Equity by Design Podcast Series
Episode 2:

Using Peer-Mediated Learning to Advance Equity

This is a transcript of the above-named podcast, which can be found on the [Great Lakes Equity Center website](). To access the podcast directly, use the following address: http://podcast.iu.edu/upload/glec/2d35ecf3-514f-48e0-ae82-b22ae3206a45/2014_2_24_PML_podcast_FINAL.mp3

Children: 3, 2, 1…[cheer]

Male Narrator: Hello and welcome to the Great Lakes Equity Center. Our mission at the Great Lakes Equity Center is to ensure equity in student access to and participation in high quality research-based education and to reduce disparities in educational outcomes among and between groups.

Female Narrator: Today's topic is our feature brief in our Equity by Design publication. Equity by Design briefs strive to provide educators with free, accessible, and applicable information. All briefs rely on current research and practice in the fields of educational reform and culturally responsive pedagogy. Go to Greatlakesequitycenter.org to access and subscribe to this quarter's brief and our other publications like our e-newsletter, the Equity Dispatch, and our e-bulletin, Equity Now!

Host Erin Macey: Welcome to today's podcast. Today I'm talking with Dr. Paulo Tan, lead author of the Equity by Design brief, "Using Peer-Mediated Learning to Advance Equity for All Students." Dr. Tan, some of our listeners, particularly in special education, may be already familiar with peer-mediated learning as an intervention strategy for students with disabilities, but in your brief, it seems to have a different meaning. Can you describe that?

Dr. Paulo Tan: Sure. Our brief describes a powerful form of a peer-mediated learning that starts with an inclusive classroom community and addresses some of the academic and social shortfalls of conventional forms of learning by shifting some of the responsibilities of teaching and learning from the teacher to the students so that all students learn meaningfully together from one another. So, our brief suggests that teachers must facilitate approaches to learning that are supportive and collaborative in order for students to see one another as contributing members to a learning community

and to prepare them to live and work in a pluralistic, democratic society. That's the ultimate goal.

Host Erin Macey: So the kind of interaction you're hoping to achieve is students learning from all of their peers in a collaborative and supportive manner. So in districts that are moving toward inclusive practices, your brief has some valuable guidance to offer in terms of having students learn meaningfully from one another instead of just being exposed to one another.

Dr. Paulo Tan: That's correct. Inclusive forms of education can be powerful. Let's listen in to a middle-school student named Faye describing such an experience.

Faye: They'd never be in our classroom when we were in middle school. They'd always – we'd see them maybe at lunch or in passing but we'd never see them in our classroom interacting, answering questions. So there was a distinct boundary between them and us. Now they're coming into our classes and they're just becoming one of our peers. It's definitely benefitted me in a huge way. It's so much better. I can approach them. Ask them questions. And they're just as one of my friends.

Host Erin Macey: Ok. So the clip we just heard is from the 2009 documentary *Including Samuel* by Dan Habib. Paulo can you tell us a little bit about what we heard?

Dr. Paulo Tan: Yes. In the clip, Faye reflects on her experiences with Alana, a student with a severe disability, who was transitioning from a self-contained classroom to a general education classroom. From Faye's reflection, we learn that although Alana attended the same school, she was not perceived as a member of the school or classroom community until Alana was integrated in the general education classroom and began to have social and academic interactions with her peers.

Host Erin Macey: This speaks directly to what you mention in your brief: students viewing one another as members of a learning community. Can you talk a little bit about the transition process that had to happen before Faye and Alana saw each other as members of a community like that?

Dr. Paulo Tan: Well, they had some struggles to begin with, but from what Faye was talking about, she began to see Alana as another member of the community. So there are those days where you get along with your peers and the days that you don't. It went from Alana being this person in another part of the building - not knowing too much about Alana - to Alana's just a part of the classroom, a friend, someone I could engage with both socially and academically.

Host Erin Macey: So this kind of story is fairly atypical, isn't it?

Dr. Paulo Tan: Historically, students with disabilities have been educated in self-contained or separate environments - much like what you heard from Alana's case before she was being integrated - and they had very limited access to the general education curriculum and opportunities to engage with their non-disabled peers. Now, in

the case of Alana and Faye, those are districts that are moving toward more inclusive environments. However, the current state of things in this country is that we still operate under that very separate system, in terms of general education and special education and especially when we're talking about students with more severe disabilities.

Host Erin Macey: So I can imagine someone arguing, "What's the harm in a separate system?" They might say they are better able to serve students with severe disabilities when they separate them according to their needs. How would you respond to that?

Dr. Paulo Tan: That's an ongoing debate and it's a very good question. I think that's sort of why districts and schools continue to push for those types of segregated models. However, under these separate models, research points to some of the negative outcomes in terms of limited social, emotional, academic development. In the case of Alana and Faye, how Faye initially saw Alana as "those" kids that were being taught over there somewhere in a different part of the building, someone that she really didn't know very much about or in some ways, didn't care much about and also feared approaching Alana until Alana became a member of the general education community.

So, being in a separate environment naturally marginalizes students. Also, while students with disabilities outside of school typically are integrated in their everyday life, like when they go to the mall or when they go to a restaurant with their family they are with everybody else. So if we think about separate programs in school, that's really the only place that you see that type of segregation.

Host Erin Macey: So in the example of Alana and Faye, Alana was denied access to the general education curriculum and both Alana and Faye were denied access to one another. Do you have other examples of the harms of separate systems?

Dr. Paulo Tan: Yes, I recently spoke to Pat Rogan, who is the Executive Dean at Indiana University School of Education at Indianapolis and I also spoke to Dr. Seena Skelton, who is the Director of the Great Lakes Equity Center at Indiana University School of Education at Indianapolis.

Host Erin Macey: Ok, and Dr. Rogan is going to offer us a teacher's perspective on some of the practices that lead to negative outcomes for students when they exit the system. Let's listen to that first.

Dr. Pat Rogan: Over time, it became very apparent that through the segregation of these students, we were denying them so many benefits of being of course with their age peers, of course in their neighborhood schools with their brothers and sisters, of course not having to ride the little yellow bus for hours and being shuffled in the side door or led to the lunchroom in a pack before anyone else. So over time we also began to see how that separation impacted students as young adults when they exited the system.

Host Erin Macey: So Dr. Rogan is pointing out that these practices can be harmful to students as they exit the system and integrate into society as adults. Let's also listen in

to Dr. Seena Skelton for her perspective as an individual with a disability reflecting on her school experiences.

Dr. Seena Skelton: I attended a school – an elementary school – that was located clear across town from my neighborhood. It was not my neighborhood school. It was actually about a 30-40 minute bus drive from my neighborhood.

I think what typically happens is that kids go to school with kids in their neighborhoods. So you make friends at school and those friends are the friends you have at home as well. You play together on the weekend and after school. I didn't have that. There was a disconnect.

Host Erin Macey: The stories we've heard from Dr. Rogan, Dr. Skelton, Faye and Alana have all illustrated some of the harms of having a separate system. In your brief, you outline some ways that you can transition from that separate system to one in which students see each other as valuable members of a learning community.

So if I'm a classroom teacher and my school or district is moving to an integrated model, what can I do if I'm interested in employing peer-mediated learning?

Dr. Paulo Tan: Well, as a classroom teacher, a good place to start – which is detailed more in the brief – is to think about establishing some core principles. There are commonalities to the ways we all learn, and that includes active engagement through social construction of learning and through activating our prior knowledge from our own cultural backgrounds. So we can say that all students have that as a common way of learning. In essence, that is a core principle that you as a teacher could start from. So though all your students may learn and demonstrate learning in unique ways, those are some of the common denominators.

Host Erin Macey: So I can read about four core principles in your brief and, as a teacher, I can adopt those and make them the foundation of my teaching. What's next?

Dr. Paulo Tan: One of the important steps that is also mentioned in the brief is to foster a supportive classroom community. An important way to do this is to have students realize commonalities, much like Alana and Faye did. They realized how much they had in common once they saw each other as friends and as peers. Those types of relationships might develop organically, or you might as a teacher have to be supportive of that development and to highlight some of those commonalities of all students.

Another way to foster a supportive classroom environment is to consider universal design for learning principles. So consider options for students to engage with the curriculum or options for how you represent materials or options of how they express their learning. So in essence, teachers are designing curriculum for the full range of students from the start rather than retrofitting their curriculum to individual students in terms of engagement, expression, and representation options that are available for all students.

Host Erin Macey: So by applying Universal Design for Learning, I've made my curriculum accessible to all of my students and my students might not be doing the same project in the same way at the same time, so they're beginning to see one another as contributing members to a learning community and as sources of knowledge. How can I further that to ensure that they're learning from one another and collaborating together?

Dr. Paulo Tan: That's a great question. A key component of peer-mediated learning is that collaborative piece. We know that students work and learn best together. So one of the ways we can cultivate that collaboration is to think about incorporating student-driven projects or using open-ended questions. A teacher might think about how she or he configures groups, so using groups of mixed abilities at some times and single abilities at other times. Most importantly is to create interdependence. So if we think about you as a teacher trying to think of a unit of study, we want that to be so that each individual in that group depends on one another for the group project to be completed.

Host Erin Macey: That's great. And we can find information about all of these strategies in your brief. So once all of this is employed, what is the ultimate outcome?

Dr. Paulo Tan: Ultimately, peer-mediated learning prepares all students to live in a democratic and pluralistic society and grapple with various and diverse perspectives in developing solutions and addressing problems in ways that will benefit everybody.

Host Erin Macey: Paulo, thank you so much for being here with us today. This concludes our podcast. We'd like to give a special thanks to Dr. Pat Rogan. We'd also like to thank Dr. Seena Skelton, Director of the Great Lakes Equity Center, and Dan Habib, director of the film *Including Samuel.* For more information about this film, please visit includingsamuel.com.

Female Narrator: For more information about who we are and what we do, go to our website or you can email us at glec@iupui.edu.

Host Erin Macey: Great Lakes Equity Center is committed to the sharing of information regarding issues of equity in education. The contents of this podcast were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.