

On Educating Girls: The Connected Girl Episode 6

Title: Speaking up, with Latricia Barksdale

[00:00:00] **Trudy Hall:** Tweets, soundbites, texts, emojis, in our modern world, that's how we connect. But in a world where we are supposedly more connected than ever, why are so many young people, and girls in particular, feeling more disconnected from themselves? At the International Coalition of Girl Schools, we're invested in ensuring that girls are whole, healthy, and well. We believe keeping them connected to their voices and their confidence is the key to keeping them so.

[00:00:35] **Voice Notes:** Like a gentle wind chime, my voice knows music happens. When connection begins. My voice, my voice, my voice synthesizes with my friends and teachers. Allows other voices to complement mine. Harmonizing and mixing as one. My voice leaps across the hallway to say hello to my classmate who's having a bad day. Our voices speak of powerful magic. Tell a story that will unfold long into the future. Together. Together. Together. Together. We make history every day. Together. We are instruments of change.

[00:01:07] **Trudy Hall:** Connection often begins with an invitation. The Connected Girl, a podcast series curated by the International Coalition of Girls Schools, is an invitation to those who know, love, and believe in empowering girls to engage with the experts we have gathered to understand the power and possibility of the many connections in the lives of girls. Can there be any connection more vital in a girl's life than her connection to her voice? Her authentic voice?

[00:01:40] **Music Interlude**

[00:01:57] **Trudy Hall:** Even the word voice has multiple meanings in the world of girls. Voice is often a term that shoots metaphorically. As we talk about gender equity, implying that to have voice is to have power. To lack voice is to be powerless. While that can appropriately be the activist rallying cry, give girls their voice! We need to remember that every girl already has a voice. A real voice, a voice she uses every day to negotiate her world. However, just having that voice is only the beginning. She must learn to find that voice, to use that voice, to own that voice. Quoting Melinda Gates here, a woman with a voice is by definition a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult. We all know the names of young women already using their voices to create change. This episode is not about girls who have already learned how to use their voice powerfully. It's about the girls who are just starting on that journey and will need our support, our encouragement, our modeling, as they're going to need to be brave. And often, it is finding the courage to be brave that is the first step in the journey.

[00:03:07] **Student voice note:** I feel your voice. It's like, it's your courage, it's your bravery, and even if it can be shut down, it is still you and it's still you trying to take your next step.

[00:03:18] **Student voice note:** I have really bad anxiety, specifically social anxiety. So it's like, in social situations like classrooms or meeting new people, I struggle a lot with speaking out and feeling that people are going to listen to what I say. When I had it really bad, it was really debilitating and I would like, sit in classrooms and I just, and I just cower, um, in, in fear of the fact that I would have to use my voice or that people were judging me for my reactions. Um, and I think trying to get connected to your voice is a really long process. If it's at the point where you, like, can't speak in class or can't meet new people, um, you kind of have to look in at yourself and see what's happening or you have to go out and see, like, for professional help to get help to find reconnection to for me, my voice or for others like happiness and so on and so forth.

[00:04:09] **Trudy Hall:** Hello, I'm your host, Trudy Hall for On Educating Girls, a podcast produced by the International Coalition of Girl Schools. And this episode continues our Connection Series in which we have convened experts to talk about the many connections in girls lives. From social media to parent conflict, from creating safe boundaries to dealing with loss, we're thinking hard about the ways in which to keep girls connected to what matters most. My guest today is Latricia Barksdale, the Vice President of Lean In Girls. A leadership program that helps girls see themselves as leaders in a world that often tells them they are not. Lean In Girls is on a mission to equip girls to be self-assured, resilient, and knowledgeable about the bias they will face in the real world. Their curriculum is all about rejecting stereotypes and creating allies for the road ahead. Latricia, it is so wonderful to have you here with me today.

[00:05:07] **Latricia Barksdale:** Thank you. It's great to be here.

[00:05:10] **Trudy Hall:** When we first talked about having this conversation, Latricia, you told me a personal story that set the foundation for where this conversation can take us. Can you share your personal experience about what happened to you as a confident younger self when you showed up at a math and science magnet school?

[00:05:27] **Latricia Barksdale:** Yes, so I went to a science and technology magnet school for high school and we were required, all of us, to take computer science. And to my surprise, I'd never had any experience with computer science before. I really enjoyed it. I was good at it, and I thought maybe I might want to pursue programming, as a career. So I decided to take advanced placement computer science. When I got to that class, I noticed that the makeup of the class was very different. So whereas the regular computer science class was required. Um, so everyone had to take it. This was an elective. And so I was one of, if not the only girl in the class and I was greeted with a lot of skepticism about my being in the class and whether I could, you know, do well in the class. And that took the form of, um, even the first day when I walked in and people, Looking surprised that I was there and then, you know, kind of covertly, but not very covertly quizzing me, uh, to get a sense for whether I actually understood the concepts, you know, looking at me skeptically if I was one of the first to finish the assignment that we were given that day. And so, that led me to question my own abilities, even though I had already

proven I was good at computer science. And so I, you know, had a little bit of performance anxiety. I really wanted to make sure I did everything right because I didn't want to confirm there are skepticism about whether I belong in the class. I would double, triple check my work. I would really be, you know, sort of stressed out about making sure that I got a good grade on everything. And that was an environment where I came in confident about what I could do. And I left feeling like this is not a place that I'm welcomed or maybe that I belong. So that was one of my earlier encounters feeling confident coming into a situation and then having that confidence challenged in the situation.

[00:07:45] **Trudy Hall:** So, as you tell that story, it makes me think hard about the relationship between confidence and voice. But, I think you really want us to lean into the role that environment plays in all this too, right?

[00:08:00] **Latricia Barksdale:** Yes. I think that, I think there's kind of a, a story that girls lack confidence. And I think that's not quite true. And I think this is true for not just girls, but all humans. I think you start off confident. Uh, I think that what people are seeing is what happens and how girls respond um, when their confidence is challenged, essentially how the world responds when girls show up with confidence. In the situation that I described, um, I entered with confidence, but didn't leave with as much, um, you know, essentially tried to just put my head down, not get noticed, get my work done. Um, and like I said, make sure I didn't get anything wrong. And so in that situation, um, I wasn't thinking about using my voice. I was thinking about just getting in and getting out as quickly and quietly as possible.

[00:08:59] **Trudy Hall:** Interesting. And, and so you and I both know this happens to girls all the time. These are the girls we know and we work with. When we see this happening to them, or when they talk about bumping into this reality, can you think of some tools or strategies that we might be able to give them?

[00:09:18] **Latricia Barksdale:** Essentially, helping them understand that what they're experiencing when they feel that people are, ah, doubting their capabilities and abilities is not about them. It's about the world we live in. And I think that it's really important to prepare girls for what they might experience, so that they don't internalize those negative messages, um, and don't think that there's something that they're doing wrong. We just need to prepare them to be able to navigate those situations. I think the other thing that is really important for us to do, uh, to help girls is to help them remember that, you know, who they are, right. And what they bring to the table, know their strengths, really help girls, um, identify what they're really great at give them opportunities to demonstrate that. And when they do really encourage them, and that can help build up their confidence and help them, uh, to kind of have a bit of a barrier between them and the things that they might experience so that those things don't kind of penetrate that kind of barrier of confidence that they've built up. And I think for me, that was something that was really important to have as I moved forward, um, in life and found myself in a lot of situations where I was one of the only or one of the few, uh, girls or women in a given situation.

[00:10:44] **Trudy Hall:** So, help us think about how we get way out ahead of this reality. You've sort of named it. It's going to happen to us. It's going to happen to pretty much every girl. We can give them some tools, maybe, for how they can recognize it. But now, now they're in the middle of it, um, and they're feeling that discomfort and that disconnect, you know, you've mentioned that we can help them remember who they are. Are there other things that you would have them think about when they find themselves in this moment?

[00:11:15] **Latricia Barksdale:** Yeah. One thing that we recommend is, for girls to really take a moment to kind of filter what they are experiencing. Um, whatever kind of feedback that might be. So to determine whether it is, you know, fair, constructive, you know, feedback, um, or whether it might be biased, right? And so helping girls use some discernment to try to figure out. What exactly is happening. So for example, um, in the situation that I just spoke about, uh, for myself, you know, I knew that I was good at computer science. And so the negative messages that I was getting, um, if at the time I had filtered them through that, you know, feedback filter to think about, like, does this make sense? Is this, you know, the whole world. Should I be doubting my abilities or capabilities or is something else maybe going on there, right? I had some evidence that would suggest that it wasn't me. It was something else. So I think equipping girls with the tools to filter feedback through that lens, ah, to determine whether it's you know, fair and constructive because, you know, we all need feedback. We all need to grow or whether they might be experiencing some type of bias. Uh, another idea could be bouncing what you've heard off or what you're experiencing off of somebody that you trust. Um, somebody whose opinion you trust and somebody who you know has your best interests at heart. Um, sharing with them what you heard and getting a sense from them whether they feel like what you've experienced or what you're hearing resonates or whether it sounds like there may be some sort of bias or unfair treatment happening there. So those are a couple other strategies that, that we recommend as part of our Lean in Girls program.

[00:13:10] **Trudy Hall:** Let's, let's keep digging because you're taking this down this road in a way that's enlightening to everybody. So there they are. They've named it. They're in the middle of it. They're feeling challenged. They've filtered some feedback. Now, how do they take this on? Should they take us on? Are there times when just recognizing it is enough? Are there times when, boy, they, they really should step up and do something about how they're being made to feel?

[00:13:36] **Latricia Barksdale:** That's a great question. And another thing that we, uh, talk about with girls, uh, who participate in our program is that whether you push back on what you're hearing or experiencing, and speak up about it if you feel like it's unfair. It was really going to be an individual decision for each girl, depending on the situation, depending on, you know, what is the specific scenario? Who are the people involved? What are the potential stakes? We really encourage girls to weigh both the positive and potential negative outcomes of pushing back and really say that, you know, not pushing back isn't wrong, right? Necessarily, um, it really just depends on the situation that you're in and your comfort level. And sometimes you're not going to be the right person to push back against what you're experiencing. Sometimes the

best thing to do, uh, depending on the situation, is to get an adult involved, right? Somebody that you trust. Um, it's not going to be black and white. And we want girls to know that, um, it's great if you feel like you can push back on an unfair treatment. Um, and it's understandable that sometimes you might not feel like you can.

[00:14:47] **Trudy Hall:** So, one of the reasons all of us who work with girls feel so strongly about this is that we know the world needs girls in leadership roles. It makes a difference when girls are in leadership roles. And we can all, you know, name the reasons why that is. But, ah, is it important how we define leadership? Is that really one of the issues?

[00:15:07] **Latricia Barksdale:** Yes. In fact, for our Lean in Girls program, our first kick-off session is about redefining leadership. You know, our goal is to help girls see themselves as leaders in a world that often tells them they're not. And this really starts with having a definition of leadership that's accessible and resonates with girls and traditional definitions of leadership that are grounded in the idea of positional power or hierarchy or operating with a command and control style don't resonate with girls who want to be collaborative and lead with empathy and, um, you know, make a difference in the world. And so part of our kick-off session is about, and our definition of leadership is about letting girls know that everyone can be a leader and a leader is not a position. There are many different ways to lead, big and small, at school, on your team, with your friends. If you see someone having a bad day and you comfort them, if you see someone, you know, picking on another person and you interrupt it. you know, there's lots of different ways to lead and everyone can be a leader.

[00:16:22] **Student voice note:** To me, being connected to the power of your voice means to be able to have the opportunities to share your voice and experiences and being able to lead and make a change. I think, like, being able to share these opinions and your opinions and work with others and creating a strong community is essential and having power in your voice. And having the chances to actually actively make those changes and to learn from your mistakes and to learn from the community and grow and being curious leads to knowledge, which leads to strength. And I think that as a female in today's world, it's important to trust yourself and what you believe and what you're learning and to take that leap of faith to speak out in order to be connected to your voice.

[00:17:03] **Student voice note:** I think, I think especially in leadership positions, you have to be willing. To listen to others and hear their opinions and whatnot and be able to put their ideas and their voice implemented into what you're doing. So especially when I try to lead or I try to do something like a group project, I, I especially try to listen to what others are saying and what they think we should do so that it can be incorporated and it can actually be a group and it's not just one person like taking over. And I think this is like super valuable for everyone involved 'cause they just get to feel like they're important and what they say matters.

[00:17:43] **Student voice note:** Being like a young teenager in this world, um, it's very hard, especially as a female. But, being able to know that you are strong and using that confidence, even if people push back and think it's, ah, overbearing and, oh, like these women are being too much and they think that they're too strong, honestly take it and be like, yeah, I am strong. I am being confident and I'm going to be a little bit overbearing right now, but it's how I feel about it. And I think that's important.

[00:18:15] **Trudy Hall:** So, let me ask you Latricia, in terms of letting girls know that leading is not about a position, I totally agree with you. Is there another phrase we can use that captures what leading is about for them? Does that question make sense? Do you know, for me, I'm looking for a, a catchphrase and maybe there isn't one.

[00:18:33] **Latricia Barksdale:** Yeah. I think if I would, we're going to simplify it. Uh, I would focus on a particular part of how we define leadership, which is leadership is about acting on your values, right? It's about being grounded in what's important to you and what you believe and operating in ways that demonstrate those things. And so how do your values show up when you're in a tricky situation with a friend? Right? Or how do your values show up when you could either prioritize one thing or another thing, how your values show up in any type of situation where there's a tension potentially. Um, so if I were going to sum it up into one phrase, I would say leadership is about operating in alignment with, with one's values.

[00:19:25] **Trudy Hall:** Sounds great. And what I really want to know now is then would you suggest that probably that work on knowing what your values are is the, the moment? I mean, that really is the moment you have to dig into as an organization or as an adult with a young woman to help her really understand that. Without understanding that, can she really help define her own voice?

[00:19:49] **Latricia Barksdale:** I think that's such an important question, and it's funny you mentioned organizations. Organizations spend a lot of time identifying what their values are, so that they can ideally operate and do their business in alignment with them. I think a lot of families, caregivers, spend a lot of time trying to in-still particular values into all, you know, all children, but I personally don't think I experienced a moment at a young age when I actually sat down and thought about what are my values? What are the things that are important to me? What are the things that I want to see show up in how I live and how I engage with others and how I'm in relationship with others? What are the things that if someone were to say, these are the things Latricia values based on how they experience me and how they see me move through the world, what would I want those things to be? I can't remember as a young person sitting down and thinking about that. Part of what one of our sessions and our leaning girls curriculum does is that just that we give girls an opportunity to do a values, you know, inventory and figure out what are the most important values to them. And then we give them the opportunity to talk about how they would demonstrate those values in various situations. I think that's just so important because when you are in a tough situation or you are in a situation that you kind of have to make a choice that feels challenging, um, and you feel pulled in

both directions, really being grounded in what your values are and what's most important to you can make it easier to figure out, you know, what action you want to take, what direction you want to go. So I do think that creating an opportunity for girls to actually identify what their values are is really important and helping them to find their voice and, and know what that voice is and have it be authentic to who they are and what's important to them.

[00:22:08] **Trudy Hall:** That makes so much sense and it sounds easy, but you and I know this is really difficult. And there are lots of fits and starts as a girl tries and then tries again and then experiments in a different way, um, and always going back to, well, what would my values indicate that I need to do in this moment? What would my values tell me? For a girl, I think you and I might agree there's just nothing more essential than being connected to the power of her own voice.

[00:22:38] **Voice Notes:** I'm so grateful for and I feel like I've gained my voice through like this period of my life and I love it. I love just saying what I, what I know and what I want. Yeah, it's always advocating for yourself in a way of what suits you the best, especially as we're now choosing like about universities and what to study. Um, advocating for what you truly enjoy over what is expected of you is really vital and advocating for your voice, it's so necessary at this point of life, because otherwise you're going to be doing an expensive degree that you don't even like, and you end up somewhere that you don't want to be, and so it's always important to prioritise who you are first, and you've got to have that connection with yourself, as we were saying earlier, because otherwise you cannot advocate for yourself if you don't know what you're advocating for, but you've got to believe in yourself and make the right decisions for you to live a happy life in a way. I think again it goes back to us being in this sort of environment where we're, where we're encouraged to have our own voice that I know when I go to university hopefully I'll still be able to stand up for myself or like get my point across and I won't be bashed down by other people. Even in environments where you feel uncomfortable or you feel new like I feel like with the help of social media and this skill still now to this day when I'm in environments if someone still says something I don't agree with I still will challenge them because I feel like I've taken it upon myself to do so, and I think while that can be annoying for some people, I think it will only do me good in the long term.

[00:24:14] **Trudy Hall:** So as we unfortunately have to end our conversation, can you leave our listeners with two to three takeaways that you know are important, um, in the critical work that they do to keep girls connected to their voice?

[00:24:29] **Latricia Barksdale:** I think the overarching thing that I would say here is that it's really important to help girls build a sense of self. And there's two pieces of this that I would highlight. The first is related to what we were just talking about, which is helping girls identify what their values are, what's important to them, how do they want to walk through. So I think that's an important part of girls having a sense for who they are. I think number two is, um, helping girls identify what their strengths are, you know what they're good at, and that's not limited to things like I'm great at math, I'm great at science. Maybe a girl you notice who's really empathetic, right?

Your daughter comes home and tells you that there was a kid in class that was sitting by themselves at the lunch table, and they invited them over, right? That demonstrates empathy, um, or you see them in other instances demonstrate, demonstrating empathy. help them see that as a strength. You are empathetic, you are kind, uh, you care about people, et cetera. So I think helping girls identify what their strengths are and having an expansive view of what is a strength, right? What constitutes a strength. And then I think the third thing is just the encouragement and reinforcement, um, when you see girls operating in ways that reflect their values, when you see girls putting their strengths into action, um, you know, that encouragement can go a long way, right? That affirmation can go a long way in helping girls build that sense of self, that confidence, um, that can act as armor against what they might experience, uh, as they continue to move through the world. So those are the things that I would highlight in terms of strategies, in, in helping girls have a strong sense of self and who they are.

[00:26:43] **Trudy Hall:** So Latricia, this has been a real privilege and having you walk us through this journey almost from beginning to end, which is this need that girls have to identify their values before they can really find that voice. But as important, I love the fact that you've recognized that it's the environment and we have to help them name it. That's something we all as the adults know, why are we letting them discover it on their own? So that purposeful naming of what's out there in the environment that could hold them back from using their voice in a way that is powerful and is authentic. I love that you're talking about leadership in different ways that anybody can lead. And I think it's important for us to understand that as long as you are leading from your strengths, you are leading. And so as a sign off, I would love to remind our listeners that it's our job then, to help our young women build a sense of self, but as important, help them see their strengths that they themselves might not be able to see. Did I, did I capture the important learnings from our conversation today?

[00:27:48] **Latricia Barksdale:** I think the one thing that I would also just mention is I want to kind of push back on this idea that girls innately lack confidence. In my experience, girls don't lack confidence. Um, when girls show up with confidence, a lot of times they receive pushback and challenge to that confidence, which can start to erode it. They don't show up like that, right? They show up ready to go. And so I just think that's why it makes it just that much more important that we prepare girls for what they might experience so that they don't start to experience self-doubt or question their capabilities, um, when they do experience pushback or unfair treatment out in the world.

[00:28:36] **Trudy Hall:** Excellent, excellent point. You know, the story that we tell about girls and confidence may well be a story that needs to be unpacked as we look forward and as we work with our girls. So, thank you so very much. It's been great speaking with you, Latricia.

[00:28:50] **Latricia Barksdale:** You too, Trudy. Thanks for having me.

[00:28:56] **Voice notes:** Tell our story. Tell our story. I'm from misty mornings and sunrise dappled bricks in the school courtyard. From cold blue and grey skies as buses move in winter snow. I'm from the simple smile in the doorway that says welcome. And the common language of laughter. I'm from the aha moments of learning inside the classroom and out. When I feel my heart in sync with the world. Like a gentle wind chime. My voice knows. Music happens when connection begins. My voice, my voice, my voice synthesizes with my friends and teachers, allows other voices to compliment mine, harmonizing and mixing as one. My voice leaps across the hallway to say hello to my classmate who's having a bad day. My voice echoes through the schoolyard joining the course of all the girls who came before me. Together, we question, find solutions. Take action. We are an ecosystem. Complex. Dynamic. Connected and dependent. Sometimes in ways invisible. Our voices speak of powerful magic. Tell a story that will unfold long into the future. Together. Together. Together. Together. We make history every day. Together, we are instruments of change.

[00:30:07] **Trudy Hall:** You've been listening to the final episode of The Connected Girl, a specially curated series produced by the International Coalition of Girls Schools for its On Educating Girls podcast. This episode is the last of six podcasts, engaging listeners to think about the many ways that the connections in girls lives keep them whole and healthy. The International Coalition of Girls Schools created this series in true partnership with Two Stories. Audio editing, engineering, and sound design were done by Kozi Mzimela and Jordyn Toohey. Thanks to the girls of Wickham High School in Wickham, England, and Culver Girls Academy in Culver, Indiana for the audio clips of girls voices used in the Connected Girls series. The story of the poem, Tell Our Story, used in the intro, can be found on the ICGS website. For more information, please refer to the show notes. Thanks for listening. It's important to the girls in your lives that you do.