

Dr. Federico Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

### TRANSCRIPTION

**Robin J.:** Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the *EquiLearn Virtual Roundtable*. My name is Robin Jackson, Products Coordinator with the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center, and I'll be serving as your Host and Technical Director. Before we start, I want to announce that we have an American Sign Language interpreter with us today. Her name is Mandy Alexander. If you are in need of ASL, then we can connect you with her. If you just go into the chat and contact Diana Lazzell, we can connect you with the ASL interpreter so we can make sure that today's presentation is accessible for you.

**Robin J.:** Today's *Virtual Roundtable* is entitled...Diana, if you wouldn't mind putting that message in the chat for me too, please. Today's *Virtual Roundtable* is entitled, *An Intersectional Approach to Building Inclusive Schools*. In this *Virtual Roundtable*, participants will: discuss how an intersectional approach to inclusive education can be implemented; have space to ask questions about the *Equity by Design Research Brief: An Intersectional Approach to Inclusive Education*; and identify local barriers for the implementation of an intersectional approach to inclusive education, and ways to dismantle them. Please consider this time an informal space to share your thoughts and insights, leverage learning from the other educators, and ask questions. Diana, did you have anyone who reached out to you yet about the interpreter?

**Diana L.:** No.

**Robin J.:** Okay. During today's Roundtable, we will align to the Four Commitments for Courageous Conversations when discussing this topic. First, stay engaged in the conversation. Second, experience discomfort you may get during this

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## An Intersectional Approach to Building Inclusive Schools *EquiLearn Virtual Roundtable*

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conversation. Third, speak your truth. And lastly, expect and accept non-closure. Diana?

**Diana L.:** Yeah. Thank you, Robin. Hello, my name is Diana Lazzell, I'm Outreach & Engagement Coordinator here at the MAP Center. I'll be serving as your Assistant Technical Director today. *EquiLearn Virtual Roundtables* are intended to be interactive. Participants are asked to interact in real time via our tele-conferencing format on Zoom. To reduce noise, we ask that you mute your microphones when not speaking.

**Diana L.:** Lastly, the video camera function has been turned on, thus if you have a webcam and you'd like to join, please feel free to enable your camera by clicking the camera icon at the lower right of your screen. Please feel free to send me a chat message directly if you're having technical difficulties.

**Robin J.:** This is us. Thank you, Diana. Next, I am very pleased to introduce our Roundtable facilitator. Dr. Federico Waitoller is an Associate Professor at the Department of Special Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and an Equity Fellow with the MAP Center. His research focuses on Urban Inclusive Education. In particular, his work examines and addresses policies and practices that generates or reproduces inequities for students of Color with disabilities.

**Robin J.:** Dr. Waitoller is also interested in examining how these inequities are affected by the production of space and urban economies, and the role of teacher learning in school/university partnerships in developing capacity for inclusive education. Welcome, everyone. Now, I'll turn it over to Dr. Waitoller.

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- Federico W.:** Thank you, Robin, and thank you everybody for joining. I was seeing how many people are on this chat and it's amazing. Thank you so much for joining in and thank you for Center and my space. I know this Center has been doing some terrific work and has respond very quickly to the COVID-19 situation, generating a lot of Roundtable cafes, so a shout to them and thank you again for being here.
- Federico W.:** Today I'm going to be speaking about a brief that should be coming up this week, maybe next week, Robin will tell us. I think within this week we'll have it out. I'm going to be summarizing that on my talk, and I'm going to try to leave a significant amount of time for us to discuss and to ask questions and engage in conversation and how this may look like in your schools, or in your programs, or if you are not working in a school or a particular program, maybe with your experience.
- Federico W.:** The topic, it's this idea of having an intersectional inclusive education. It's consolidated some of the work that I've been doing the last 10 years, not just me but in collaboration with our colleagues like Dr. Alfred Artiles, Elizabeth Kozleski and even Kathleen King Thorius, Director of the Center and Subini Annamma.
- Federico W.:** That, working with these scholars have been reshaping this idea of how inclusive education could look like? What that would mean for practice. What kind of principles should we be following to enact a meaningful, inclusive educational agenda? This comes in response because the inclusive education movement has had many different meanings as across boundaries, national boundaries but also state and local boundaries.
- Federico W.:** As you probably know, this is not just a U.S. phenomenon, it's an international phenomenon that started back in the 1980s. I've been

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# An Intersectional Approach to Building Inclusive Schools

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changing phrases and meanings as it had traveled different localities. One of my favorite phrases is that inclusive education has traveled so much that it's jet lag. This has been interpreted in so many different ways that has lost some of its meaning. My work and this brief, consolidating that, is an attempt to try and to bring that back to our original and radical agenda.

**Federico W.:** You probably are familiarized that, how inclusive education looks like in the U.S. it's mostly about mainstreaming students with disabilities to general education classrooms. I would argue, I'll just call it, as well that this comes from a medical and deficit model of disability in where the biological or psychological differences of the students are treated as deficits that reside within the individual, and that are treated as undesirable traits that requires your remediation.

**Federico W.:** It also requires modifying instruction from the general education classroom. This is what it comes out of the least restrictive environment. Because it's based on the assumption...can you change this slide, Robin, please? The least restrictive environment comes from the solution that students needs to accommodate to a practice that is already rigid, and it has not been designed with them in mind.

**Federico W.:** I understand the reason why we have LRE. But I think we need to start moving away from that. The LRE, we have it because of course our general education classes are not prepared to work with students with disabilities. So we need to have a certain continuum in where professionals can choose maybe different environments for the child because the child location classes are not defeated. But that assumption is problematic. Can you change the...thank you.

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- Federico W.:** That assumption is problematic. Because that assumes that the general education classroom is not the placement for all children, and that students with disabilities only can be included, if they not demand a significant alteration of the general curriculum practices. I think we see this reflected also, this almost say, a minimalistic approach that based in very few modifications and accommodations to students. We see some repercussions of this, I think.
- Federico W.:** If we look at the national data, we see that some positive trends when we see data on, how many students are being included in the general education classroom? For example, we know now that science 2002-2020, the amount, the percentage of students with disabilities included in the general education classroom by 80% or more of the school day has increased for almost 20%. It was 42% in 2002, students who were highly included in general education classroom. Now, we're up to 63%.
- Federico W.:** But there are some significant differences within that. If we look at a data desegregated by disability category, we see that, mostly of these students who are highly included are students with speech and language impairment, where 87% of them are included. Students identified with learning disabilities were around 72%. But if we look at students with demand, maybe more of a transformation of the general education classroom like students with intellectual disabilities, only 17% of them are included, highly included in the general education classroom.
- Federico W.:** While only 13% of students with multiple disabilities are highly included. If we look at students autism was 40%. We see a huge difference within disability category which it tells me that the model of inclusion that we have in the U.S., and in other countries as well, it's very selective. It gets more

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interesting. We have a selective inclusive education which is a paradox. Because inclusive education should be for everybody, not just for a few.

**Federico W.:** When we look at race, it becomes even more complicated. Because we know that Black, Native Americans, and Latinx students tend to be disproportionately identified for special education services. But more interestingly to be, once they're identified for special education, they're less likely to be included in the general education classroom.

**Federico W.:** This is a trend that we have seen since the 1990s and it hasn't changed. There is, I think, a brief by the Center, by the MAP Center. I think, published this year or last year, where I did an analysis of placement on LRE patterns in Chicago. I wrote a small brief of that article for MAP Center, looking at issues in Chicago. Where white students are twice or three times more likely to be include the general education classroom than Black students, even in charter schools.

**Federico W.:** We have a selective inclusion agenda which mostly benefits students who doesn't demand a significant transformation of the classroom, and mostly white students. Even researchers like Leroy and Kulik in 2004 concluded, in a national study about patterns of placement in the least restrictive environment, that inclusion is the middle class, suburban phenomenon for students with sensory or physical disabilities. Conversely, a non-white student with a cognitive impairment, living in poor urban district, has little chances to access inclusive education.

**Federico W.:** This deficit model has several limitations. We need to start thinking beyond this deficit model of inclusion, which is supported by this LRE provision of the IDEA. Instead of providing modifications and qualifications to this normative curriculum, we need to begin to dismantle intersecting forms of

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inequities that are part of the DNA of what we call the general education classroom.

**Federico W.:**

In this presentation, I'm going to talk about intersectional inclusive education principles that I think it can take us a step farther in moving away from these deficit model of inclusion. Can you change this slide, Robin, please? Thanks. The goal of this intersectional inclusive education, I'd say is to dismantle intersectional educational inequities and build a more just, pluralistic and emancipatory democracy. To guide this inclusion, I'm going to use three principles that I draw from social justice theory, particularly work of Nancy Fraser.

**Federico W.:**

Can you change the slide Robin? I will look at three different dimensions: redistribution, recognition, and representation. I'm going to be talking about these three dimensions and I know it's going to sound very abstract. But then I'm going to talk about how these may look in practice with some promising ideas and practices that are being aware. These three dimensions of inclusive education make us think about inclusive education as a redistribution of quality opportunities, inclusive quality opportunities to learn for our students, in the recognition and value of differences as reflected in content, in pedagogy and assessment tools, and in opportunities for marginalized groups to represent themselves in the decision making and represent themselves on decision making instances that what's at stake is their educational experiences.

**Federico W.:**

Let me talk briefly about each of these and how they play out at the intersection of race and disability. Struggles for social justice, or struggles for inclusive education based on redistribution, are based on the economic aspects of justice, where material and social resources are distributed equally. These redistributive dimension emphasize socioeconomic

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injustices that are based on the unjust redistribution of resources. This has been greatly part of the inclusive education movement. For example, the Salamanca Statement, international statement of 1994 talks about that, "Every child has a fundamental right to have access to an inclusive education."

**Federico W.:** It gives the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve the education system for all children. The idea of the redistributed agenda is to transform the general education classroom so all schools are inclusive schools. I think this is very important. Because we tend to think in the U.S., in a market model of education delivery, in where there are different offers and parents can choose from different school options. But I don't think inclusive education should be an option.

**Federico W.:** I think inclusive education should be in every single school. That's the only way we'll guarantee this redistribution of inclusive services. Through a redistributive agenda, we need to call for the restructuring of the social and learning arrangements of the general education classroom. Learning is not based on limited accommodations and modifications to an exclusionary curriculum.

**Robin J.:** Dr. Waitoller?

**Federico W.:** Yes.

**Robin J.:** There a question in the chat. Someone's wondering, who is the scholar for what you're talking about? This slide?

**Federico W.:** Can you say that again?

**Robin J.:** They want to know who the reference is for this slide.

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- Federico W.:** Well, the three dimensions are based on the work of Nancy Fraser, and I move her discussion. She doesn't talk about inclusive education, she talks about justice, social justice in general. I'm using her words and translate it to what it would mean for inclusive education.
- Robin J.:** Thank you.
- Federico W.:** Do you want me to put it on the chat?
- Robin J.:** If you have time.
- Diana L.:** Kathleen put it in the chat.
- Federico W.:** All right. Again, the brief that is coming up this week will have these references as well and it has everything that I'm saying as well. The second dimension talking about the recognition, which is the red circle. It talks about the cultural aspects of justice. Struggles for justice based on cultural recognition comes as a reaction of injustice based on misrecognition. In which racist and ableist belief promotes deficit views of students. Cultural groups, students with disabilities, Black students, Black students with disabilities should be able to meaningfully participate in public institutions, without having to leave their identities under cultural repertoires at the school door.
- Federico W.:** Students' identities based on race, gender, home language, ability should be recognized, valued and sustained and empower. The remedy for misrecognition is to value and sustain the student identities as legitimate forms of participation, learning and being. The last dimension there, which is representation...actually, I should put it first because the one that I think we give less attention in our schools, talks about the injustice is... It's a response to injustices based on representation that arise when people are

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denied opportunities to participate in conversations to advance, understand and define injustice—as well as the solutions to these injustices.

**Federico W.:** As a result, some people make a practice and policy decisions that affect other people's education without their voice or input. An example of representation principle is evident in the rights gained by parents and children to actively and meaningfully participate in educational decisions like those made in IEP meetings, though, we know that's been a tremendous challenge and parents of Color still struggle significantly to participate meaningfully in IEP meetings.

**Federico W.:** Students experience intersecting forms of oppression here at the intersection of these three single circles. They do so at intersections of race, disability, gender, class and ability or disability. We need to recognize that students don't come with one particular identity and don't experience one particular form of oppression or exclusion or one particular problem. But we need to understand this as intersecting, and as students facing different injustices based on mis-redistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation, based on their race, ability, language and gender identities.

**Federico W.:** I think there's just some cautionary points about this definition that I'm talking about, inclusive education. First, these principles are not prescriptive, but rather are there to provide guidance for developing inclusive schools. Another important aspect of this is that none of these dimensions can be trained as in isolation. Because these dimensions need to act together.

**Federico W.:** For example, a parent's effort to obtain quality and well-resourced for special education who can be seen as struggle for redistribution to

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access, for example, speech and language service, may contribute to stigmatization and stereotypes about students. That is an injustice based on misrecognition. So, we always need to have these three dimensions in constant play and dialogue. Well, that's the reason that I like what Corbett and Slee talks about, being a cultural vigilante who examines in ongoing basis, in the examination of intersectional forms of inequity. Because to be in continuous alert for the threat of reemerging ableism or racism that maybe at play in our schools. How we can transform this to practice? Can you change this slide, Robin? Let's move to the next one.

### Federico W.:

The first is we need to start thinking about developing and implementing an intersecting inclusive pedagogy that can interrogate, contest, and provide alternatives to different forms of isms like racism and ableism and repair and avoid injustices based on misdistribution, misrecognition, and misrepresentation. The idea of this pedagogy, it would be to sustain identities that can contribute to a participatory and just democracy in which all abilities, languages, literacies, races and cultures are valued and treated as legitimate forms of participation.

### Federico W.:

I don't think we need to reinvent the wheel for these kind of pedagogies. There are various efforts out there who had been presented in parallel form. For example, Dr. Thorius and I wrote a series of articles talking about how to cross-pollinate cultural sustaining pedagogies or cultural responsive pedagogy with UDL, one that looks, not just...cultural responsive pedagogy that tackles issues, not just of race and culture and access. Issues of recognition but also issues of redistribution as you provide access to instruction to students of Color. And UDL that comes more from an inclusive education inclusion, where participation is widened for students with diverse abilities.

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- Federico W.:** I'm going to stop there because I want to leave time. But they're different pedagogies that come from, for example, critical race theory or cultural responsive traditions—and another one's for inclusive education for students with disabilities—that have very little dialogue between them. I think we need to start putting them in constant dialogue and trying to fuse them together to be able to dismantle intersecting forms of exclusion. Both of them, I think in this case, culturally responsive pedagogies or cultural sustaining pedagogies and UDL, needs significant improvement, I think, for attending to issues with disability.
- Federico W.:** One of the things that I think is very important that none of them are addressed is to actually to recognize disability as a culture and as a social identity. Because students don't come only to our classrooms with racist identity, but there also comes with ability as their identity. Iconic example, I think, of this is the autism community. The autism community have developed different cultural patterns and identities which are evident in a myriad of autistic musician, bloggers, filmmakers, writers and musicians who are claiming autism as culture and identity.
- Federico W.:** And that needs to be not just autism from other identity disability cultures, needs to be a core part of our instruction and our pedagogy. Not just sustaining racial and cultural or linguistic identity, but also sustaining disability identity. Can you change the slide, Robin? Of course, we need to provide behavioral and emotional support. But we need to do it so based on culturally responsive behavior support principles and solidarity.
- Federico W.:** Most of you will be familiar with PBIS. The PBIS results with students of Colors are kind of mixed. But I think there is new work coming out. I give the example on this brief of Aydin Bal in the University of Wisconsin. He developed a culturally responsive positive behavior support. This culturally

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responsive PBIS, I think, addresses two shortcomings of regular or more traditional positive behavior interventions. These latter ones, the more traditional one, have ignored inequity based on misrecognition and misrepresentation, and have circumvented discussions about race and culture and power. Even those PBIS that aim to be culturally responsive impose a series of tools for practitioners and administrators.

**Federico W.:**

Second, I think these traditional PBIS, the school culture is dictated by the administration and professionals, leaving parents outside or in the margins of decision-making. Because we know most of our school professionals are white, middle-class, this can be problematic or tends to be problematic for students of Color, or some families of Color. I encourage you to look at the work of culturally responsive positive behavior interventions by the work of Aydin Bal. I've describes it on the brief, so when the brief come out you can also read the brief summary. But we need to start looking at incorporating students and parent voices on the culturally responsive positive behavior models. But I think that's enough.

**Federico W.:**

We also need to think about what, Annamma and Morrison calls “solidarity.” That is, and I'm going to quote from them, "If teachers recognize that multiple-marginalized students face structural inequities and interpersonal violence, historically and through the present day, then we should expect that multiple-marginalized students of Color will enter classrooms with a host of emotions. Administrators and teachers need to build solidarity with students and guide their emotions and responses to schools' practices and policies. Solidarity, in this case, means understanding students' disruptions or misbehaviors as gifts of persistence," according to Annamma and Morrison.

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- Federico W.:** That is, we need to support students to own their emotions, and concurrently use that passion to change the systems of oppression that experience. We need culturally positive behavior support plans. But it also needs to be built in the solidarity with students, rather than treating students as just misbehaving. Can you change the slide, Robin?
- Federico W.:** Of course, part of redistributing resources is also providing the health, counseling, and psychological services that can provide support for all students. Having an inclusive education agenda or dismantle the DNA of, what we call the general education classroom, doesn't mean students don't have support. We still need supports, and needs to be distributed equally across states, but also within cities and within schools. Importantly, and I think greatly absent in inclusive education, can you change this slide, Robin? We need to provide spaces and a structure that supports student collective organizing.
- Federico W.:** Often neglected aspect of developing inclusive schools, I mean, addresses the political representation of students and families of Colors in schools. When creating such opportunities for student organizing, school stakeholders need to be aware of power differentials among students too, as the students with disabilities and other minority students can also be left out from these student organizing efforts.
- Federico W.:** There is a very interesting I think, another Roundtable called *An Equity Toolkit for Inclusive Schools: Centering Youth Voice in School Change* in the Center, that I encourage you to see with Taucia Gonzalez, Dr. Gonzalez talking about incorporating youth voice. I'm going to put that on the chat too, the name, at least. Maybe either Robin or Diana can put the link to the Roundtable which talks about how to do a participatory action research project and incorporate the voices of youth of Color with disabilities in

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inclusive education efforts. Finally, I'm going to stop after this. Can you change this slide please, Robin?

**Federico W.:**

Inclusive education is never an end product, it never finishes. When a school tells me, "Oh, we are inclusive school," I look at it with a skeptical eye. Because it's an ongoing process. We're not an inclusive school, we're becoming inclusive, and we are in an ongoing, endless process of becoming inclusive. Thus, we need to provide ongoing learning opportunities with a focus on critical reflexivity, justice and inclusive education for principals, leadership, teachers, students and family, for them to come together and work in inquiry projects to examine how school is serving all students in their schools.

**Federico W.:**

The brief, after proposing different practice, also have some guiding questions that I'm not going to touch today, but I wanted to make you aware. With very specific examples of the kind of questions that you can engage with your fellow teachers, with your leadership, with your families, with your students, to look at these three dimensions of inclusive education, at the intersections of race and disability. And engage in an inquiry process through using these questions. Can you change the slide, Robin? I'm going to stop now. I did a half hour, so we can have a half hour for discussions and talk, so I can hear from you and we can debate this farther.

**Robin J.:**

Everyone, feel free to drop your questions in the chat bar, or if you are feeling particularly brave, we'd also love to hear your voice so you can actually enable you microphone and speak.

**Diana L.:**

Dr. Waitoller, in the chat bar, some people were talking about how can educators, and particularly special educators, get over some of their biases that they come to the table with? I talked a little bit in the chat bar about,

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just cultivating critical consciousness as the key to addressing those biases moving forward, and really thinking about the biases that you hold against students. Do you have anything to add to that?

**Federico W.:** Biases towards students in general? Towards students with disabilities? Towards students of Color?

**Diana L.:** Students of Color and students with disabilities. They talk, particularly, about special education teachers.

**Federico W.:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, we all hold, to some extent, these beliefs. This is the work that we all do. It's a work I do. I came to the U.S. when I was 21 years old. I came from Argentina. It took significant work even, back in Argentina where there is, for example, there's not a lot of people of Color. It's mostly a white European-descent population. To get rid of all of the biases and that's the transformation you do it yourself. You do it through recommended readings, through talking with critical peers in safe spaces where maybe your comments are not going to hurt other people but engage in ongoing work. And it's endless. We don't finish that work.

**Federico W.:** I'll continue doing that work, and I will urge most scholars and teachers who are actively engaged in this work, continues doing so as they go. So readings, critical friends. The Center has lot of great resources to engage in these kind of conversations. If you check at the resources tab of the website. There is always something to learn. There's always something to reflect and to emancipate ourself and almost, I would say, exercise ourselves of some of either racism or ableism that we bring to the table, too, every day.



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**Eulalia V.:** Is there a way that you can share your thoughts in terms of, what would be a basic book when you talk about...or maybe it's not a book, maybe it's some article or some other type of reading, to start your learning. What is the starting point?

**Federico W.:** Absolutely. In the terms of...are you Eulalia? I'm answering your-

**Eulalia V.:** Well, yes. Yes. Eulalia Valdez.

**Federico W.:** Eulalia. Are we talking about issues of race and students of Color, intersectionality, students with disabilities?

**Eulalia V.:** Honestly, we are going to be starting some book studies in terms of race, so that would be one. The other area is biases.

**Federico W.:** Biases. I think a great book that it's relatively new, and I'm going to put this forward, it's target more to a white audience, is *White Fragility*.

**Eulalia V.:** Okay.

**Federico W.:** It's a white audience book. It tackles very complex issues about race in very simple terms. I think it gives you a lot of tools to reflect and to think about our own biases or how we engage in conversations and in daily practice with people, and the beliefs that we hold. There is-

**Eulalia V.:** Yeah. But-

**Federico W.:** Go ahead.

**Eulalia V.:** Go ahead. Thank you.

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- Federico W.:** Another one that recommend...it's a little more academic, but I think it's very readable, is *Racism Without Racists* by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva.
- Eulalia V.:** So that's *Racism Without Racists*? Oh, I see it. Okay, perfect.
- Federico W.:** I'm going to put the book titles in the...am acting to someone privately, sorry. I'm very bad about-
- Diana L.:** I got it for you.
- Federico W.:** Okay.
- Diana L.:** I got it for you.
- Federico W.:** I shouldn't be asking. Someone to slap my hand, please.
- Diana L.:** We have a comment for you, when you're ready.
- Federico W.:** I'm ready.
- Diana L.:** It says, "Dr. Waitoller, please share your perspective. I work with learners on the spectrum and while some of my clients are placed in one class, their ability could run significantly below their peers. I tried to support teachers in meeting the learners where they are. But often teachers will try and place the learner where the rest of the class is in a modification. This means that they may not be building core and foundational skills. What do we do about this? Or am I being unrealistic?" That was from Nasia.
- Federico W.:** Well, I don't think you're being unrealistic. I think that, unfortunately, the realities are far from what we want it to be. But that doesn't mean that what we hope for is unrealistic. This, I think what you're saying...what was the name of the person, Diana?

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**Diana L.:**

Nasia.

**Federico W.:**

Nasia. What Nasia is referring to is some of the things that I spoke about, about the DNA of the general education classroom, which is very rigid. And people, like the students of Nasia, have very difficulties to be included because only those who demand very little modifications or accommodations can be included. One of the ways to go about that, and it's not a magic bullet but just an idea, is to engage in a series of either readings or conversations with your general education teacher, geared to understanding that what she has in her classroom it's benefiting some students and marginalizing others. The decisions I train teachers, general education and special education teachers.

**Federico W.:**

One of the things that I tell these future teachers, one of the first things that I want them to leave my class imprinted tattooed in their brain, is every practice decision that you're doing, the way that you design activity, learning activities, the way that you design your curriculum, the experiences that you provide to your students: while you design that, you're making decisions of who's going to succeed and who's going to fail—and who's going to be included, and who's going to be excluded. You need to try to widen that form of participation and the kinds of tools or supports you give students, so everybody can succeed together and can work together. They may be working in different goals, and they may be working with different levels of support, but they're all still working together.

**Federico W.:**

I mean, it's a very big question. We can gear to some resources by email afterwards, so we can put it on the chat. I know that the Center has many resources in this regard, too. But we need to begin to have conversation with general education teachers because that's where exclusion begins. I like actually to train better general education teachers and special ed

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teachers. Because I know if I can train them to design learning activities that are including from the get-go, there is less used for special education. It makes me very happy.

**Mildred B.:** I have a question. Can I jump in? Is that okay?

**Diana L.:** Yeah.

**Mildred B.:** Robin and Diana. Okay, good. It's really-

**Federico W.:** Hey, Mildred.

**Mildred B.:** Hey. I'm such a fan of yours. It's exciting to see so many people on this call. But I have a question related to the first question Diana brought up, the conversation about how to get started? What I've noticed by engaging in conversations about differences, whether it's disabilities, race, differences in general, is that teachers, even peace service teachers at the teacher education level, are very comfortable listing all the ways that the students are different. But when you ask folks to do what you did, when you talked about your Argentina experience, folks get really uncomfortable.

**Federico W.:** Mhm (affirmative)

**Mildred B.:** There's this ease by which we can say, "That kid's home, those people in his house they're divorced. The parents are divorced, that kid's Black, that kid has a disability," and there's an ease with that. How has this framework, or can a framework or their brief that's coming out, how can it help teachers feel comfortable thinking internally the way you did? The way you listed, "I have some unpacking to do, yeah, I'm Latino..." But there was some complicated things about being Latino and were you Latino, right? Because you said you were from Argentina, you became Latino when you came

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here, in some ways, right? So those types of things. Is that something we can look forward to in the brief?

**Federico W.:** Yeah, I think so. I think there's a set of questions. Particularly, I think in the recognition dimension, and how we recognize the other, right? That comes to the Hegelian tradition of the other, how we recognize the other. I think there's a set of questions that may talk a lot, or may need to be tweaked or changed to address those issues for teachers on reflecting, not just group, but to yourself on how you recognize the other. I mean, where are your implicit bias towards others?

**Federico W.:** What are the assumptions that you've come to the table, as you were saying, families. We know that a lot of professionals need to know some aspects of the families' race and socioeconomic status to make special ed decisions, unfortunately. To interrogate those issues. Are your practices and your policies or your dialogues and interactions in IEP meetings, for example, or with general education teacher or when you go into your classroom, really recognizing and valuing and sustaining who the other is?

**Mildred B.:** Thank you. That's exciting to look for, those practical guiding questions. I'm excited about that. Thank you.

**Federico W.:** Yeah. I mean, I would say, again, this is not prescriptive. There are several questions, but I think you got to tweak it and make it your own and use it in your own context, and with your own audience.

**Mildred B.:** I appreciate you saying that so much. When you said it's not prescriptive, I got really excited. Because it feels like sometimes folks are asking for the end-all solution that romanticize a book or a set of questions. It's not prescriptive. They're guiding questions. Thank you.

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**Sarah G.:**

I'm going to chime in. Hi, my name is Sarah. Thank you for this space in this conversation. My question is tied to the fourth suggestion you had, the structure in spaces. I guess tied to the fifth suggestion too, about ongoing learning. But as an instructional coach, a lot of times when I have conversations with teachers, we can sit down and we can collaborate and be creative together. But so often when I think about structures and spaces, if I'm not involved in those conversations the training wheels are really necessary in finding that idea that, we are collaborative by nature as people, right?

**Sarah G.:**

But then besides that, I guess, how can I ensure that those things go on without, to Mildred's point, without being prescriptive? Because that doesn't really work either. What are ways that I can keep ensuring those conversations and those practices go on, even when I'm not necessarily there to support my staff?

**Federico W.:**

I guess the simple answer, which is not simple, but it's, you've got to build capacity within your staff. If your staff are dependent of you to implement certain practices or having certain dialogues, that means they don't own it. That means, to me, that there have not made them their own. Therefore, the less likely they're going to practice it. I think one is to begin to build those capacities in the schools, to understand that this is not a one-time shot thing. This is an ongoing, cyclical inquiry process where we continue examining our practices and different forms of oppression and barriers that students may face in the classroom and in schools, and at that this doesn't end. Because when you fix something, something else breaks. You need to nurture that ongoing thirst for continuous inquiry in your staff. You'll do that with tools with different questions that probably go beyond this brief as well.

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**Sarah G.:** Yes, that's my underwriting question is more about the tools. Are there other tools to look at structure in space that are accessible for a teacher who is thirsty but doesn't have the knowledge?

**Federico W.:** The brief have a series of questions, I said before. I know the Center also, if you look at different tools for difficult conversations with teachers. I'm assuming when you talk of structures and spaces, Sarah, you are talking about meetings, ongoing meetings or? I mean, when I used it on the talk around the brief was mostly, I think, to promote student collective organizing. But I think you're talking about something different.

**Sarah G.:** Yes. I'm thinking more at the classroom level of, even within the middle school level, of four voices of students who aren't often heard—whether that be in group work within the classroom, or whether that be that they're not often seen or heard in courts or in student council or in those different spaces. How do we as staff help create spaces and structures that lift all voices, and provide a platform for everybody?

**Federico W.:** Yeah. Well, I mean, you need to create, let me say, the space, the time that that is not disposable too, right? Because sometimes we create those spaces and times for students to engage, in this case, in collective organizing. But when things get tight, when time is tight and resources are tight, that's probably the first thing that goes out the window. They need to be placed with the same importance that teachers have, and other important structures that the school provide. Because I think providing a students' voice and collective organizes and creating consciousness within students, it's a key aspect of developing inclusive education.

**John H.:** Dr. Waitoller, I'd like to jump in. My name is John Hagens. How do we push the boundaries on comfort? When we're talking about students with

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disabilities, and then we add the layer of Color and race, there's this idea that we all have to be comfortable all the time. I think when we pushed the boundaries on discomfort, we enter a learning space. How do we do that, especially from a systematic approach and leadership?

**Federico W.:** Yeah. Good question, John. I think, first, we need to talk to people and make sure they know that it's okay to be uncomfortable. Most people thinks that being uncomfortable is a bad thing and they need to be running away from it. The only way to face the issues that we're discussing is being uncomfortable. The only way to examine ourself with a critical reflexivity is to be uncomfortable. From a leadership perspective, I think...are you a principal, John? Or you're a leader or just a teacher?

**Diana L.:** You're on mute, John.

**John H.:** I'm a building principal.

**Federico W.:** Great. I mean, concrete example would be to provide ongoing biweekly meetings where teachers can safely work, maybe in small groups, these issues. With also, not just keep it on the abstract because I know we know teachers like practice, and they like to be funded in practice. How these assumptions and their beliefs and these uncomfortable conversations, have interacted back and forth. Because they do. Our beliefs of field have a tremendous interactive back to back.

**Federico W.:** I think example is if you think disability is a deficit, you're going to try to remediate it. If you think that disability is a form of diversity, you will try to transform the general education classroom so that diversity is sustained and acknowledging the classroom, right? How we think about students has a tremendous application for practice.

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**John H.:** Okay. Thank you.

**Federico W.:** You're welcome. Thank you for your question.

**Robin J.:** I've been, for the last few seconds, digesting what you just said, Dr. Waitoller. I think it's super important that we, in the midst of all this, begin to reframe exactly the way you just said when you said it, to look at students with disabilities as part of diversity rather than as a deficit. I think that's super important. It seems like it should be a no-brainer, but I think that a lot of times we forget about that because we're so used to living in a society where we feel like if you don't adhere to this idea of "more and more," whatever that means, that then the next logical step is to fix people and things. I just think it's super important, what you just said.

**Federico W.:** Yeah. I mean, there's a little danger. I'm going to push, actually myself, on this. I'm going to take back a little bit of what I say, not completely but mostly asking a question or actually inquiring what I said. That disability is a form of culture diversity identity, I completely not just agree, but I see disability in that form. But there's a thorn on this. For example, a Black student that's been identified by majority white school as a misbehaving student, or a student with a behavioral disorder, should we try to sustain that identity?

**Federico W.:** The issues are complex. So, yes. I don't want to jump on the wagon on this like a liberal inclusionist wagon of, "Oh, well, diversity all the same." There are some problems on how we create that diversity as well. We need to be cognizant of that, and not just take it for granted that disability is a form of diversity. But also try to inquire in the forms that people that have been identified as disabled, in the tools and purposes of identifying certain people as disabled, particularly, students of Color.

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**Diana L.:** We have that question in the chat, when you have time?

**Federico W.:** Yeah.

**Diana L.:** Sorry, Robin. Do you have something, Robin?

**Robin J.:** No, I was just going to thank Dr. Waitoller for that important distinction he just made.

**Diana L.:** Nathaniel Turner has a question in the chat. He says, "Do you believe parents have a role in their children's learning progress and development? If you do, what tools, techniques and strategies do you suggest or apply currently, so that parents, especially those who lack wealth and privilege, might improve their children's academic outcomes and future civic and implement preparedness?"

**Federico W.:** Yeah. Parents, absolutely. I mean, I'm a parent. Absolutely, would have a huge role to play on that. Different roles at different developmental stages, definitely, but definitely different role. I think the most important thing that I have learned in the last 10 year for parents is to collectively organize. Most of my resources in Chicago, and I have work with many parents of students with disabilities that worked in different organizations, and I have collaborated with them in research in inquiry projects. But not just doing research, but actually going in and talking about CPS, board meetings, and talking to legislator with parents and help them to do so. I think the best thing parents can do to help their students is to get together with other parents.

**Federico W.:** Because it's very, very, very difficult to fight alone these things. Almost, it's like David and Goliath kind of thing. It's very unlikely to do changes with just one person. But when you get with several parents, and you just begin

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## An Intersectional Approach to Building Inclusive Schools *EquiLearn Virtual Roundtable*

Dr. Federico Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

organize and begin to support each other and begin to take action in the schools or in the district level, I think you have a more powerful resource. I think parents are your best resource.

**Diana L.:** We're going to start wrapping it up now, Dr. Waitoller.

**Federico W.:** Can I do a little quick advertisement of my new book?

**Diana L.:** Of course.

**Federico W.:** Thank you.

**Robin J.:** You absolutely can.

**Federico W.:** Oh, fantastic. My new book is actually coming tomorrow. June 12th, it's called *Excluded by Choice...it's right there...Urban Students with Disabilities in the Location Marketplace*. I tried my best to, and I think I did a decent job, on writing it for a general audience. I hope you consider it, acquire it in some form of shape. It talks about these 24 parents of students of Color and with disabilities who are engaging in the school choice market, and experiences they have.

**Federico W.:** But I think it has very powerful narratives. It situates their choices within the broader history of how the geographies of the cities have developed over time and their experiences that then they have in charter schools. The last chapter has a lot of some of the talk that I have discussed today, that it is on the brief. It talks about how to implement an intersectional inclusive education.

**Diana L.:** Nasia wants to know, is it available on Kindle?

**Federico W.:** It is. Hard copy, soft copy and digital copy. I think that's the only copies.

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**Diana L.:** We want to thank each of you for participating in today's *EquiLearn Virtual Roundtable: An Intersectional Approach to Building Inclusive Schools*. We want to also provide a special thanks to Dr. Waitoller for taking the time to be with us today and to share his expertise and insight. We'd like to highlight a few additional resources from the MAP Center Equity Resource Library from Dr. Waitoller. The first is another Roundtable, *Inequities Faced by Students with Disabilities and Charter Schools*.

**Diana L.:** In this *Virtual Roundtable*, Dr. Waitoller facilitates a conversation with participants about students receiving special education services in charter schools, focusing on the experience of Black and Latinx students. I'm going to drop all these in the chat right when I'm done. The second resource is a podcast entitled, *Advocating for Black and Latinx Students with Disabilities: A Conversation with Charter School Teachers*. In this podcast, Dr. Waitoller interviews two special education teachers about their experiences and perspectives with being in special education teachers in charter schools, and the proceeding teacher strike that led to shifts in policy.

**Diana L.:** Third, we have a brief, *Can Charter Schools Erase Racial Inequities Evidenced in Access to General Education Classrooms?* In this brief, Dr. Waitoller and Maggin (2018) a study in the *Special Education Journal, Remedial and Special Education*. The purpose of this research was to examine whether charter schools mitigate racial inequities evidenced in access to general education classrooms and neighborhood schools, or if they reproduce such inequities.

**Diana L.:** Lastly, we want to encourage you to visit our website. I'm going to post the link in the chat, for tools or resources in our Equity Resource Library such as our bi-monthly newsletter, Equity Dispatch and Equity Digest publications, our Equity Spotlight Podcast Series, and our equity tools

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which Kathleen posted in the chat. You can also access all materials on our website, [greatlakesequity.org](http://greatlakesequity.org), as well as stay abreast of upcoming events by visiting our calendar of events. I'm going to post all these links in the chat.

**Robin J.:** I also want to quickly mention that whenever we publish new things to our website, we send out an email blast. If you feel so inclined to go to our website and subscribe to our publications, you will receive those. But I want to specifically say that the brief that Dr. Waitoller was addressing during this *Virtual Roundtable* will be published sometime between tomorrow and Monday, and that all of you who were part of the conversation today will get the notification when that brief comes out.

**Federico W.:** Thank you everybody for joining us.

**Diana L.:** You can follow us on social media, on Facebook at Great Lakes Equity Center or following us on Twitter @GreatLakesEAC.

**Robin J.:** Finally, Diana posted, a couple of times, the post-session questionnaire in the chat. If you all would take some time to fill that out for us, we really do look at your feedback and incorporate that feedback in our planning processes. We just really appreciate the feedback that you all give us. Thank you so much for joining us today.

[End of Audio]