

**Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student  
with Nelson Peralta**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Angela Kelly**

# Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student

## with Nelson Peralta

Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 134.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. A not-so-typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host, Certified Life Coach, Angela Kelly Robeck.

Hello, my empowered leaders, and welcome to another special episode of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. As I briefly shared with you last week, this week's interview is with Nelson Peralta. He's an LGBTQ advocate and is the founder of Brown Ambition, which offers mindset coaching to persons of color, specifically helping leaders and entrepreneurs destroy doubt, master their mindset, and level-up.

Nelson shares his experience as a student along with the work he's currently doing in one of his former school districts. Again, his experience that he shares with us is so enlightening as a school leader, and it can help guide us as we navigate what a fully inclusive school environment can look like for all students; Black students, LGBTQ students, students of color, all students.

So, if you know someone, perhaps a student of color who also identifies as LGBTQ who might need support or coaching, Nelson might be the ideal resource. Be sure to share his contact information, which we will place in the show notes. And I know you can find Nelson on Instagram at @soynelperalta. Enjoy the show.

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Angela: Hello, empowered leaders. Welcome to a very special episode of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. I have with me today a colleague and

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

fellow coach Nelson Peralta. He is a mindset coach, specifically focusing on people of color and his company is titled Brown Ambition. I absolutely love it.

So, Nelson, thank you for being with us today. We're going to talk more about the services that you provide to your clients, but I'd love for you to tell the listeners who are school leaders about your experience as a student in school and how you've grown into what you're currently doing with your coaching business.

Nelson: Of course. Well, first of all, thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate that. So, as I was telling you a little bit earlier, we were chatting before, I'm from Los Angeles. I am born from two immigrants from Oaxaca, which is a very indigenous part of Mexico. And so, for me, culture is very important. It's one of the things that we pride ourselves on.

And I will say for me, I grew up in a predominantly Latino neighborhood, low-income, and I was fortunately given the opportunity to go to a private elementary school from 5<sup>th</sup> grade onward. And for me, this experience was great because I felt like I was not supported in my public school. I was a very fast learner. I picked up on everything really fast and the teachers had like 35 other kids to work with.

So, I would always be bored and I would tell my parents, "Hey, I'm so bored at school." And then wanting to skip a grade, all that stuff. And so, when I was introduced into the world of private schooling in Los Angeles, I found myself being usually the only Latino in my classroom, sometimes being one of two or three Latinos in the whole grade.

And so, growing up in that kind of environment, especially seeing that most of my teachers were White or maybe Asian sometimes, I didn't feel a really deep connection with when I was being supported. It's funny. I

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

actually would have conversations with a lot of the janitors or the people that worked in the cafeteria because they were usually Latino and they spoke Spanish.

So, I remember from elementary to middle to high school, I had amazing relationships with the cleaners and the janitors. And I always felt like they made it seem like home, my school. And I don't think necessarily the staff and the faculty at my high school was necessarily doing a bad job. There just wasn't that cultural competency to be able to talk about the experiences that maybe somebody that identifies like me, Latino, or identified as gay might have experienced, been able to help them with throughout the time in middle and high school.

So, that was a bit of my experience was I felt very misunderstood, almost, sometimes. I was very self-aware about the way I spoke, so I would never like speaking in class because I would be afraid of pronouncing something with an accent. So, I would always be very cautious when I spoke.

I always wanted to make sure that I sounded as American as possible. And it's so funny because even growing up, I would go from this very expensive private school back to my home, which was in Lennox, California. And my family would tell me, "Oh, so you think you speak better now?" All these things. So, I never felt like I fit in at school or at home because I was in the middle ground.

And my experience changed a little bit when I went to college. I went to Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, which is a Jesuit school, which is, I think, 18% Hispanic. That's what the statistics say. And it was very interesting because for me, it was a world of, like, "Oh my god, there's 100 Latino people here." And to me, that was amazing. Like, there's so many...

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

And it's so funny because my friends had the opposite experience, where their high schools were predominantly Latino. And then, now they came to what we call a private White institution, they were like, "There's so little." So many different perspectives, right?

I think I love this because it's an example of a circumstance, right? They saw this circumstance as, like, there's so little. And I saw the circumstance as there's so many of us. And for me, college, even though it was still not as diverse, provided this space for me to tap into my Latino identity, being able to have more people that spoke like me, that had the same culture aspect to me.

And I will say, the staff at my college was very supportive. So, my school in general, the Jesuit schools, are very much aligned with social justice. That's one of their main pillars. And so, there's a lot of them throughout the United States, but specifically Loyola because of its place in Los Angeles, a very diverse city, they did a really good job of providing what is called EIS, the Ethnic and Intercultural Services office.

And so, there was a Latino students' service office, a Black students' service office, so they provided these resources for our student population. And for me, it was a great way to feel like I belonged somewhere. I felt that sense a little bit more. But when it came to what I was studying, I mentioned that I studied philosophy, and I loved philosophy.

I consider myself a nerd. I love learning. I love reading. I'm always in the quest of finding more information. I think that's why I love coaching as well. Its always dig deeper, don't take everything at surface-level, really go in further. And that's what philosophy taught me while I was in college.

But the difficulty is, a lot of the philosophical cannon, the works that you read, are predominantly White, European men. And so, a lot of the times, I

## Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta

felt like I couldn't directly relate to the content, obviously, because it was written like 1000 years ago, but I just didn't look at it from a perspective that took into account race and gender and sexuality...

Angela: And different culture.

Nelson: Exactly, and I didn't even know that there was philosophy in Mexico, I didn't know there was philosophy in Asia, right? So, once I started...

Angela: That was a question I have for you. Sorry to interrupt. Do you believe that you didn't see philosophers of color because there weren't any or because they weren't highlighted in our studies, in books? What was it, was it both of that? What do you feel was going on there for you?

Nelson: I think, honestly, it's the latter. They're not highlighted because part of the curriculum of obtaining the philosophy major is to go through what they call a history sequence. So, its four classes that are ancient philosophy, medieval philosophy, modern philosophy, modern philosophy two. And all of the works in all of these four classes are all White European men.

There's not a single woman. There's not a single person of color. And so, I was like, okay, I get it, but I remember, there was a Black professor that I heard amazing things about and I was like, "I want to work with him. I want to take a class with him."

And so, he taught a class called Race, Sex, Gender. It was literally called Race, Sex, Gender. And it was in the philosophy department and in the African American studies department. And that completely changed everything for me.

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

I was like, oh my god, is this philosophy? And he was like, “Yeah, this is philosophy, Black philosophers, there’s Latino philosophers.” And that’s when I became kind of introduced to that area of these people exist. And even to this day, I get so amazed that there’s a whole work of Mexican philosophy and the thought that has evolved.

So, to me, that wasn’t available so easily from the beginning and it made me feel like, well, I’m not a White man so will people take what I write philosophically seriously? And also, a lot of the faculty in the philosophy department was White and male. They had maybe one female, maybe two professors of color, and the other 10 are White men.

And so, then as I studied to do well and I ended up deciding, you know, I wanted to become a professor, I knew I had to get into a Master’s or a PhD program. So, this professor named Dr. Stone became my mentor and he basically helped me get into a Master’s program. And within the Master’s program I decided, hey, I’m going to be doing all this theoretically European philosophy, but comparing it with what Latino philosophers think or what Mexican philosophers think, right?

I always wanted to see how race, gender, and sexuality take place within everything. And so, I did it for two reasons – I was doing it for two reasons. I didn’t complete it, actually. I ended up taking a break from the program. But my ultimate goal was, one, to be able to say that a Latino can study philosophy, and two was my ultimate goal was to become a professor so then I could be a mentor for incoming students in the future that would want to feel, like, “Hey, I want to feel like somebody that understands this,” or somebody that gets what it’s like to be in this setting that, again, is predominantly White, male, heterosexual, et cetera. So, that’s a little bit about my education and what I think about or what I’ve experienced about being a person of color, being Latino.

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

Angela: Amen to you. And I just think thank you so much for being willing to be a pioneer in this effort because I agree with you. I never have seen philosophy discussed as it relates to gender, race, sexuality. Like, I've not seen that at all. It's always been White males. So, for you to acknowledge that and see that and seek it out, and not just seek it out but be willing to be the person who becomes that mentor for kids who are younger than you and who want to have this experience or want to be a philosopher, that is so powerful and it's so courageous of you It's amazing.

Nelson: Thank you.

Angela: You're so welcome. Can you tell us a little bit about, what do you believe – so, this audience is primarily aspiring school leaders or newer school leaders. There are some veterans out there listening. Cheers to all of you guys listening out there. And they're curious to know, what do you think is the biggest challenge for schools right now?

There's a lot of conversation going on in schools. We've had the whole COVID crisis, and now we've got conversations with race coming up and how we can really create actual, you know, not just speak to the change but create systemic change within the system to create more equity? What do you see being a challenge for school leaders and I'm really curious to know your opinion on why you think coaching is a tool or a solution that school leaders and teachers can embrace to help them through the process?

Nelson: Yeah, of course, I love that. I will share that I have been kind of in talks with my high school, that was predominantly White individuals in this school, about – they're having this initiative to provide more resources to students of color so that they can feel more supported.



## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

And one of the things that – we had a Zoom meeting about this two weeks ago. And one of the things I mentioned was, a lot of the times, I don't think people – and maybe this is because of my experience – I don't think White people are ignorant on purpose about culture. I just think that it's not presented to them in a way that they're able to easily understand it.

I know some people who are like, "Yeah, I don't really interact with people of color," just because of where they live. I'm very blessed, or it's a gift that I live in Los Angeles, so I'm surrounded by so many cultures. But then we look at people that live in other parts of the country and they just don't get exposed to that.

And I do think being exposed to it makes a very big difference. And so, what I was telling the people I was talking to was, it's important for the faculty and staff to get even a basic sense of cultural awareness trainings because, right now, there's people that study how to best talk to and support students of color. Like, it's a whole field in education. You can get a Masters in education where you literally just study how to best support students of color, right?

So, there's people that specialize in this, and I think that a lot of the times, schools are looking for a really easy solution when it's not as simple as that. I think what's going to be part of it is understanding that there's a lack of cultural competency within a lot of staff and faculty. But it's about bringing in that training.

Just as how we give orientation to students when they start, I think it's important to be able to have even the basic understandings of, like, "Hey, this is how you talk about..." I just saw a post where it's like the reframing of the language we use with slavery. So, instead of calling the people slaves, we think of them as enslaved people from Africa. It changes completely the way the language works.

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

So, these are small things that although seem miniscule make a really big impact on the students. And so, for me, I think it's important to get some cultural competency training at the minimum. Like, there's coaches that do this. there are consultants who do this. I have a friend from college that they started their own company where now they specifically give trainings to different centers or non-profits or schools on how to work with LGBT youth.

So, I think this is one of the things that investing that money into the competency because that's going to be one of the best resources that students of color and other minorities can have for themselves. I think it's also about having better, like, spreading the resources potentially within school districts.

So, I think a lot of times, we spend a lot of the budget of schools on certain things that perhaps could be better spent in training faculty and staff. And one of the things I want to share is that I think it's important for people that work with students to always have a sense of empathy for whatever it is.

I think empathy is one of those virtues that is very necessary in the educational system because I will never understand what it's like to be a woman, right? No matter how many female friends I have, they can tell me about their experiences, I will never truly have the female experience. But what I can do is empathize and come from a place of love.

I've always told other people this. I'm like, there's so many terms out there. There's the whole idea of, even in Latino communities, Latino, Hispanic, those are two different terms and people fight about that. I'm like, the language at the end of the day is not as important as empathizing with somebody else.

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

And I think sometimes when people don't have the cultural competency, the minimum they should do is be apathetic, listen and be a listener. Validate the experiences of these students and then being okay with not knowing. I think that's one of the things where we can talk about coaching coming into it; being comfortable with being wrong, or being comfortable with being challenged and seeing things from a different perspective.

Angela: You nailed it right there. You talked about how the adults need the training. And I think, so many times in education, we believe that we need to get a program for the students, right? Like, let's give the students social emotional learning up to par. I think in this case, the vulnerable thing that has to happen is the adults in the room, like you were just speaking to, they need to learn how to be able to feel the negative emotions and the discomfort that comes with these conversations.

And you're right, like, as a White woman, there are things that – I can never be a person of color. Like, as much as I have friends who are of a different color, different backgrounds, different cultures, I can never have that experience. But what I can do is be open to learning and understanding and acknowledging what I don't know.

And I think that's what you were going to speak to just now, like, that is how coaching tools and personal development tools within the professional development of our educators comes into play, so speak more to that.

Nelson: Exactly. Yeah, I think it would be a really good asset to have a coaching person – I mean, that would be an ideal world. We would have a coach that works with the faculty and the staff in helping them process through the discomfort that happens when we begin to realize that students might have a different experience and that we might not necessarily be at that moment completely prepared to best serve them.

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

And so, I think the coaching aspect of it, at least for me, is understanding that the circumstances might be the same but people interpret them differently. So, what might seem – and I just gave the example of the actual use of the word slave. We think of it, it means very different things to two different people.

And what we want to do is have the circumstances be as neutral as possible for everyone, but also cater to the needs of people who have an interpretation given the experiences that we have. I do believe that all we do – at least this is my positive perspective of human beings, it's like, I think we do the best we have with all the information that we're given to this point.

I truly believe that. I feel that we're all in some ways capable for good, but our idea of good is limited by the knowledge that we have. So, I think in all cases...

Angela: So beautifully said.

Nelson: In all cases, it's going to be a case of openness, of open-mindedness, of humility, knowing that we have limitations. This is actually what I wanted to study in Philosophy. I was studying virtue theory, which is ethics, but in regards to virtues like open-mindedness, humility, and courage. And I was talking about these virtues in regards to knowing things, like knowledge.

So, when we practice the virtue of open-mindedness, it allows us to take in different perspectives. And I do think, now that I'm looking at it, I do think these three virtues are what a coach needs to be a successful coach, actually. They need to be openminded, they need to be courageous, able to risk their relationship and coach very, very strongly. And they have to

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

have a humility so that they can understand, you know, they're also learning as well.

I know, and I tell this to my clients, I learn as much as you do in every coaching call. It's a two-way thing. I take away things. I see things from different perspectives. I learn as much as you do. So, I always think it's going to be a part of being openminded. I think it all falls down to that too.

Angela: And you know, school leaders really are also playing the role of a coach. So, what you just suggested to them, that's very powerful because there are moments and times when they are the student and they're learning and they're getting coached. But there are plenty of occasions where they are being the coach and having to coach either a parent or a colleague or a teacher in their schools.

So, I think that what you've said there is really helpful for people to think about it both ways. It's not just always getting the coaching. It's also, like, how can you help other people and embrace the ideas that you can help other people expand their awareness as well?

Nelson: Exactly, yes, definitely.

Angela: So, I have a question for you. Is there anything during your school experience as a student that you felt the school it did right? So, one of the things I like to do is let's build on what is working, in addition to, like, talk about what's not working. But what do you feel that schools do well for people of color, if any? You can be honest and say nothing if that's the case, but if there is something that school leaders can hold onto, what do you think that would be?

Nelson: Honestly, I will speak about my own experience, was my counselor at my high school was a Black woman. And I think that changed how

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

comfortable I felt talking to her about what I was experiencing because it felt like, okay, you kind of know what it feels like to not be part of the majority.

And I also think, I'm going to be adding the philosophical aspect to this, people of color, especially within the United States, we go through our life understanding that we are not the majority, which is White. And in a way, given systemic racism and systemic inequality, we have to always understand what the rules are for White individuals and what the rules are for our cultural group or whatever ethnicity we identify with.

So, there's this almost double knowledge of, okay, I see how it is for White people and I see how it is for me. Whereas, I do think, a lot of the times, for White people, given that it's the norm, quote unquote norm, they only have this one perspective. So, I do think that it's going to be important more than just to simply diversify. It's like, it allows this kind of double perspective that – I believe it was W. E. B. Du Bois who talked about this kind of double perspective. I forgot the actual name of it. But it's like we see things in two ways and I do think that when schools have more faculty or staff of color, it does allow for them to – because I do think, like, I do think my Black counselor, it would have served me because she could see how it was for the White students and for herself, a person of color.

So, I do think that's part of the importance of why we require more people of color being represented. I don't know if you've heard of this argument, like, we can't have movies with predominantly Black individuals because then White people are going to be felt left out. But for the last 100, 200 years, all the films have been mostly White individuals, but we still relate to them. So, it's like, why can't the opposite be true? Why can't we have films of predominantly people of color?

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

Honestly, I've seen films with predominantly Black characters and I still relate and I still connect with it. And I think, at the end of the day, it's about the connection. So, that's...

Angela: Agreed, and you know what, I think it's okay for White people to sit in that discomfort. We have to understand that we have been granted the privilege of not sitting in that discomfort for decades, like centuries. And part of the invitation is to allow us to sit in the discomfort of watching and being around people who look different than us. That is an okay experience to have and it's an okay feeling to allow.

Nelson: I definitely agree with you on that.

Angela: Okay, so we've got to get to this part. Tell us about your coaching services, your business, and I just love the name of it so much, Brown Ambition. So, tell me a little bit more and tell the listeners about what it is you specifically do, who you specifically help, and then where they can go if they want more information or want to learn more from you.

Nelson: Of course. So, I predominantly like to work with people that are wanting to be leaders or entrepreneurs, given that I do think these people end up being high achievers, people that want to excel. And so, I help them kind of, I would say, master the confidence, the belief in themselves so that they can take and make an impact, and that way, that impact is going to support their communities, support their family, and support their dreams.

And I also do this because I think it's important, I think, like I've mentioned before, to have more representation in every single industry, it's specifically like businesses as well. I grew up with two parents that have been entrepreneurs since they got to the United States. And I've always had that idea of what it would mean to have a successful business to my family and the impact it has now for them to be successful business owners, to have

## Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta

three different businesses and be making a good amount of money that they never imagined they'd be able to make, and what it means to have that.

So, for me, part of it is I want to see more people of color in leadership positions. I want to see more people of color as business owners so, that way, as they make more financial wealth, they're able to support causes like the ones that we're seeing currently, to donate to foundations, to organizations that are doing the work, right?

I was very much a social justice person in college, but I've learned that what is my skill is coaching. And the way that I can help transform the world is by coaching people of color that want to excel, that want to make a change, that want to make a difference. And that's my little – I think there's a saying in Spanish, that's my little grain of salt into the big cup, you know. It's like, my way of supporting.

Angela: I love that. It's such an empowering mission and I do believe – I think back to when I was teaching, my school was primarily Hispanic Latino and just, I want those children to know that they are equally capable and equally able to have the lifestyle and the career and the life that they want, that it is possible. And you are out there ensuring that these children and their young minds are growing in their capacity to believe that that is the case.

So, where can people go to find out more information? Do you have a website? Should they go to social media? Where can they find you?

Nelson: So, I have my regular Facebook page, it's just Nel Peralta Life Coach. And then my Instagram is where I'm mostly, like, that's where I create all my content, that's where I share, that's where I have most of my audience. It's @soynelperalta. So, that's my Instagram. I do these things



## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

called Inward Intensives. I always like to lead with service. So, these are usually complimentary 60-minute calls where we talk about anything that you want to get clear with, and also shows a way for potential clients to get a taste of what it's like to work with me as a coach and also for them, if they've never been coached before, to have the experience to find out how transformational coaching can be. Because I am of the camp the coaching can and it is changing lives.

Angela: Absolutely. Well, thank you so, so very much for your time today. And listeners, out there, if you know of a leader of color or a student of color or a family at your school of color who would be interested in learning more and getting coaching from Nelson, please, please share this information. Share this podcast with them so that we can start empowering our students and families of color today and from this day forward. I think that this is the work we need to do and that we have the platform as school leaders to begin this conversation and spread the word that there is support available and that coaching is one of the ways to expedite transformation, especially for kids of color.

So, Nelson, thanks again for being here. I look forward to staying in touch with you and watching you grow. And let's just keep in touch, okay.

Nelson: Thank you so much for having me.

Angela: Take care, bye-bye.

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Hey, principals, listen up. I've created a professional learning program for you and your team to build your capacity and lead your staff through the empowerment process. I've designed personalized growth experience for

## **Ep #134: Inclusivity for Every Student with Nelson Peralta**

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