

Toward Anti-Oppressive Practices for Early Career Teachers

Virtual Coffeehouse Series

Dr. Sarah Salem, Todd Hawks, Nicole Andrews &
Jack Hesser

TRANSCRIPTION

[Intro Music]

- Dr. Tiffany Kyser:** Good afternoon or good early morning depending on the time zones, and welcome to the Region III, Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, Virtual Coffeehouse Series. I am thrilled to welcome participants across our 13-state region and beyond. So, we have representation from fourteen states, in addition to the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and Canada. We have representation from Ontario, Canada. So, I just want to welcome you all today.
- Dr. Tiffany Kyser:** Today's Virtual Coffeehouse is entitled: *Fortifying Ourselves in the Work: Toward Anti-Oppressive Practices for Early Career Teachers—Early Career Classroom Teachers*. Please note, this experience is intended to be a space to virtually land, as well as continue to meet the needs of our students and families in response to continued sociopolitical tensions within public education, as well as the COVID-19 global pandemic. As we work to pursue our consistent stance on realizing educational equity together, we want to use this as an opportunity to share in this virtual space what is going well, and also what are our boundaries? What are—excuse me, our barriers in terms of accomplishing our goals? To be clear, the Region III Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center's Virtual Coffeehouse Series is intended to center the perspectives of each of you, of participants. We encourage all of us to come together in this virtual space to share our experiences and use dialogue and conversation just as you would in your local coffee house. So again, welcome.
- Dr. Tiffany Kyser:** Session two of which this is of a two-part Virtual Coffee House Series, is focused on fortifying ourselves as we engage in equity-oriented practices by sharing our stories, our approaches and lessons learned. This is not a didactic instruction-based experience. Rather, this virtual experience aims to acknowledge the need for us to come together in a virtual community to discuss challenges, discover and be encouraged by what we've learned collectively today, as well as work to meet the demands of teaching and learning in the wake of COVID-19, as well as the ongoing demands in our ever-nuanced landscape of politics and society. This is an opportunity for us to learn and dialogue together, to fellowship and to provide collegial support. Please note that our conversation today will emphasize and center those that have been historically and contemporarily marginalized,

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under-served, and disenfranchised, as is our charge in supporting public Pre-K-12, LEAs, SEAs and other responsible governmental entities to redress the student's civil rights violations in the areas of race, sex, national origin, and religion. Please be ready to take notes as we engage in conversation and coffee together.

- Dr. Tiffany Kyser:** My name is Dr. Tiffany Kyser and I have the great fortune of serving as the Associate Director of Engagement and Partnerships with the MAP Center. I also have the privilege of serving as one of your hosts for today and I'm joined by Ryan Sundeen, Doctoral Research Assistant here at the MAP Center. And I'll give Ryan an opportunity to say hello.
- Ryan Sundeen:** Good afternoon, everybody. It's great to be here and to share this virtual space with you and I'm looking forward to hearing from our conversational starters and—and engaging in this discussion with you all.
- Dr. Tiffany Kyser:** Thanks, Ryan. I'm also thrilled to sort of introduce you to our conversation starters for today as well. We're joined by four really experienced, I think, practitioners who have a lot of variety in their expertise and their background. So first, I want to introduce you to Todd Hawks. Todd serves as the Assistant Director of Special Services with the Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township located in Indianapolis, Indiana. I'll give Todd an opportunity to say hello
- Todd Hawks:** Hey, everyone. Thanks for being here. I'm excited to share with you today.
- Dr. Tiffany Kyser:** Thanks, Todd. Also joined as a conversation starter, Sarah Salem, who's a Director of Continuous Improvement and Professional Learning at Lincoln Public Schools in Lincoln, Nebraska. Sarah, I give you an opportunity to say hello.
- Dr. Sarah Salem:** Hi everybody, excited to be here and maybe I should not wear hot pink when that picture is also up there. Apparently, I like pink!
[laughter]
- Dr. Tiffany Kyser:** Welcome, Sarah. Also joining us is Nicole Andrews as a Program Manager for the Academy of Whole Learning in Minnetonka, Minnesota. Nicole.
- Nicole Andrews:** Hi, everyone. It is a pleasure to be here today with you all.
- Dr. Tiffany Kyser:** Thank you, Nicole. And then finally rounding out our conversation starters is Jack Hesser, a middle school science teacher within Indianapolis

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Public Schools in Indianapolis, Indiana, who was also named IPS teacher of the year in 2021. Jack.

Jack Hesser: Hello, beautiful people, excited to be here and thank you so much.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Thank you, Jack. Thank you to all of our conversation starters for being here. Before we jump into some questions of the conversation starters, just a couple of housekeeping items. One of our goals at the MAP Center is to engage participants in well-defined, content rich technical assistance such that knowledge and expertise are shared in a way that results in transformative change, as well as personal reflection and growth. To this end, we aim to make this unique learning available on our website, via recording and transcription. Additionally, by sharing photos of today's conversation on our social media platforms. We just wanted to encourage participants to consider this disclaimer as they share and engage today. So, I'll turn it over to Ryan who's going to give us some guidance around netiquette. So how are we going to engage in terms of our norms. Ryan?

Ryan Sundeen: Alright, thank you, Dr. Kyser. So just briefly a note about access and interaction during this Virtual Coffee House. The virtual coffee house is intended to be interactive. Participants are asked to interact in real time via our teleconferencing format. Also, to reduce noise, we ask that all participants mute their microphones when not speaking. Further, we will post additional resources to the chat bar. And—and lastly, the video camera function has been turned on. Thus, if you have a webcam and you would like to join, please feel free to do so by clicking the camera icon at the lower right of your screen. Other modalities of access will be available as—as the session is posted to our website two to three weeks after our session today. Again, and lastly, please don't forget to mute your microphone when not speaking. Thank you.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Thank you. Ryan. Also, closed captioning for those that prefer that is enabled as well. So, feel free to leverage that also. So, I'm going to kick us off with the first question. This question is going to be for Sarah. Sarah, what are two to three approaches that district leadership can take to support anti-oppressive practices in the classroom, particularly in this sociopolitical moment? If you would not mind kicking us off today.

Dr. Sarah Salem: Sure, I was really thrilled to hear that this session was about action and what can we actually put into place as a concrete and tangible action step. I

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think the first thing, especially in my role as Director of Continuous Improvement and Professional Learning, is humility from our district office to rethink professional learning. And I think often we get in the mode of, as a professional developer or a district leader, I need to teach my staff the strategies that they need to use. And so, while we're not there yet, we're trying to think about revising our professional learning so that rather than coming and sitting at a session to hear what special education students need, the session is: get out your roster, highlight the three students with an IEP and then this session is designed for you to go through and how is your lesson going to reflect the needs of those students? We certainly have experts there. We have district office people there and willing to engage in a conversation and build their knowledge, but I do think taking ourselves out of the expert [role] has been something that's been hard for some of our building leaders and our district leaders.

Dr. Sarah Salem: The other thing I would say related but—but somewhat separate point, is that we have to— to talk to teachers about the difference between their intent and their impact. And I know many of you were doing that same thing but again, decentering us as the expert and asking teachers which classroom practices that you currently use may be impacting students differently than your intent. And so, an example that we use is when we ask students, "Who can tell me...", well, the "who" in that sentence is singular and that is unintentionally communicating to some students that I don't believe all of you know the answer. And so, when we talk about oppressive practices, that may not be the intent, but the more students continue to hear that language as they go through their courses during a day, we're asking teachers to help create their own list of practices that may be unintentionally hindering the participation in their classroom. And teachers are so smart. So, they come up with things like, when I ask, "raise your hand if you know...", why don't I just have all students write the answer and then share with a partner? And so having teachers be the ones to develop that list of practices in their classroom is much more impactful than us saying, here's all the things that you need to do. So those are a few starters.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Yeah, that's—that's really great. I'm just going to mirror back and then open it up to you, the entire virtual space. So, if anybody is listening to Sarah and wants to follow up or ask more detailed questions, we can do that before we move to Todd. So, what I'm hearing is if you're at the district level and you're either watching [or perceiving] this recording or if you're in this virtual space

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now, really taking the time to re-frame and rethink what is professional learning, is how Sarah opened up. This idea of what is our role if I'm at the district level when it comes to professional learning and our—maybe—perhaps our role should be not centering ourselves as having all the expertise and assuming that educators, classroom educators specifically don't. But really decentering ourselves at the district level and facilitating experiences that really center students and their experiences. So, I appreciated that. This idea of intent versus impact is a powerful one Sarah--of really examining what are the conditions that students are experiencing instruction, they're experiencing teaching and learning in the classroom, not what I intended for them to experience. But authentically, what is the impact or what do I need to do about that if that impact is not positive? And that—that barometer I inferred was students will tell you or teachers will tell you about the impact, it's not up to the district if it's your supporting teachers, or it's not up to the teachers if you're supporting students. And then the final thing that I heard, or I infer from that, is moving from this deficit view to an asset view of classroom teachers. The classroom teachers have the skill sets even at the early career stage, to do what they need to do they just may need support, or they may need a framework, or they may need facilitated learning. So, I just wanted to mirror back some of those highlights, those—those things that really stuck out for me, Sarah. Did I miss anything, Sarah, before I open it up?

Dr. Sarah Salem: Good paraphrase. You know, I—I agree with you that the fastest way to shut down, at least our teacher group, is to say, "here's what you're not doing." And rather say, "Well, what do you—what do you think?" The impact of these strategies are when students aren't participating in class, what are some of the things that we might unintentionally be setting up that—that create that [barrier] rather than looking to the student to solve that.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Yeah, Thank you, Sarah. So, I'll open it up to the room if there are any questions. I don't know if Faith or Tara or Marcus or Sarah, Liz, or Latasha, if you have any questions, feel free to unmute your mics and share out if you have anything that you really want to build on, that Sarah's saying, anything you want, feel free. [Small Pause] Give you some think time here. I'm scanning the virtual room, so I'm seeing some thinking and then also some cameras are enabled. So, I want to honor people who maybe thinking, but I may not be able to perceive them.

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Dr. Tiffany Kyser: All right, Todd. We're going to move to your question. And it's a very similar question, but it's still focused at the district level but really zooming in on this idea of what can we do as classroom teachers— sorry, excuse me, what can we do as district educators to support anti-oppressive practices in the classrooms. So, two to three approaches beyond just professional learning, but what can you do additionally at the district leadership level?

Todd Hawks: Sure. Yeah. Thank you. I think for me in my work in Wayne Township, what has been super amazing is our support of our superintendent and his team in allowing a space for conversation. Meaning that we have book studies, we talk about race, we talk about difference, and it's become normalized. And so, I can say that, so my first point is normalizing conversation about difference and calling out when oppression happens. So, for instance, I am an Assistant Director of Special Services, so I oversee Special Ed, 504s, Students Services in our district for elementary. I was in a case conference yesterday and someone made a comment, which I felt, just to be very clear, was racist. And so, I had to redirect in that conversation and say, can you clarify what you meant? Because I think the intention was different than the impact. And so, giving this space and creating a culture to say, "This is not okay, but I'm going to give you a chance to say what you mean." Because we have a whole life of experience ahead of us, which we have to recognize. So that's important. Giving space for conversation, addressing the elephant in the room, calling things out for what they are and being okay with that. I think the second thing for me is like, learning history. In my work in education, I had been in a charter school, public school teaching previously, I have been in IPS [Indianapolis Public Schools], one of our largest districts now I'm in Wayne Township. You know, I think for me, my biggest aha moment was learning the history of people of Color and kind of like the systemic oppression that has occurred. So, like digging into things that may feel uncomfortable to you but that creates new learning. It disrupts your thinking in a good way. So be willing to disrupt your—your—your own thinking. And I think decentering yourself.

Todd Hawks: So, I—I will own this publicly and it's taken me a while to get here, I am a white, middle-class man, but I am also gay. And so, for me, you know, my — the ways I'm oppressed are not visual, right? You can see me, think one kind of way, but I have a different experience, and I get that visual is different from identity, potentially. But just understanding that we cannot separate people's, like, different parts of identities, right? So. I may be a

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person of Color, I may be gay, I may be trans and we have to take all of that together. We cannot just look at a person and say, you are Black, you are trans, you are gay but there is this intersectionality, right, of where that all meets, and we have to consider all of that. So that's super important to me and why I say that is on a daily basis, I have to take myself out of a situation, de-center myself and say that whatever I feel, right, as a white middle-class man, take that x100 and that's what people who are different from me may have been experiencing their whole lives. So, I have to take myself out of the equation although I'm also gay, that's a part of how I'm oppressed but we have to take account—into account all parts of identity. And that's super important if we're only taking into account race, gender, sexual orientation, we're not looking at the whole person. So, I talk with staff very candidly about that.

Todd Hawks:

I oversee 12 schools in our district, and I've come to a place in my life, I'm in my 40s now, where I own who I am and this is the experience I bring, and that's what I got to share. So, creating that space for that, so learning history, decentering yourself, and then giving a space for conversation.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser:

I appreciate that, Todd. Some highlights for me that I wanted to mirror back that I heard is that if you are at the district level, either watching this recording or in the virtual space currently, and you're in a district position and you're thinking about contributing to creating conditions for anti-oppressive practices for early classroom—early educators, but specifically teachers, early classroom teachers in their career, that really focusing on the self is what you really hit hard as a nice complement tied to Sarah's comments that were much more around the approach to systemic work of professional learning and development. You're hitting a different angle in terms of the self and really thinking about repositioning at the highest levels of leadership in your organization. Calling in leadership to what you call it normalize or to make a tradition of your culture is difference is not bad, right? Accepting difference. All the ways we show up and this human experience as Dr. Seena Skelton, a director of our center always says, we show up in all these beautiful differences and how we create conditions is started by the leaders at the highest levels in our organization to explicitly and unapologetically communicate often how difference is valuable, how difference is an asset in our school community. I thought that was really powerful.

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Dr. Tiffany Kyser: This idea of understanding history. So, as you're approaching the work of supporting, if you're again, in a district leadership role or a coaching role of early classroom teachers, do you understand and recognize the lived experiences and histories of those that you are working with, that you're supporting? And are you examining whether or not you are contributing to whether or not oppressive practices are occurring, or you are contributing to anti-oppressive practices that are occurring? The next thing that I heard was de-centering oneself and this got really sophisticated, Todd, where you were talking about identity and that we all may hold—we all hold multiple identities, but some of those identities, maybe what we classify at the MAP Center as non-dominant identities, so identities that had been historically, been minoritized or marginalized, or identities that bring us closest to experiences of oppression. We also may hold simultaneously dominant identities, so identities that tend to be centered, that tend to be considered "the norm," the normalized identities. And Todd where you were talking about in the identities you hold, is this tension between multiple identities and intersectionality. Although we all may have multiple identities and some of those multi—multiple identities may be non-dominant, intersectionality is where our early career teachers and our staff and our students broadly, possess multiple non-dominant identities. So, they're experiencing multiple and intersecting experiences of oppression. And so, what does that mean in terms of ourselves? What does that mean in terms of the classrooms and the conditions in the classrooms we're creating to support anti-oppressive practices.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: So concretely, as Todd disclosed some of his identities. I also too was a middle school teacher at a point in my career, and also supported in coaching other educators. I too identify as LGBTQ similar to Todd, but unlike Todd, I identify as a cis woman and unlike Todd, I identify as a person of Color. So even though Todd and I both are—have worked in a district level, I formally taught currently, we both have supported early career teachers, we both identify as LGBTQ, I have also, other multiple intersecting identities in addition to dominant identities like being temporarily abled, like English being my first language, like having height privilege, et cetera. So, I think this idea of starting with the self-re-examining myself, if you're in the role of supporting teachers is a really powerful one. So, Todd, did I miss anything did I mirror okay?

Todd Hawks: Oh, Dr. Kyser, thank you and miss working with you. You got it.

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Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Thank you. I'll open it up to either the panelists or anyone in the space. Give you some think time. Any pushback, any loving critique, anything you want to build on. Give you some think time here.

Robin Jackson: Hello. My name is—Hi Tiffany. My name is Robin, and I am a doctoral research assistant here at the MAP Center as well. And excuse me, I'm actually— I'm listening, but I'm—I'm also working. So, Tiffany, did you touch on Todd's point about the importance of intersectionality?

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: I—I think I did, but feel free to build.

Robin Jackson: No, I was just—just wondering because that's an important point, right? It went hand in hand with you, Todd talking about some of your identities not being as visible [perceivable] as other folks and how folks with multiple marginalized identities are and, they're Black and gay and trans and all these other things. But what I really wanted to talk about was something you said at the very beginning, it is one of my favorite tactics in terms of group conversations, when someone says something problematic, when we ask them, "Could you please clarify when you met?" I think that, uh, folks, specifically, folks with dominant identities, so white, male, Protestant, other dominant identities like in this country, are often thrown by that question because of their positionality, oftentimes what they say is left at the table and then we move on from it rather than, you know, talk about what it is we just heard, or you know, interrogate what we just heard. So, I love that because it gives folks an opportunity to reflect without even realizing they're reflecting, or to be uncomfortable because now they have to clarify their bigotry in a lot of ways. So, I appreciate what you said in that moment.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Thanks, Robin.

Todd Hawks: Thank you.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: I'm going to hold some more space for the virtual room. Any questions, any points of clarity, any request for any more concrete examples? Again, opening up to you, we have new—some new folks that have joined. So, Fred certainly don't want to put you on the spot or Penny or anyone else, Rebecca, but feel free to unmute your mic or unmute your cameras. Feel free to share out if you have any questions or any remarks to build or contribute to the conversation.

Penny: Good afternoon, everybody. I'm going to keep my camera off. I hope that doesn't bother you. I am just wanting to add into the conversation. First of

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all, thank you for this space. It is just rejuvenating to be in a space with sort of like-minded people who are talking about very important things that impact— impact us all on a daily basis. So, I'm just grateful to kinda be in the room and listening. The other thing I want to say, it's just—I'm going to pretend like no one else is here but Todd and I because I want to really just talk to his heart. He and I have been friends for a number of years and have worked—it's, but in charter world together and then IPS together and now both assistant directors in Wayne township. I have personally watched his journey and just the grappling identity and how comfortable will I be to share who I am? Will people accept me? Can I speak up for marginalized folks? Can I talk about something beyond race when everyone else in the room is just focused on race? I just want to be very transparent about that and to kind of watch his evolution into I think the co-conspirator, but also man, in his own identity that he is if both inspiring and encouraging. And I just want to say kudos to him to being vulnerable, you know, and continuing to be that for—for so long. And then getting to the point where he is and actually empowering other people to also embrace who they are and be honest about their journeys. Not afraid to kind of step in it sometimes, but also, you know—you know, call things out as they come up, you know be reflective as needed, and just continue to contribute to this—to this whole idea of just us getting better as human beings, right? Like if beyond just like the day-to-day when you work with someone, it becomes like a piece of who you are in life, like that— that relationship, that connection. So, Todd Hawks, hats off to you. I'm proud of you. I'm proud of what you're contributing to this conversation here. I'm honored that you're my colleague and my friend. Nice to see you again, Tiffany and Seena, also.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Thank you so much, Penny. I'm going to reflect that back to the group in a concrete action step and appreciate Penny's share. Coming from someone who's been in a journey and proximity with a colleague over time and I think that's a really powerful insight and Penny use the term co-conspirator. How are we working intentionally together to disrupt patterns of practice in the classroom? But in this case, as district, Penny identified both she and Todd as in district roles, in leadership roles directly supporting educators who are directly supporting students who historically have not been served well. So this idea of identity, but also being co-conspirators, that the more of— my takeaway is, Penny, is the more that we work together collaboratively towards this common goal of pushing our school community to be anti-oppressive by first starting with

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ourselves, becoming comfortable and knowledgeable about who we are, loving ourselves and becoming comfortable, modeling that to our early career educators is one concrete way to create conditions that support early career educators showing up with who they are in all their identities sooner in the classroom. As Todd disclosed, it took him well into his career and I'm going to infer to feel comfortable, but also safe enough to be fully who he is to show up and be the best he can be for other early career educators. So, they can be the best they can be for students—students and families. So, I just appreciate that, and I turn it over to Ryan who's going to pull in, zoom in, now to the classroom level and get some questions around concrete practices in the classroom. Ryan.

Ryan Sundeen: Alright. Thank you, Dr. Kyser. And I'm just going to kind of let—let all that's been said sort of sink in. I don't want to rush past that. I think there were a lot of really, really wonderful shares, so I thank you. Thank you all who shared so far. But to—to continue the conversation, we want to move over to Nicole. And Nicole, based on your expertise, what would you say are two to three anti-oppressive practices every early educator—early career educator, should use or leverage in the classroom? [Short Pause]

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: And Ryan, I think Nicole may have had tech issues and popped off, so she might my pop back on so we can—we can actually kick that off to Jack first and then hopefully Nicole will join us back. I think she just had some tech issues there.

Ryan Sundeen: Gotcha. Yeah, I didn't see her—her—okay. Yeah. So, we'll—we'll jump over to Jack. Same question to you: What are two to three anti-oppressive practices every early career educator should use or leverage in the classroom?

Jack Hesser: So I know that's something everyone—everyone on this call is aware of, so I don't want to belabor the point here, but we know how important relationships are with our students and building them, but I think something that early career educators especially sometimes miss, is that beginning of the year when people start doing these, but these relation buildings, I think they miss the fact that there's a huge power imbalance right? On the first or second day of school when you're doing those, “get to know you” activities, there's this huge power imbalance between you as the adult at the front of the room going through and like leading these activities and what students may or may not feel comfortable in sharing and bringing their whole selves, right?

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Jack Hesser:

Jaime in the chat, I think was talking about intersectionality and you might not even see or be aware of some of the identities that your students are bringing and on those first, second, third day of school, being a— cognizant of what role you play and the perceived power that you have in that space. And I say that because I think when we— when educators think about building relationships, a lot of thought is given to what the first few weeks of the school year look [sound,feel] like and not into what it looks like, pass that point, right? What is the maintenance of those relationships look like? What does it look [sound, feel] like to continue to build relationships? What does it look [sound, feel]like to continue to create space in your room and outside your room, but right, continue to create a space or curate a space where individuals feel comfortable bringing their full selves to your room, where they feel comfortable exploring their identities in your room and, and also in turn, you know, being able to share it with other students and being able to share it with other adult enough that adult isn't yet, right? But like feeling empowered and confident to do that.

Jack Hesser:

And by kind of an extension of building relationships that I would focus on specifically for early career educators is relationships with families. I see a lot in teachers in their first or second year, they view their relationship with families that like, at best, "oh I'm going to communicate this information to the family." Instead of viewing it as a genuine partnership and like what is this family's experience, which it by extension is like, is this child's experience and what are the strengths that they bring and the expertise that they bring on their kid? And I think that that like and leveraging that can be super powerful. And I'll use the example of literally last week, there is a student who I've struggled with a little bit this year to stay motivated and the student was, you know, out because we're in a pandemic. I don't know if you all know that. The student was out for a bit and so I was—I called the family to check, to see, "Hey, how is the student feeling like are they feeling better?" And I wasn't calling about work at all. I just wanted to know like, "Hey, is this good feeling? Okay?" And the family ended up texting and reaching back out to me at the end of the call to be like, thanks for checking on him. Like, I like, that makes me feel better knowing that you actually— like that you care. And unfortunately, that was "wow, that was really great." It was also reflected in that prior to that, most of my communication with that family had been like, "so-so is not getting this in." So it was—felt good but also with like kinda missed— oh, sorry. I'm at school, that was an announcement. Like it felt good, but it also felt like very like, "Okay,

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wow, that family's perception of this relationship up until this point was that I was only checking in about things like grades" and so I obviously still am improving what that looks [sounds, feels] like with, you know, you have 140 families that you're communicating with.

Jack Hesser:

And so, I think that recognizing that the partnering with the family is not a one-way communication of, "oh this is an update your child". It's like a genuine interest. Something that I, is like, I'm very, I know it's very [inaudible] but like very concrete action that I enjoy doing is when I do my family letter at the beginning of year, I ask families, what is—I teach middle school science, what is an experience you remember from middle school science? And then I leverage that as I start to reach out to families of talking through and for some families that experience is really funny and might involve, "you know, I almost accidentally set something on fire." And for other families that might be like, "I'm gonna be honest, science was not my thing", right? But—but either way it opens the door for a conversation beyond just, you know, "what's the best time to contact you", like XYZ, which I still have on there but I—I think that asking those questions also sort of opens it up and allows you to leverage, I don't know, different, different points of connection, right? And like that, having that human connection I think is super important. I think if you don't have that like real authentic human connection with students that they're not going to feel comfortable taking risks, taking chances genuinely like engaging and learning. I don't think that happens if kids don't like, have a relationship with adults in their school building, it just doesn't.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser:

Thank you, Jack. If—I'm going to mirror back and then again, follow the same format. Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead. We have someone who wants to make a comment? Okay. I will mirror back and then open it up again to the virtual space.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser:

So, the first thing I heard, which is really interesting in this context, Jack and you clarify that we've all sort of perceived this sort of wisdom that's handed down, which is relationship, relationship, relationship, build relationships. But I thought you did an interesting deconstruction and re-framing of what that authentically means. So underneath build relationships, I heard, Jack, that ultimately starting with understanding who has benefited from the ways in which educators, classroom educators typically define relationships with students and families and who has not. And underneath that you talk about power. That relationships are

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inherently connected to this idea of power and certainly in the classroom, classroom educators have the power. And so how are we tending to power? Well, some of the ways we can tend to that, you talked about Jack, is redistributing that power to students and families for them to self-determine, to be able to actualize and self-determine what they want in the classroom, to be able to share their lived experiences, in this case, of being in a middle school science classroom. Of—to be able to build a relationship beyond technical communication of this person is missing homework, this person didn't come to class, et cetera. And building an authentic relationship with the whole student and the whole family and I think that that's really powerful and requires some redistributing of power that we as classroom educators, although we're—we're charged to do a job, should not dictate the dynamics of a relationship.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Ultimately if that relationship is to serve a child or children. I thought that was really powerful. This idea of communicating with and not to or on people. We communicate with it as a reciprocal exchange. It is not one way, and it is not a communication that we ourselves control and determine. And I thought that that was really powerful of your share, if we should communicate with and not on or to. And then finally, this idea of it's a two prong: one, maintenance, you talk about relationships. Building relationships should not be couched within beginning of the school activities or back from—to second semester or the next quarter. That ongoing maintenance of relationships, of understanding how our students, who should be evolving and their identities and should be exploring who they are, should be free to do that within the classroom and certainly early career educators, the sooner they're able to negotiate what that means for them in a classroom, the better. And the second part of that is, ultimately that students and families who they are, it should not be separate from what you're doing in the classroom and teaching and learning. It should be centered.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: And so, it can—what I inferred from you Jack, you didn't overtly say this, is that if you are understanding and having ongoing maintenance of authentic multidimensional facets of relationship building in your classroom, you ultimately are developing a level of understanding and clarity, not only about the lived experiences of your students and families, but also the funds of knowledge that they themselves bring. And so, it becomes this really beautiful way to engage and teaching and learning where also the teacher is learning. That it's not this one way, again, back to power in the

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relationship, it's not a one-way direction, but it comes this beautiful reciprocation of teaching and learning. So, I'll pause, Jack and see if I mirrored okay or if there's anything you want to clarify before I open it up.

Jack Hesser: I think you mirrored it beautifully. I want to add something that I didn't say—

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Please. Please.

Jack Hesser: And I think—and I know this may seem a little off topic, but like, I actually also—I identify and associate a lot of relationship building with teacher mental health in the sense of I— I feel it right now. I have—I have seven classes and there's one class that I don't have the strongest relationship with those students and the toll it takes on me when I'm teaching and like something doesn't go well, right, or like I'm trying to manage the classroom behavior that happens, feels different than in the classes where I have relationships, even if it's the same behaviors, right? Even if it's on the surface level to an observer, right? Like the exact same things are happening in both spaces, the toll it takes on me feels so different and I leave this space feeling differently based on whether or not I have those relationships with students. And I mean, of course, in hearing that like it makes sense, right? The same way that if you were with a group of your friends or your closest friends and a group of maybe people who are not as close with, right, those would feel different even at the same experiences happen. So I really do think that though it can seem overwhelming or like the idea of investing so much time, energy and building those relationships can seem like a lot because it is, I think that truly it's one of the ways that you build a more by positive work environment too as a teacher, and like that's how you are able to maintain a more positive mental health in the space.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Thank you for that. Thank you for that, Jack.

[Crosstalk]

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Please, Sarah, go ahead.

Dr. Sarah Salem: I'm going to celebrate Jack really quick because I do think it is hard to say, "I have a class that I don't feel that same connection with" because we're educators were supposed to have this amazing connection with all of our kids and when you come in as a new educator and it doesn't meet your expectation of what you thought it was going to be, that's where it does start to make you question, are you in the right profession? Can I do this? Can I

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connect with all kids? And so again, going back to previously, if I were to sit Jack down and say you're going to go to a professional learning session that teaches you how to build relationships, that's not what Jack needs, right? Jack needs this session where he can be honest and say, "okay, so let me identify some things that are working really well for this class and not for this class." And he can probably solve some of that with his colleagues thinking about things that they've done. So yay, Jack!

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Brilliant point, Sarah and way to connect that back to a concrete step that you talked about earlier. Thank you. That was really helpful for me. Thank you. I want to open it up to the virtual space before we close out with Nicole. So, any questions, any loving critique, anything anyone wants to build on, there's some lovely comments in the chat. Give you an opportunity to scan the chat as well. So, appreciate the comments from earlier from Tara, from Penny from others, really appreciate that.

Tara: Hi, I can share a comment. I'm Tara in Bloomington, Indiana, and I'm a teacher. And as Jack was talking, I was, I just kept thinking back, he was talking about the classroom level, and I kept thinking back to what Sarah was saying at the administrative level and how so much of the language that we use and how we approach each person that we interact with really influences that relationship. And for me, the word that keeps coming back to me is "mattering," just displaying that every person matters. And when you exude that, I think as a teacher, the kids feel it and they— they see the ways that we communicate that. And I remember back to my early years as an educator and I'm thinking, it was so easy to build relationships with the kids that had energy to share right away and you can easily get caught in that trap of building relationships with the talkative ones or with the ones that stand by your desk are the ones that talk to you to passing period but we're communicating a lot by who we're not talking to. So, reminding the early—the early career educators, that, what we don't do, also says as much about the kind of relationships we are trying to build as what we do. So, remembering to talk to the quiet ones, to the ones who are, you know, trying not to be as noticed, but trying to figure out ways to—the way to connect with them that feels comfortable to them and showing that they matter too.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Matterring. Powerful, Tara. Thank you for that, matterring. Absolutely. Thank you. Any other shares in the virtual space? Give you some process time. [Short Pause] Ryan, back to you.

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Ryan Sundeen: Alright. So, this question will be for Nicole, similar to Jack's, but obviously based on your expertise. Nicole, what would you say are two to three anti-oppressive practices every early career educator should use or leverage in their classroom?

Nicole Andrews: Well, first, thank you for letting me back in. We had some technical difficulties on our end to hear in Minnetonka and all of our internet went out. So, I'm excited to be back in the space. When I first heard about this topic, the first thing that came to mind was anti-oppressive language. What are we doing in our classroom around language? And thinking through how we're telling or talking to teachers about how to talk to your students. I've had the pleasure of working both in early childhood education at formal settings, so in daycares and preschools, but also in respite care rooms. And I work specifically with students who had experienced homelessness. And thinking through when our teachers' aides were in the classroom, a lot of the things that we would say were, we weren't using person first language. And so really thinking through, as early teachers walk into the classroom, what does it mean to use person first language? What does it mean to show up in a space ready to learn and understanding that language is—and what I've learned from MAP [Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center], equity work is dynamic? So, you're going to constantly need to refresh your information.

Nicole Andrews: I am now teaching in a school that specifically works with students diagnosed with ASD as well as neurodiverse students and I walked in the building with all of my knowledge, with 14 years of experience and I kept saying neurodivergent, right? A term that I would now never, ever use again but it was focusing on typical versus atypical. And so, learning through the fact that you're not always going to get it right, that it's okay, that language is dynamic and ever changing and so that we have to continue to practice that. And giving yourself grace around thinking through how you use person first language, how you recognize your students. The other thing I thought about was leveraging power and space, both in early childhood education and in enrichment. I do a lot of meeting with families and what that tends to look like is having parent-teacher conferences in our school. And I found very quickly that that created a power dynamic that I wanted to shift. I didn't want to be seen [perceived] as the only expert in the classroom. I didn't want to be seen [perceived] as the expert of your child. You're coming into a space asking me for my observations during the day, but you also are bringing so

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much information to the table. And so, we decided to think about how we do home visiting, how we do parent-teacher conferences in a very different way.

- Nicole Andrews:** So, I give my family's three options: you can meet— we can meet at the school that may be more comfortable for you. We're not going to eat in my class, but we'll meet in a neutral space. We can meet in the community, so we can meet at a park. We can meet at a local coffee shop. We can meet in a space that you feel really comfortable, or we can meet in your home. And I do explain to parents/[caregivers] if we're doing a home visit, that this is the time for me to learn about you, learn about your family, learn about your children. It's not a time for me to come in as a judgmental view of what's right, what's wrong, which could be doing better. And so really using that thought partnership language, that MAP [Center] has a beautiful way of sharing but being a thought partner with parents, allowing them to be a part of the conversation, allowing them to be a part of the education of their children. That's another way to start building anti-oppressive classrooms and allows you to see their perspective in a very clear way, allows you to see all of their layers, their families. So those are the two things that kept jumping back to mind.
- Dr. Tiffany Kyser:** Thank you, Nicole, powerful. And I'm just going to again mirror back some— some high notes, and then we will move to transition to close out to honor— to honor everyone's time as we approach the end of our hour. Anti-oppressive language, using people— first, person first language. And we will certainly, if Ryan hasn't put it in the chat already, we'll certainly follow up after this session with a—with an email with some of these resources in the chat and additional. We have a critical language style guide that we just released at the MAP center and pulling from all kinds of really wonderful resources, this idea of what is people first language, it's centering the person first. That Students aren't just one thing. Students are multifaceted. People aren't just one thing, right? And so, this idea of using person first language.
- Dr. Tiffany Kyser:** Recognizing the power in relationships, back to power again, Jack hit on that as well, and that concrete approach to repositioning, not only in language, but repositioning in terms of proximity. Where are we meeting? In a neutral space within the school, in a space where we can honor the community where we both are part of, in your home? I'm coming as a guest. I'm a guest in your home and I need to come with some deference to

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your knowledge, to your expertise, that we are authentic partners in how we are being responsive and supportive to the child or children that we all want to support, and we want to also learn from. And so again, that idea of reciprocity, and we have a—a couple of different resources around authentic partnerships with students, parents, and caregivers that either Ryan will put in the chat, or we will definitely follow up in the post-session questionnaire. So, I appreciate that, Nicole.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: This has been a wonderfully rich discussion. I want to honor and thank each of you. If you do have any comments or any questions for Nicole, feel free to place those in the chat and we will follow up in chat as we move to wrap up as well.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: The first thing that I want to highlight is the first session of the Virtual Coffeehouse Series. So, the first part of this two-part series is now available on our website. It focuses on conversations around critical conscious — excuse me, critical consciousness, and how to realize one's potential as an equitable and responsive classroom educator. So, it talked a lot about this idea of the self. So, if you're interested in that part of the conversation, identity, that whole first part was really around this idea of identity and what does that mean. So, we just wanted to highlight that for you that that's currently available. Ryan?

Ryan Sundeen: Alright. Thank you. And once again, thank you all for the great shares. I have multiple pages of notes. So, thank you. Yeah. So just wanted to share some additional resources. So, on our website, you can check out our inaugural issue of *Equity Express*, where we highlight and provide resources which attend to the importance of strengthening and protecting oneself while in the midst of equity work. So, this is a great resource to have and to reinforce the ideas expressed here today. It features the work of two of our graduate assistants here at the MAP center, Katy Rusnak, and our very own Robin Jackson, as well as Dr. Seena Skelton and Dr. Kathleen King Thorius.

Ryan Sundeen: Additionally, the *That's All Folx* podcast, if you haven't had an opportunity to check it out yet, I highly recommend it. This is a podcast used to increase critical consciousness of K-12 educators. You know, millions of people watch TV daily and—and millions of teachers watch TV as well. So, by examining the inequities and tensions that TV raises and applying these situations to school and education, we—the podcast provides a lens through which teachers can reflect on the intersections of their identities

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and the lived experiences of their students, and how these shape classroom and school culture and the learning. So just goes along really well with what was discussed here today.

Ryan Sundeen: And if you're not currently following us on social media, please follow us at Great Lakes Equity Center on Facebook, and @GreatLakesEAC on Twitter. You can also follow us on our LinkedIn page at Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center and find more information and resources on our website at greatlakesequity.org. We do update our social media daily with our recent publications and resources and information about upcoming events. So, we would like to thank you all for joining us and sharing this virtual space with us today. I'm going to put the—while—so I've put the link in the chat. So, we are an organization of continuous improvement. So, with that in mind, we would greatly appreciate if you would take five to seven minutes to give us feedback on this Virtual Coffee House, highlighting what went well, what did not go well, and suggestions for future events. So, we do thank you in advance for your feedback. And once again, I've put that link in the chat. Dr. Kyser or any of our conversation starters, is there anything you would like to add before we close out.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: I just want to thank each of you. Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead. Did I interrupt someone? I just wanted to thank each of you for your time. I know that we're all busy for those that came in halfway, we want to recognize and honor that you probably were coming from a meeting or hall duty or bus duty as we're working through multiple time zones. And just want to honor and appreciate your time being here. If we can ever be of any assistance as the Region III Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, don't hesitate to reach out and let us know. And with that, I want to give a virtual cheers to each of you for this virtual coffee house. And again, please expect a follow up from us just providing you that post-session questionnaire link and additional resources. With that I want to thank Nicole Andrews, Todd Hawks, Sarah Salem, I want to thank Jack Hesser as really powerful conversation starters, as well as each of you in this virtual space. So have a good rest of your day.

[End audio]