



### 131. Bringing Community & Communion to Education with Christopher Travers & Derrick Tillman-Kelly

**Christopher Travers:** [00:00:00] I think part of the issue that we're having in our world is we exist in this lovelessness space. Folks are yearning for love, folks want love, and I think we can all do a better job of trying to demonstrate it in our practice.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:00:12] Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. This is Annalies Corbin, Chief Goddess of the PAST Foundation and your host. We hear frequently that the global education system is broken. In fact, we spend billions of dollars trying to fix something that's actually not broken at all, but rather irrelevant. It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we reimagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:00:52] So, today on Learning Unboxed, we have a special treat, because we're going to have a conversation that allows us to think very critically, to think deeply, and to really think about community, and what it means to be part of a community on so many different levels. And so, joining me today is Christopher Travers and Derek Tillman-Kelly. And we're going to talk about the Communion Collective and what that all means. So, gentlemen, welcome.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:01:19] Thanks so much for having us.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:01:21] Thank you. Thank you for having us.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:01:22] Absolutely. So, just a little bit of context for our listeners. Christopher or Chris Travers is a scholar, minister, a writer, a speaker, and curator of communion. Anchored in an ethic of love, his work explores the intersection of spirituality, race, and gender among Black men. So, super excited about that conversation.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:01:42] Yeah, awesome.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:01:44] Absolutely. And joining Chris today is Derrick Tillman-Kelley, who serves as the Chief of Staff or the Dean of the College of Engineering at the Ohio State University. And so, I'm super excited to sort of see how the two of you connect for this conversation. So, Derrick, welcome to you as well.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:02:04] Thank you.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:02:05] So, I wanted to start today, just very, very high level, recognizing that our listeners come from all over the world. So, Chris, talk to us just a little bit, first and foremost, about what this notion of a Communion Collective is.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:02:20] Yeah, that's a great way to begin. So, a communion for me honestly is, at the core of it, it's about relationship, right? It's a two-part relationship. So, it's a spiritual connection in the sense with our creator, but then it's also this horizontal union that we have with one another. And I think oftentimes, and folks have heard the concept of communion, particularly within faith and form spaces, it's sort of like a ritual.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:02:47] And I think of it as being something that's every day and everywhere we go, any time that we are sort of connected, embraced by community, I think we are living and doing communion, right? And so, the Communion Collective is really just a group of artists who are committed or passionate about bringing this notion of communion within every fabric of life, particularly within educational spaces, faith-informed practices, as well as scholarly pursuits.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:03:13] Absolutely. And wow, that's a great way to sort of help everybody understand that. So, thank you very, very much for that. So, Derrick, help us understand sort of your connection in this space with what Chris is talking about. So, A, I think I probably have a pretty good sense of that, but help our listeners out by understanding sort of what role you play in this conversation.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:03:36] Yeah. So, the honest answer is that I'm all things cheerleader for Chris. That's the quick way to say it. But in reality, I've sort of been a partner in Chris's walk in life. He came to Columbus for doctoral study at Ohio State, but the day that we met, we talked both about his interest in exploring education, but also in his call to ministry and his desire to be intentional about the ways in which those two things intersect.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:04:04] Because often, we were told that the formal structures of education and the sort of formal structures of religion or faith aren't meant to be brought together. And Chris didn't believe that. And so, I've gotten to sort of walk alongside us. He's sort of brought the two things together, but also be a sounding board to think about how these things might work, and then ultimately, to be a benefactor and beneficiary of the ways in which he sort of brought the Community Collective into existence.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:04:31] Yeah, absolutely. I love that. So, Chris, that was a perfect segue. So, Derrick, thank you for that, that bridge that you provided there, because I do want to talk a little bit about your graduate work, because I get the sense that a lot of that sort of piece of your journey has really informed the way you're thinking about and doing the work that you are now.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:04:50] And for our listeners, to just sort of have a sense of what's going on, currently, you are serving as a visiting assistant professor at Denison University, which is also here in Ohio, as well as a lecturer at Ohio State University. And you've really been in a lot of work and space around thinking about men and masculinity, race and gender, and sort of the intersection of all these roles in what I hope becomes a conversation as part of this around making a lot of your work very, very tangible broadly today, the here and the now. So, let's talk a little bit about that journey for you.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:05:27] Yeah. So, I think Derrick got us started, when I got to school, I had a little bit of experience in ministry and working with students, working with younger people, and I thought that I sort of had to push those skills or experience to the side and become socialized like to the field of the academy, right?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:05:48] Academia. This wicked, wicked academia, right?

**Christopher Travers:** [00:05:52] Yeah, this is almost, right? And so, what I realized, though, over the course of my studies was it was the relationships that really like got me moving forward, right? It was the spiritual connection that really pushed me for it. So, some of the things that I thought that I had to turn away really was what anchored me during my time in graduate studies, right? And so, I found my success and sort of like remembering and drawing back to what I would call, now, communion.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:06:17] And so, I realized that there is a way for me to bring the essence or the spirit of what communion represents in my life into the classroom, just as much as I can bring some of the conversations, and the exercises, and the pedagogical practices within ministry. And I also began to realize that the students that I would engage, because I had worked with undergraduate students at Ohio State University, they also appreciated my approach, right? At the core of what I'm trying to do in communion is a level of humanizing, the educational spaces, keeping love at the forefront, valuing the person over the product, taking the time to engage in relational experiences more than some of the things that the academy would prioritize are important.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:07:01] And so, I realized that those are sort of like—that that's the secret sauce to unlocking the potential in students, to empowering them are some of the very same elements that I had learned growing up in my faith. And so, really, during my graduate stays, I think I built a level of confidence around approaching things in my own way, which is really just breaking down the barriers between faith, informed spaces, and educational spaces, and kind of just bringing the worlds together.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:07:28] Absolutely. And definitely, not just a piece that we need, right? But I do think that there are so many lessons learned, so many values in understanding the humanity of the work that we are collectively doing. And I did make a reference, talking about sort of wicked academia, and I was very deliberate about that. And most of my listeners know, my background and work is as an anthropologist and as a university faculty member myself, right?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:07:57] And so, I do think and I feel a bit sort of your journey with you, because I have also found that if we're not mindful that there is an interesting dichotomy and tangible disconnect, sometimes, that happens in post-secondary, and it pushes down into K-12, that really, I think we lose the human in the journey, right? And certainly, one of the things that we advocate for all the time at PAST and the work that we do is recognizing you have to meet people and systems where they are. We can't make great, meaningful change if we don't recognize that we are in the moment for collective set of reasons.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:08:43] So, Derrick, on that note, I want to turn a little bit to you, right? Because not only are you Chris's champion and cheerleader, and I love that, but more importantly, I suspect because of your role at the university from an administrative standpoint, you get to see the very things that Chris is talking about playing out in real time across a broad sector of the institution.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:09:06] And I realize you may not be here to speak specifically from the institution perspective, but I am really curious as you watched and participated in Chris's journey and the work that's happening—we're going to circle back around, by the way, with you, Chris, about the conversation, about thinking about your students and the way you interact with them. But before we get there, Derrick, I want to understand from you, what are you seeing sort of in the landscape of post-secondary right now that is a deliberate sort of work and shift to sort of change this paradigm we're talking about.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:09:38] So, I think there are probably two things. So, I'm fairly fresh in my role as Chief of Staff, but also worked for an alliance of universities prior. And the reality is lots of folks want to serve students well and they want to serve the fullness of students, right? We talk a lot more about students' identities and how that shapes what they bring with them into college, but the reality is without some intentional and explicit engagement, we fail time and time again.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:10:07] And I don't want to denigrate the institutions that we are a part of, but at the same time, we often talk about student success. And the reality is when institutions we're talking about student success, they were talking about institutional metrics that sort of left the humanity of students on the side, right? So, we talked about graduation rates with, yes, certainly, spark and influence what students can do with their lives, but we didn't talk about students' ability to articulate what they wanted from education.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:10:35] The reality is not everybody who goes into post-secondary spaces are thinking about fully four-year degrees or graduate degrees. And if we can only articulate our success in them achieving a metric that someone else is measuring them on, we sort of miss the possibility. And so, I think as we push into spaces where we want to be more fully thoughtful of who the students are, it requires us to not just acknowledge identities, right?

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:11:03] So, we can call them first gen, we can call them students, we can call them from low-resource communities or families, but if we tell them, cool, we recognize that, and now, I want you to come and fit the mold of the typical student, which when we say traditional students in that sort of thing, they're like, but the people that we call traditional aren't the majority of students in higher ed.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:11:27] And so, I think a lot of that, for me, that means how do we actually honor the commitments that we've articulated to students, where we're not just labeling them, and then telling them to be who the other students have been, but actually changing the ways in which we go through orientation, or we deal with registration of courses, or that we celebrate their successes along the way? Right? Because I think in our current frame at Ohio State, there's a new interest in students pursuing multiple possibilities.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:11:55] So, yes, we want you to get a degree when you come here, but we also want you to be an entrepreneur and think about the things that tug at your heart or soul in ways that allow you to change the world. And you don't have to wait until you graduate from Ohio State or other places to begin making that broader impact in the world. And so, in many ways, I think that is sort of how I thought about Chris's journey, too, right? Like he didn't have to get his Ph.D. before he could start thinking about the ways in which he served the fullness of students.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:12:25] Right. Absolutely. And I really do love that, because again, one of those things that we see all the time, in the entire student journey, personally, I'm conflicted, in terms of—because I spent a tremendous amount of time working with a variety of students across that sort of PK 20 spectrum. But a lot of our time, full transparency and disclosure, it's really that sweet spot, upper elementary through high school with students.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:12:53] And it's a time in their lives where they're just struggling mightily with everything under the Sun. The traditional, kid, twin and teenager angst, the world discovery, the disparities, the advantage, the what am I going to do? People are still asking me, what do you want to be when you grow up? Wrong question to ask a kid, by the way. In that whole sort of just mix, if you will, that is the growing up of life.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:13:20] But it's becoming increasingly difficult in my mind to be able to have a conversation with a student that says, oh, by the way, you need to go to college. That's a whole different space

that we're occupying, and I appreciate, Derrick, the way you couched that. And Chris, so I'm really curious as it relates to the work that you're doing specifically with students, they're showing up there.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:13:42] And they may be there because they got community pressure. They may be there because they got an awesome scholarship they couldn't say no to. They may have gotten there because their parents pushed them. And a whole host of all these other reasons that kids today show up in post-secondary. And some of those reasons are fabulous and wonderful, and are the exact thing that a kiddo needs, but sometimes, they show up there and it's not, and yet some of them persist, some of them choose not to.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:14:08] What does this notion of Communion Collective in the way that you do your work specifically with students, I want to dig into that, how does your role then help these individuals find their path and their journey? At the end of the day, it's about happiness, and engagement, and fulfillment. How do we get there inside of a post-secondary structure? And I know that's a loaded question, Chris.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:14:33] Yeah. So, I'll speak from like two vantage points. One, I'll speak from like the Community Collective, but then I also talk about some of the years of experience I have within higher education institutes and of engaging with students. And so, for the most part, as a higher education scholar, practitioner, I've had most of my experiences in the classroom and a few in some co-curricular spaces. And I think one of the things that I do in both, Communion Collective and in my work in higher ed is try to curate space. So, I talked about, I think in the bio, you say like curator of communion, right?

**Christopher Travers:** [00:15:08] I do my best to curate spaces that have a certain set of conditions, right? And I allow the spaces to really help to move the students forward. So, within the space, like institutions realized this early on after being in my presence for like a day or two, they start to learn some of the conditions in space. And so, love is in the space. I feel like we're in a culture where we talk about love, but we don't name love, right? So, all of the literature that we have around belonging, and connection, and acceptance, and affirming students, at the core of that, to me, what I hear is love. And so, I name it explicitly.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:15:49] But beyond naming it, like I demonstrate it. I take the time to understand my students in terms of how they receive love, whether they love languages, right? Like we do all of this work when we think about romantic relationship of how we give and receive love, but we don't talk about it when it relates to students, right? And love is still important. Love language is still important. So, that's one of the things I try to bring into the space. I create a dynamic where we are co-constructing.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:16:14] And oftentimes, when you think about professors, or administrators, or even like faith-based leaders, there's always this sort of separation between the leader and those who are following, right? Like this hierarchy, if you will. And one of the things that's always prioritized in any space that I curate is a level of vulnerability and a level of transparency.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:16:33] And it's not because, Annalies, I'm interested in just sharing my business with folks, but I'm trying to model what it looks like to admit that I don't have it all figured out, to admit like I need grace just like you need grace, to admit like I'm still on this journey. You mentioned like never to ask a kid, what do you want to do when you grow up? I'm still trying to figure out what it is I want to do when I grow up.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:16:54] Me, too. Full disclosure.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:16:57] And I think as leaders, we underestimate the importance of a student or a person that's younger than us being able to see themselves in us, right? Such that like, oh, Chris, like do you struggle sometimes getting out of the bed in the morning? Like you are still working on time management, or like you miss deadlines from time to time, or like you slip up and say something that you don't mean?

**Christopher Travers:** [00:17:19] Like I think students need to see that, right? That's also a level of humanizing the space. So, transparency, vulnerability, love are demonstrated in the space. And when you set the conditions, because students really yearn for these things, contrary to what we might think. When you set the conditions, then the students themselves within the community begin to transfer it. And even when I'm not around, it exists.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:17:44] And so, those three conditions that in my opinion would have been most helpful within the Communion Collective and in my work as a professor or as a scholar, the vulnerability, the transparency, and like the naming of love, right? And we can define it in a lot of ways, but I think of patience, I think of kindness, I think of gentleness, I think of forgiveness, I think of grace, I think of mercy, right? These are the kind of things that I think embody what love looks like.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:18:09] You bet. And I'm going to circle back around with you just a touch here, Chris, and then I'm going to get Derrick to respond to this. I'm really, really curious inside of an educational institution, especially one, we'll pick on Ohio State just a little bit here, right? Only because of the size of it, right? It is a massive institution and we talk about it a lot here locally in our community, right?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:18:37] Because it's an anchor institution within our community. Its large employees, a huge number of people. It's got so many different things that are happening across the university ecosystem. And there are so many students who show up here from not just locally, but from all over the world, right? And so, how do you then take your experiences, your work, your philosophy around the way you engage with the student experience, because I really, really love this, but how does that translate into others? Right?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:19:15] So, how the other, if you will, the adults, the instructors, I'm using adults in the most generic of term here, right? Because all the participants in the university system are adults, but they're young, and in many cases, inexperienced. And as we all collectively here know, there's an awful lot of mentorship that happens or should happen at that piece of somebody's journey, because it's all about transitions and it's about self-discovery.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:19:42] So, how do you take the amazing work that you're doing in the philosophical point of view that says, I'm going to start by recognizing that everybody that walks into my sphere of experience is a valuable human being and translate that across an institution, but not so much has marginalized them, but it's not necessarily embraced as an everyday practice on behalf of our students?

**Christopher Travers:** [00:20:11] Yeah, that's a great question. And Derrick, you can jump in if you like, but I think part of it is, so I recognize my limitations, right? I can't be in every single space talking to every single person, offering this set of ideas. There's a concept within the Christian tradition that I think it shows up within educational spaces, and this is the notion of discipleship. And so, I bring a similar kind of like focus into educational spaces.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:20:37] So, by that, I mean, there are certain leaders, or individuals, influencers. The concept of folks might use in the social media world, right? And so, my hope is that like the six to 10 leaders, or influencers, or changemakers on campus, or within like a faith-informed space, like I spent intimate time with them. So, I may not spend intimate time with everybody, but I spend intimate time with them, right?

**Christopher Travers:** [00:21:06] And so, as I'm sort of like pouring into them, and offering them a perspective and a framework of how we can approach this with these opportunities with students, my hope is that they then go into their spaces and sort of like emulate a similar dynamic, if that makes sense, right? And so, I spent intimate time and energy with the leaders, the folks who I feel like I have the ability to impact other spaces.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:21:27] So, during my time at Ohio State, that might have been like folks who were in leadership within the Black Student Union. That might have been folks who were in leadership within the multicultural center. That might have been folks who had influence within the Higher Education Student Affairs program, right? And so, like as they move into their different spheres, helping them see how they can also bring some of those same conditions in the spaces, and I feel like that is an approach that I use to try to infiltrate more of the larger ecosystem without me, myself, having to be in every single space.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:21:56] There's just one of you after all.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:21:58] Yeah.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:22:00] So, Derrick, what are your thoughts about that? Because same question back to you, right? And it is one of those pieces that as a faculty member, I struggled with mightily, especially when I was a new and young faculty member, it's been many years now, but it was really, really tough to sort of figure out your place in that sort of post-secondary hierarchy, which is incredibly hierarchical, right?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:22:25] It's based on traditions that have long since past, relevancy, not even the table and conversation, oftentimes, with our colleagues. And so, how do you take an approach that is so incredibly student-centric, recognizing the humanity of it all, and take that, and make it more of the norm across the ecosystem of the folks who are actually there spending time, quite frankly, with all of these young professionals trying to figure out their way in the world.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:23:01] So, I think there are probably two things, which I realized I say a lot now. The first one is I was told very early on when I got to Ohio State that while we want everyone to be a Buckeye, not everyone will show up as a Buckeye in the same way. And what I think the person meant was it is a lot easier in some ways for undergraduates to feel a connection to the broad institution, right? Because you tend to be a bit more immersed in athletics, you tend to be a bit more immersed in student organizations.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:23:31] And so, they might hear, I am] an Ohio State Buckeye very readily, but when you move into the graduate spaces, for example, you tend to be a lot more isolated from the institution. You're not going to all of the events that are happening in the same way. And so, when we started talking about retention, the reality was, I need you to be connected to an aspect of Ohio State. It does not need to be the same. And that does two things realistically. One is it reminds you that even if you feel not fully connected to the football team, me, honestly, that doesn't mean that you're not a true Buckeye.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:24:09] It just means that the ways in which you connect to the institution are different and we should honor that difference. And so, it means being willing and able to articulate the various opportunities that people can use to engage. The second part, though, is I think it's about modeling what we desire. And the reality is Chris was honest when he said that he curates space as well, and then people sort of think about curation in very different ways after they've been in those spaces with him.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:24:36] And then, you start curating your space differently. And so, as Chief of Staff, part of my job is to advise the dean, but I've also had the privilege of watching lots of senior leaders. And the

reality is the institution unintentionally often takes the tone and tenor of their senior leaders. So, for example, I joined the college six weeks ago, and the first week, I heard that meetings in the College of Engineering start three minutes late, because living in the world of virtual reality, the virtual world, the dean wanted to ensure that folks had the chance to get in before she pushed the agendas forward.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:25:12] And so, people took that as a, here's a little bit of grace for folks who might be slightly delayed, but I don't think that she was doing it with the intent of pushing a behavior, but people watch the behavior, recognize the value of the behavior, and then begin to implement their own versions of it. And so, I think when we work with senior leaders, they might be busy all the time, but when President Johnson randomly stops on the oval to ask a student how their experience is, people notice it. and more people begin to less familiar students and ask them about their experience in ways that might allow them to share with the broader institution where we're struggling, but also to reinforce to students that, yes, this is a really large place.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:25:58] And yes, there are 60-some thousand students and 50-some thousand employees, but no, you're not just your ID number. You are, in fact, more than your name got numbered, you are a human that we want to make sure feels connected, feels like they have access to leaders who might be able to influence things that aren't working as well, and then continuing to check in with folks in ways that allow us to say, we really do see you as a human on this campus.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:26:24] And even though it may not be perfect all the time, because no organization or institution is, we will do everything in our power to ensure that you have a voice and a place to share with us where things are working for you, where things aren't working so well, and how we might be better administrators, faculty, and staff to sort of push the goal home. And I think that really does, for me, connect back to the ethos that Chris has sort of created with the Communion Collective that until the Communion Collective came to be, I didn't actually give language to in the way that I can today.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:26:55] Right. So, some of the value proposition then, and there are many, many, but, Chris, in terms of the work that you're doing, is to be able to sort of help folks have a conversation about the outcomes that we're collectively looking for, I would assume. So, I'm super curious, as we continue the conversation, what is next in the journey, right? So, if you think about, and I don't mean, and it doesn't have to be the big giant long-term aspirational goal, but what are you working on right now that you feel like is critically important to our community, and the community within postsecondary, the community in Columbus, community in Ohio, more broadly than that? But what is it that you want people to walk away from this conversation thinking about from a sort of action opportunity?

**Christopher Travers:** [00:27:52] Yeah, that's a great question. I mean, I think one of the first things, I don't know if it's as clear to the listeners, and so I'll name it. Part of the impetus to begin the Communion Collective was because I existed within organizations and institutions that I felt, in some ways, did not allow me to fully walk in my vision, And I want to name that. right? So, this is not an organization that exists within Ohio State, it's not it's not an organization that exists within like a church, this is an independent movement that I'm trying to help push forward.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:28:33] And I want to be honest about the fact that, sometimes, you have visions, and you have dreams and ideas that are not meant to exist within certain spaces that you occupy. And it doesn't mean that they aren't true, that they won't come to fruition, it just means that like the current places that you're within may not be meant for it. So, certainly, there are things that I did bring and I continue to bring during my time at Denison in Ohio State, but the Communion Collective is outside of all of that. And part of it was because I had some challenges in my journey with trying to do it, and I see Derrick smiling.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:29:07] I had some challenges trying to get within a certain institution, so that's one of the first things I wanted to name for the listeners to be clear about that, that it is an independent organization. But in terms of what I'm working on, so I am heavily situated within some K-12 schools, having conversations with teachers, getting in front of students, a lot of teachers and professionals within the school system are interested in how to better connect with Black and Brown students, how to better support Black and Brown students.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:29:34] And so, one of the things that I'm continuing to work on and really trying to just continue to hone in terms of my message is some of the things that we've known for quite some time, right? We've had tons, and tons, and tons of Black women scholars, and thinkers, and intellectuals over decades who have told us about some of the ingredients that are necessary for the success of Black and Brown children. And so, I spend time honestly trying to represent that, like to go back to what we've known for a long time is helpful when we think about how to support Black and Brown students, right? Culturally relevant pedagogy coming out back in the early '90s still has relevance today, still has power today, still has meaning today, right?

**Christopher Travers:** [00:30:14] And I think it takes time for us to go back and actually consider the work of Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings and figure out how we can like bring that into today's. But part of my work is going back and remembering what we've been taught long ago that we forgot along the way or maybe folks never knew. So, that's something I'm working on right now, and really trying to, I think you even offered it, how do you operationalize? What's the methodology behind love? I love practices, right?

**Christopher Travers:** [00:30:38] Like I try my best to package that in ways that teachers can understand it. So, that's one of the first things that I'm working on that I want to continue to push and hopefully make positive impact within the school system, but I'm also writing quite a bit. So, we talked about some of my work around masculinities, anti-hero normative masculinities, trying to push back against some of the patriarchal ways of being and doing that, that many of us have been socialized within this Western world.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:31:03] And so, I curate spaces for folks to wrestle with those tensions, to have the kind of conversations where we interrogate who we are and who we want to be. And we actually don't just dream about that, but we try to put in practice what it looks like to exist in the world where White supremacy isn't the norm, where heteronormativity isn't the norm. And so, I'm also very much committed to that work. Not just in practice, but also writing about it.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:31:27] So, I have some current papers that are in the works that will be coming out very soon. I'm also very much committed into like curating more spaces for folks to come together that's not based on a particular religious affiliation. It's not based on denomination. If you feel connected to the spirit of love, if you feel connected to the spirit of relationship, regardless of your identities, regardless of how you show up in the world, like you can enter into this space.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:31:55] And I'm interested in like building that out more, continuing to push it forward, speaking on podcasts like this one, and reminding the world that like love still matters, love is still important. And if I'm drawing on the words of Bell Hooks, I think part of the issue that we're having in our world is we exist in this lovelessness space. Folks are yearning for love, folks want love, and I think we can all do a better job of trying to demonstrate it in our practice.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:32:19] Absolutely. And you know, Chris, you're an anthropologist at heart, you just didn't put that label on it. So, I'm going to officially invite you to be part of that crew, because you, my friend, are a true, true anthropologist at heart. So, I love that about you, so thank you for that.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:32:41] I appreciate it. I'll take that. I'll take that. I don't know if I identified that. I haven't had that label yet. Nobody has given that to me.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:32:47] Well, labels, like you said, sometimes, we put names on things and it's powerful, and in the space where I occupy, I spend so much time trying to get folks collectively to think about, well, what about the humanity element of no matter what it is that we're talking about, I'm doing a project that I do every fall, actually, with Metro early college high school kiddos, they have a program called the Bodies Program, which is all about healthcare. And several years ago, and most of those kids, not all of them, most of those kids end up at Ohio State, right?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:33:22] So, they become part of the ecosystem that Derrick gets to see sort of from that lens. And one of the things that's lost, especially for the kiddos that go into medical school, or nursing school, or a lot of these different sort of veins, whatever that happens to be for that individual, is that they spend so much time focusing on the academics, getting the content, that they forget about what the end result is. Why did you go there in the first place? Right? I wanted to go into health care, because I want to help people broadly.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:33:55] But if I can't speak to people broadly, how could I possibly help them all? Right? And so, we've, over several years, crafted a program that we run in their fall semester of that early college experience before they go off into the OSU labs, and they do their capstone, and all that sort of stuff to help them figure out about the humanness of the people that they're going to encounter, and to help them recognize that just because you see something doesn't mean that it's real, right?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:34:30] If you can't figure out to identify and to connect with people, how to ask questions, and how to ask questions of questions, and how to really step back from your assumptions and the biases that you walk into every moment with, you're not going to uncouple them, but you do need to be able to understand and recognize them. And if you can wrestle with that enough, that my hope is that you will be a better caregiver, because you will care about the patient first and foremost and the system in which you're practicing less.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:35:03] And I want to push that if I can.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:35:06] Please.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:35:07] I've grown very frustrated at times with—I'm trying to use my words wisely, I've grown frustrated at times how quickly folks run to practice. And I get it, right? Like you're in front of me, you're telling me this framework, this theory, it's great, but like tell me how to implement it. And I get it, right? You want to know, you want to take away like two or three nuggets from this conversation that can help you immediately shift wherever it is you work, particularly for me, mostly teachers and classrooms.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:35:37] My frustration with that, though, is you're so eager to shift the practice that I don't know if you're spending as much time engaging in the self-work that is necessary to really be the practitioner that folks desire to be, right? And this is part of the reason why I am like transparent about my own work, and my own journey, and all of these spaces that I exist in, like also trying to do the work. I'm also wondering how I can better show up.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:36:03] Derrick talked about being a thought partner for me. Many of our conversations are, hey, Derrick, did I drop the ball? Did I miss the mark? Like could I have been better? I'm

replaying scenarios and asking him as a brother, like, how could I be better? Right? Because I'm not perfect. And so, I think while I understand folks want to understand practice, what I really, really want to encourage you to do is to engage in self-work, because the truth of the matter is like love cannot exist alongside domination.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:36:33] So, if there are ways in which you are actually engaged in sexism, homophobia, classism, abolism, like any any of those phenomena, like you're not doing that self-work, it doesn't matter what kind of practice you bring into the classroom, you are still unintentionally harming the people that you're in relationship with. And so, I really want folks to just sit with that, like reflection, interrogation, having people around you to hold you accountable. Those things are what help us to get closer to love, not accumulating a ton of strategies and techniques to shift our practice.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:37:09] Absolutely. Thank you very much for that, Chris. I think that it's a wonderful moment for us to celebrate and close the conversation. So, I want to thank both of you for taking time out of your day to come and have this conversation with me and to share with our listeners. And so, I am ever so grateful for you, gentlemen, to be in my space and to be part of our community. So, thank you so much for what you do and thank you for the conversation today.

**Derrick Tillman-Kelly:** [00:37:40] Thank you.

**Christopher Travers:** [00:37:41] Yeah, no. Thank you. Thank you for having us and for just curating space for us to be able to share. We appreciate it.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:37:46] Absolutely. Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media @AnnaliesCorbin, and join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to reimagine education.