

# Ep #138: Now is The Time to Re-Evaluate and Act with Dr. Julia Barrow



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 138.

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.

Angela: Hello my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. Welcome back to this week's podcast. I am so excited. I have yet another amazing person to interview for the podcast today. We have a special episode for you. With me today, I have Dr. Julia Barrow. She is an educator for the last 30 years. She's done it all.

She's been a teacher, instructional coach, she's been a principal, curriculum director, she's been working at central office, she has done a variety of roles within the field of education. She is now, just like me, transitioned over to life coaching for educators and has recently created a digital course for educators, trying to help us through all of the transition. And she is here with me today, and I so honored to have her on the show, so welcome Julia. Thank you for being here.

Julia: Thank you for having me here, I'm so excited. I've been following you for a couple of years now, so I am just tickled to be here.

Angela: Oh, this is wonderful. Great. So why don't you tell the listeners all about you. Who you are, your experience in school, and how you've grown into what you're currently offering now as a coach.

Julia: Yeah, so it's a funny thing. I'm actually, like you said, a retired educator with over three decades of experience in pre-k through 12. And when I stopped being officially an educator and I was sort of in a retirement phase, I remember telling my adult kids I'm going to give myself a blank

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slate, I'm going to just really explore the world and see what I want to do next.

And so I did, and one day I was in my searching mode, I was sitting on my sofa looking through my iPad to see what I could be passionate about, where I could contribute, what I could get into, and literally I stumbled into a video of Master Life Coach Brooke Castillo explaining this tool that she calls the model.

And immediately I was hooked. I was taking notes, I was so excited about it. I just kept thinking of all the different ways we could use it in our schools. And I kept asking myself, why haven't I seen this before? Why hasn't anybody taught this to me before? Why aren't we teaching this to our kids?

And so long story short, I became obsessed. I signed up and got certified as a life coach myself, and then as I launched my own business after a couple of years of really digging in and learning how to coach clients and really getting even coaching for myself to see the impact of it, this global pandemic hit. We've all heard of that.

And so what happened was that I noticed how I was using my life coaching tools and concepts to re-center myself, to get grounded, and then I thought, well, how can I contribute at this time for this purpose? And how do I want to spend these months and when I look ahead, how do I want to say later that this is what I was able to do to support fellow educators during this time?

And so my thought was okay, I'm coming back. I'm getting in there, I want to contribute. I want to intersect my life coaching tools and concepts with everything I know about teaching and learning, so here I am in the middle of my shift back in education and I really cannot be more excited about it.

Angela: I am so glad that you said that. I feel like educators have tons of resources available to them, but very few resources in this capacity. There

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aren't many people who are out there supporting - especially I feel like the school leader. I feel like the school leader specifically is that ultimate middle manager where they are balancing the input from the district, which means they're kind of filtering all that county, state, federal, all of those types of influences, but then they're trying to manage - they're on their boots on the ground.

They're trying to manage parents and teachers and students and their campus and their staff as large. So, I'm so grateful to hear that you are out there offering services to educators who really more than ever need to understand that there is a different level of support available, unlike anything else out there.

Julia: 100%. And it's really how you look at it. I mean, I am a firm believer in seeing challenges as opportunities and 2020 is just like the motherload of opportunity in my eyes. So, I think of our teachers who are in the work with our students and at first, it was this whole pandemic thing and everything that it entailed.

Lots of major change, the new learning, the problem solving, the teaching. I kept thinking about that emotional resiliency that our teachers need during this time because they're actually flying the airplane as it's being built. And so, what I saw that was unfolding in front of me was this opportunity because like I said, I believe that difficult emotion is actually a great teacher, it's our greatest teacher.

And so you can learn so much from disruption and discomfort if you know how and that's where our perspective comes in, the life coaching comes in, and then on top of that, when George Floyd was murdered in front of the world really and the protests started and I took it all in and I thought, well, we just can't let this moment and this momentum get by without us making our greatest impact.

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We're the ones who have the most influence. I always think about we're the ones in front of the people who are moving our world forward. And so, I was thinking like, guess who has the means and the position every day to make the greatest impact. To not just improve how we treat each other as humans, but also to improve mental health for all of us and to help rebalance the world.

And the answer is that it's us. It's the educators who have this amazing opportunity to do some global healing for us and really change the course of history. I mean, some might say how did you land on that big concept? But what makes me think of it is like, if we pull away and look back at this historical timeline of our civilization, this is going to pop out as a really significant era and how we handle it, how we handle it ourselves, us first, and then how we handle it with our students, what we do moving forward as a society is going to be very telling.

And for me, I'm not willing to sit back right now, though I can say "hey, it's you guys, the younger generation," or "hey, I've earned my time to rest or something like that." What excites me way more than that is me being able to support our educators and helping us to make our greatest impact. It's like 2020 happened on our watch for a reason. That's the way I look at it. This is our time. Let's do this.

Angela: I completely agree. You know, when it first happened, we were all in shock. And I was watching education have to scramble basically, and I just am so impressed at the capacity to which people rose to the occasion. And I feel like I caught the tsunami of emotional resiliency. It's coming.

The tsunami trauma is coming in the sense of educators are going to have to not only figure out how to support students and families as they're coming back into the system in whatever capacity that ends up happening for the school year in the fall, but their own. Their own mental and emotional traumas that have occurred as a result of now not just COVID.

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We were just looking at COVID in the beginning, but now we're looking at deeper issues around race. Racism, anti-racism, equity, and it's really brought all of that to the surface. And I agree with you 1000% that this is the perfect beautiful opportunity for us to look at every aspect of education and not - instead of faulting or blaming, but really just for its pure essence of what it is and what it's become and how we can evolve it to really be equitable for all.

Julia: 100%. And I think this is it. This is our biggest challenge right now is how are we going to frame this era that we're in. And I mean, I can look at it and say all I see are challenges and difficulties and uncertainties, and I certainly feel for our teachers who, like I said, are right in the middle of it.

But you and I know as a coach that the more we tune into those thoughts of this is going to be so hard or there's so much uncertainty and all of those things, that's not as helpful as kind of making peace with it all and then looking for those opportunities. And this pandemic, like you said, is really caused us to snap out of our routines and it's really gifted us with a chance to weed the garden, so to speak.

And what do we want to keep, what have we been doing that's not working and what needs to go and what do we need to do differently. It's like we're in a blank slate moment and what I would love to see if our school leaders to jump on this. It's almost a once in a lifetime chance to just do education better, to reach and teach all of our students to look at the messages and the images we have been sending to both our adults and the children in our schools and then to take deliberate action toward more equitable practices.

Our beliefs about our students, for example, their curriculum, the delivery of instruction, the literature, the history books. I mean, I can go on and on. Our assessment practices, our disciplinary practices.

Angela: All of it.

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Julia: All of it. There's so much to look at, but this is clearly the best time. And the space, the culture, all of that. Even in how we incorporate the tools and concepts that you and I use in our work that we have never really seen in our schools before. I mean, how powerful is that to give our students the tools for improved mental health? It's like a life-long gift. And I just think it's time and now the circumstances have presented themselves for us, as a family of educators to re-evaluate and to act.

Angela: Beautifully said. And I loved what you said about just the need for that kind of shift in focus from assessing and testing and giving schools a grade to looking at the whole child. And I hesitate to use that phrase because it has attached meaning to that, but in the truest, purest sense of looking at their mental and their physical needs and their emotional needs.

I think that's something we have danced around. We've talked the talk, but we've really skirted the issue of mental and emotional health. And I'm curious to hear your perspective on this. What do you think is the biggest challenge or the reason that we're afraid to go there?

Julia: Well you know, we've just never really done it openly. I think we know a lot more right now and because it's sort of like the Maya Angelou quote, "When you know better, you do better," and I think that we've been there but we haven't stopped. We haven't paused to really make the changes, to really do the self-examination.

Because it's hard. When you self-examine, there's the judging and the blaming like you were saying. And what we know obviously is that if you come from judging, like our kids, you'll shut down. And so what I offer to our educators is to come from a space of openness and a willingness to learn and empathy and compassion.

And those types of emotions, what they make you do, the way they make you to show up or cause you to show up is in a way that you can actually



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see and hear and learn and understand the whole do better part. So I mean, there are some things I think that we're working towards. I see some changes but I really think that instead of a lot of policies and rules, the questions we need to ask are things like what does our culture need to look like and feel like to guide our students?

In my own research and asking students in one of my studies, I asked them what do you need from us? Your teachers and your principals, and their response overwhelmingly was I want a chance to prove myself. I want conditions to help me to learn. I want for my teachers to have my back.

So my personal belief is that our kids, they want to learn, they want to succeed, they want to walk across the stage, they're eager to show us what they can do. And so that might be a good starting point to determine what are we doing well, okay, do your students believe that you believe in them? Like all of your students. Students of color.

And I can give you some examples of my own experience as a woman of color. And then there's like, how is your culture and the team around them helping your students to grow and evolve and make decisions that are good for them and good for the rest of us. So I think it really starts with being willing to do our own self-examinations. And the way I teach this, now I'm jumping a little bit further ahead here, but the way I teach this is...

Angela: Go for it.

Julia: The way I teach this is that we have these five levels of consciousness. And by the way, never would have known this or taught this in the past before I learned about life coaching and what it can do for us. But the way I teach it is we have our five levels of consciousness and the first, let's start from the bottom to the top.

So at the bottom, the first is our unconscious level. And that's like, a bucket. I call it my unconscious bucket where I'm just collecting all of these



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messages and images and everything else that we learn directly or indirectly from people, from advertisements, from media, movies, books, all the things. Things that people say to us.

And so, you have this massive amount of messages and images in your unconscious bucket, and that's where most of us are. We run from our unconscious buckets, so what happens is in the absence of self-examination or thought work or coaching, our brains offer up thoughts that were programmed into us over the course of our lives from that unconscious bucket.

And this is why we often don't even know sometimes what our biases and filters are. They're hanging out in there and we think maybe they're not in there because we would say no, I believe in all of my kids, and you don't know what's in there until you look.

And so, what I have been teaching lately is that we are conditioned with the messages from the society that we live in, and so until we take a look, we don't really know. There are hidden assumptions that affect how we show up.

So like, even me like I said, as a woman of color, I'm taking a good look. I'm learning. I'm actively seeking out more voices of color. This is why I'm so excited that you're doing this. We owe it to our young people and the coming generations to make some shifts from here, but where we do it from a more conscious and studied perspective.

And I also want to encourage your listeners and anyone who's interested in doing this to not be fearful or judgmental about what they find. You might be appalled to learn that there are traces of sexism or racism or other isms in our unconscious bucket, but it's just our conditioning. It's us being humans.

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And so, we really do have to look. It's the only way we can catch ourselves. Otherwise, we'll just keep repeating the same thing. We don't get change, which I think is one of our biggest challenges is that we don't take the look, we don't look, and we keep doing what we've always done.

So, the good news is that it doesn't make you a bad person if you find something in there that you might be surprised to find. The better news is that we can do something about it, that we can totally change the messages and images going into the unconscious bucket of our students and the generations to come and we can totally learn to take action from a more conscious level of awareness. And that's what you and I teach as life coaches.

Angela: You said that so perfectly because we can't know what we don't know is down deep in that unconscious level, and here's what life coaches does offer to people. We're not telling you how to live your life. We don't have the answers. We're not the expert in life. That is not what a life coach does.

What a life coach does is help you unveil thoughts that you didn't know existed in your mind, and then you get to examine them and decide whether you want to choose to continue believing that thought or have that thought take up space in your brain, or select a different thought or shift the thought to a thought that either feels better or feels more true for you or that rings right. Like it feels correct in your body.

And we also help you - and this is where we get back into this emotional resiliency and what Julia just said was we're afraid to go down into that unconscious bucket for fear of what we might find or see and then we would feel bad that something's wrong with us as a human being.

And what we do is we want to go to that place where we see the thoughts and then we learn how to process the emotions that come with the

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realization. Because the truth is there are thoughts and beliefs that we have that feel ugly, that feel wrong, that feel bad, and that's okay. It's okay to experience negative emotion and to process it.

And that's what we're kind of talking about here is this emotional resiliency piece where we'll go down in the bucket with you. And we're going to be there with you and you can feel bad about it, and then you're going to process that emotion. But on that other side of that processing comes this beautiful clean slate where you're like, okay, now what?

Now what am I going to do as an educator? How am I going to show up now that I know this? I'm so grateful to know this because now I can show up in a different way.

Julia: Yeah. I mean, that's so perfect. And then what that allows is that you really come from a place of authenticity because now you really know yourself well and love and unconditional support. When you get to your students, when you do this work yourself, then you will come to the table with this very knowing energy that your students are going to grab on to. They're going to know, so that's exciting.

Angela: So, I'd like to give our listeners a little hope. I feel like educators feel like, oh my gosh, we're doing everything wrong right now. What about our systems or what aspects of education do you feel are working? What should we continue?

Julia: Yeah, well I think we do so much - just I mean, so much props. I have so much admiration for just getting through 2020 for crying out loud.

Angela: Yes. Congratulations.

Julia: Like, talk about stepping up big time. And that's, I think, the biggest thing that we have as educators is that we were going to show up for our

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kids no matter what. And I saw it every day, all day long, just people showing up. So how amazing is that that we were able to do that, right?

And I think that also, what I'm hearing is that educators are grabbing onto this kind of global conversation right now that we're in about all of us being reflective and all of us trying to see how we do better. And so, I think that those are all amazing things happening in our field. The other thing is that I think right now, we're also more open to doing a little bit different because nothing's the same anymore.

Angela: Right. Why not?

Julia: Yeah, why not? So, it's kind of all stuff in the air. So those are things that I think are really going to make an impact. The other thing that's really hardening me so much is seeing how much attention is being paid to the whole concept of racism and anti-racism and really understanding those definitions and all of us seeking more understanding by being very deliberate in addressing and seeking different voices and the voices of the children that we serve. So those are all great things as well. I'm excited for our future. Can you tell?

Angela: Yes. I really am too. It's a very exciting time for us and it's an exciting time for education. And I think this has been long overdue and unfortunately, if it took a pandemic to number one, slow us down, and then within that pandemic, while we have the time and space to think and to examine our thinking, then we have the issue of racism come up and equity.

It was like, almost the perfect combination. An opportunity, like you said earlier. It is an opportunity. I'm curious to know if you'd be willing to speak to our school leaders of color and what support and recommendations you might have for them perhaps in experience. I know you have been a school leader, a site leader, so what thoughts and words of wisdom do you have

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for our leaders of color? As well as maybe our White leaders need support in terms of how they are going to approach the school year as well. So, what are your thoughts for those leaders out there?

Julia: Yeah. I think right now for me, the main idea of that our students need more than ever, they need to feel valued. Like they are seen, like they're heard, and that they have a voice and that they belong. And even for me as a first-generation Latina, I was the oldest and the first to go to school here for my family, and I just remember that I had to figure it out for myself.

And I have this little story I tell. I remember my teacher calling my name in kindergarten and I was so shy I couldn't get myself to raise my hand and speak up and say here I am. And she literally did not see me, and this was at the end of the school year and she could not see me in front of her.

She never said, "Oh, there you are." She glanced up, she kept calling my name, Julia, Julia, and looked around and never saw me and I was sitting right there in front of her. I mean, dead center directly in front of her. And it was the only time I actually remember her even calling my name, which is such a sad thing to say.

But the message here is that my five-year-old mind, the message that I took in was you are invisible, and you don't count. And so I just want to - that's what I want our leaders to really drive with their teachers and as a team is make sure that nobody is invisible, that everybody knows that they count and like, I'm here telling you you count. I see you and I hear you and I'm here to support you.

And then even the other thing I would love to talk about a little bit is the expectations that we have for all of our students. I know for me, again, my experience as a woman of color, as a student of color, I remember

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sometimes having to question the expectations that my teachers had for me.

Like I have another story, a tale was a young teenager, when my family moved from one neighborhood to another and I started - I went to a new middle school. And after a few days, I noticed that my classes were kind of easy and something was off. So, I worked myself, this shy kid, this shy teen, to the counselor's office, and I said to her, "I think I'm in the wrong classes. They're just too easy. And can you take a look at the grades from my other school?"

And she did and she said, and I still remember her saying, "Oh, you need to go upstairs." And upstairs meant the magnet vanguard program, so I was sent up there, but what would have happened if I had not spoken up? What happened to all of those kids that stayed in the "easy" classes?

I still think of them. I wonder why they did not deserve the same level of instruction that the kids upstairs reserved. And then why did they place me in the "easy" classes in the first place when my mom enrolled me, when they could clearly see that I had good grades? Did they even look?

These are questions that I have had forever, and that pains my experience. And so, when I talk to leaders, my fellow educators, I want them to talk about expectations for their kids. And it goes beyond the color of your skin. That's why it's uncomfortable sometimes to even hear the words or say the words, but we have to just take that honest look and say what are the expectations we're holding for our kids?

We have to see them, hear them, let them know, make sure they know they're valued and that they count, and that they can do. We have these expectations for them. I want them to look at the different perspectives of their student body. What I learned in school for example in my history

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classes, my dad would say, well, this is how your ancestors experienced that piece of history.

So, kind of giving me the version from another perspective. Even looking at that. And the books, the curriculum, the resources that we use in school, I see a nice shift happening now where I'm excited to see literature books and other resources coming out that are more diverse and inclusive. Still, I think we have a way to go to make sure that again, the messages and the images that our kids are getting demonstrate the value that they have as humans.

So those are some of the things that I just want to remind our leaders about and also some specific strategies that I like what I see for students in schools that have welcoming rituals. A moment for our students to be seen, to be greeted, to be recognized, to get props. And the closing ritual, the same, so that they get a debrief of sorts and guidance and recognition and just always giving them a chance to think better and to do better and just really be curious, come from a place of openness to learn about all of your students and to work toward real cultural proficiency, instead of just checking off that, yup, I did that Cinco de Mayo program, yup, I did the Black history program.

It's much more than that. It's so much more. And I also just want to say it starts with that human touch. A human connection with your students so that they feel that it is safe to come to you and to connect to you. Like in my coaching, I talk a lot about dropping agendas and judgment because the kids, they see that so fast and they kind of shut down from there.

But when you can hold the space for your students and they see that they have your unconditional support, I mean, in my experience, when I've seen children with behavioral challenges and then they make a turn, I always ask - for 30 years I've been asking, what was it?



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And they said it's always that their teacher cares for them. They'll say even when I was being disrespectful, my teacher kept on me and my teacher made me do the work so I could pass to the next grade level, or so I could graduate. They're touched when a teacher sees their pain and keeps having their back. It's like, they see that they do matter, that they do have value. Just really amazing what folks can do.

Angela: I love that you just shared that because what it comes down to is our ability to believe. The depth to which we believe in ourselves and in our students and in our school, in our district, in our society. The levels of belief that are required for educators, in order for students to feel heard, to be seen, to be respected, and just that belief that anybody has the capacity to achieve the goal that they want to achieve.

Julia: 100%

Angela: I love it. I love it. So, tell the listeners more. What services do you offer? I know you mentioned before we started recording that you have this online digital course for educators that's going to be launching soon I think you said?

Julia: Very soon. Very excited about it. Thank for you giving me the chance to talk about that. So when I had this epiphany that this is literally the best time to be an educator and to make our greatest impact, I had to figure out a way to reach out and I wanted to make my support as easy as possible to get.

So I landed on this idea of the digital course that you can get on your phone or your iPad or your laptop and you can either just listen to the content or watch the videos or read the guide book or all of the above. I just wanted to create something that was easy to grab and consume and that you could go back to if you needed a refresher on a certain concept or tool that I covered.

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So as we speak, the course is actually completed, but the technology side is being done right now so that it can be accessible. And it's going to be available really soon and I can't wait to get it out there for anyone who's interested again, in learning how to intersect life coaching with teaching and learning.

And that's the main thing that I offer, The Greatest Impact e-course, it comes with five modules, 18 video lessons, there's a journal in there for you to do your own work first, practice the thought work, work on your own emotional resiliency. Then there's a guidebook and I even included some bonus mini lesson plans to show you what it might look like to get it started with your students.

The models I introduce you to, the primary tool I'm using throughout the course, and then I cover what nobody taught us in teacher school. And then I'm going to show you why kids act out and check out, and then that's followed by the antidote for that and how to make our greatest impact in this historical moment. And there's even a self-growth process to guide you along in there. It's just filled with lots of tools and concepts. Actually, it's everything I wish I would have had as a teacher. It's in there.

Angela: Wonderful. That's so exciting. I can't wait to see it. I'm really excited to share that out with the listeners. So is it designed for teachers? Classroom teachers specifically?

Julia: It's for educators. I had to go a little bit broad in general for pre-k through 12. I think if you're a school leader, it will also all apply. You'll of course, benefit from it as well.

Angela: Great, good, okay. Awesome. So if people want to learn more, where can they go to find you?

Julia: It's still in the works, so it's coming out soon.

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Angela: That's okay.

Julia: The way that they can get the latest updates is to follow me on Instagram.

Angela: Okay, perfect. And what's your Instagram handle?

Julia: So my handle is @drjuliabarrow. You'll find me there. And of course, if you want to work with me in other ways or have questions or input, I'd love to hear from you. You can reach me at hello@drjuliabarrow.com. That's all one word also. That's an email, you can drop me a line. I'd love to hear from your listeners and learn some more from them.

Angela: Great. What an exciting conversation and it was such a pleasure having you on the show, Julia. I look forward to working with you again in the future. We'll have to do some collaborations.

Julia: I would love to do that.

Angela: Yeah, let's do it. Alright listeners, there you have it. Dr. Julia Barrow. You can find her on Instagram and be on the lookout for her upcoming digital course. Does it have a name, Julia?

Julia: Greatest Impact.

Angela: Greatest Impact. Be looking for that. It sounds amazing. So have a wonderful, empowered week, and we will talk to you guys next week. Take care. 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

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