



Learning to Live Together

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

Episode One



Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

TRANSCRIPTION

- Dr. Diem:** Hi, I'm Sarah Diem, and I'm an Equity Fellow for the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center and a Professor and Chair in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri.
- Dr. Waitoller:** Hey! And I'm Federico Waitoller, an Associate Professor at the Department of Special Education at the University of Illinois-Chicago.
- Dr. Diem:** And this is *Learning to Live Together*.
- Dr. Waitoller:** A podcast about inclusion and school integration in the 21st century.
- Dr. Waitoller:** Welcome to our new four-part podcast series, where we'll delve into the meanings, tensions, and practices of integration and inclusion in the 21st century. Justice Thurgood Marshall wrote in his dissent in the 1974 *Milliken vs. Bradley* ruling, I quote, "Unless our children begin to learn together, then there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together."
- Dr. Diem:** And you know, Federico, these words have a particular significance in today's context. We currently live in a moment where we are witnessing rampant anti-transgender and LGBTQ+ policies being implemented across states, an intensive push against discussing race and racism in schools, a discourse of equity based on choice and academic outcomes, some minoritized populations requesting more funding and resources rather than integration, and continuous segregation of students with disabilities in an unaltered, exclusionary, general education classroom. Moreover, education

Copyright © 2023 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D220003). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.



Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

institutions are moving away from using terms such as equity, diversity, and inclusion because of legislative and judicial rulings.

Dr. Waitoller: And in addition to this, Sarah, different social groups, like Black communities, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+, etc., tend to engage in these struggles in parallel efforts and use different terms to sometimes describe similar things like inclusive education, inclusion, integration.

Dr. Diem: Yeah, for instance, I conduct research on racial and socioeconomic integration with little attention to disability or gender issues, which is really representative of my field.

Dr. Waitoller: And I focus mostly on inclusion of students with disabilities, though I, I tend to focus a little bit on intersections with race, but mostly, again, focusing on data on inclusion of students with disabilities.

Dr. Diem: Yeah, so, unfortunately, there's really little collaboration that we're seeing between researchers and activists focusing on single social group, which is why we're coming together for this podcast series.

Dr. Waitoller: Considering this context, in this podcast series, we bring our parallel expertise to grapple with the following questions: Are we still longing for racial integration or inclusion or inclusive education? What does integration and inclusion mean to different stakeholders? Are we still dreaming about the project of learning, and learning to live together? It's still feasible? And what will this project look like in 2023 and moving forward?

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

Dr. Diem: So, in this podcast series, we'll hear from individuals with various backgrounds, experiences, and engagement with social struggles, particularly about their perspectives on inclusion and integration.

Dr. Waitoller: We will hear, for instance, from Seena Skelton, the Director and Operator of the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, a center that provides technical assistance for states, districts, and schools on issues of school integrations. Importantly, Seena identify herself as a Black woman with disability and have experienced not only racial segregation in her life, but also segregation due to her disability.

Dr. Diem: We're also going to hear from Terah Venzant Chambers, who is a Professor of Educational Administration and an Associate Dean in the Graduate School at Michigan State University. And Terah also identifies as a Black woman.

Dr. Waitoller: We'll also hear from the perspectives of the Donato, Donato-Sapp family. The Donato-Sapp family engages in different kinds of activisms on issues of inclusion, not just in terms of race, but also gender and disability. Their unique perspective comes from being in a family composed of two fathers, one white and another Filipino, who had adopted a Black daughter with a disability. And the three of them work in their daughter's schools and other environments and as well as nationally on advocating for inclusion.

Dr. Diem: And finally, we'll hear from Peter Piazza, who is the Director of School Quality Measures for the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment. Peter also writes about education and racial justice

Copyright © 2023 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D220003). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

A PROJECT OF 

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

on his blog, *School Diversity Notebook*, which is affiliated with the Penn State University's Center for Education and Civil Rights. And Peter identifies as a white man.

Dr. Waitoller: One of the things we noticed, Sarah, in our interviews is that there were different understandings and terms used to describe similar longings. Our interviewees used terms as inclusion, integration, inclusive education, depending on their social struggles and what kind of social groups they were talking about.

Dr. Diem: Yeah, and so, in our first episode, which I'm really excited about, we're going to hear from our interviewees about how they define integration and inclusion and how their experiences and identities impact these definitions.

Dr. Waitoller: So, let's hear first from Seena and how she defines inclusive education and inclusion and school integration, and how her understandings has also changed over time.

Dr. Skelton: I think ultimately I view them very similarly. So, when I think about integration, I'm thinking about all, all students, all adults, regardless, and in appreciation of difference, learning, learning, living and working together. In community together. In school spaces together. In working spaces together. That there is a...there is a, a, a sense of belonging, there's a sense of an appreciation of difference, and there's a, a, a, a sense of people working and living and learning side by side. And whatever needs to happen environmentally to break down any barrier from, from that being a reality, that that work is the work to be done.

Copyright © 2023 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D220003). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

A PROJECT OF 

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

Dr. Skelton: Inclusion, when I think about inclusion, I, I'm also, in addition to people working and living and learning together, there's a, a, attitudinal piece, right, that's often...that's often the biggest barrier to true integration. And so, when I think about inclusion, I'm thinking about not only are we creating environments, are we dismantling structures that are...that prove to be barriers for people to work and live and learn with each other and together, but also are we addressing the attitudinal barriers, the perception barriers, that keep people apart?

Dr. Skelton: That even when you're in the same space together, are you truly...is there truly a sense of belonging? Is there truly a sense of your lived experience, your values, your practices, being included, being part of the, the whole, right? Or are we continue...do we continue to have people in spaces together, but yet they're... but yet they're still not really, truly a sense of connectedness, a sense of relationship, a sense of wanting and, and curiosity about each other and cultivating community. And so, when I think about inclusion, I'm thinking about, in, in a way, community building, fellowship, connectedness, belonging. When I think about integration, I'm thinking about people learning and living and working together, side by side.

Dr. Waitoller: Thank you, Seena. Have you come up with a better word that encompass all this?

Dr. Skelton: No, I have not [laughs].

Dr. Waitoller: Too bad. Why am I interviewing you? Why am I interviewing you?

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

Dr. Skelton: [Laughs] Really, just loving each other, Federico, right?

Dr. Waitoller: Yeah.

Dr. Skelton: How do we, how do we, how do we love each other? Really love the humanity, view the humanity that, that, that we all possess and view that in each and every one of us, regardless of the sort of quote unquote package that we're in? You know, how do we, how do we see each other, see the humanity in each other, recognize that, and love, love that? And to me, that's a part of inclusion, that's a part of...you know integration is sort of the, the, the sort of the material manifestation of, of inclusion. But for me, inclusion is, is that emotional connection, connectivity piece, right?

Dr. Diem: So, similar to Seena, Terah also talks about how terms have specific meanings and are siloed and have particular histories. Let's hear from Terah and her understanding and conceptualization of these terms.

**Dr. Venzant
Chambers:**

So, no, I don't think that there are necessarily better words, but I do think it's an opportunity for us to be precise with our language every time that we're talking about these issues. So, when I start a conversation, whether it's just with one person or in a group or I'm, I'm doing a workshop, one of the things I like to do is to really be clear about the terms that we're using and the definitions that I am applying when I'm using particular terms. And for us to have a conversation about whether our definitions match or not match, or who's left out of a conversation, because it's not necessarily, what, like, is there a better word. Because what I have learned, I've been on this earth

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

long enough to see a whole transition in the words that we use in a lot of different areas, back to, like, multicultural education, that, you know, there are all kinds of ways that there's been this transformation in the terms. And a lot of times it's reflective of contemporary issues or changing...changes in understandings or all kinds of things that are appropriate for the time, and that's great. And then things shift, and we use a different term, that's great.

**Dr. Venzant
Chambers:**

So, I don't know that there's ever going to be a perfect term, and I'm okay with that. But I, I...so...in light of that reality, I think it's incumbent on us to just be really precise with our language and have conversations about it. And I'm always down to have a conversation with people to use that, that I guess it's like training, like muscle memory almost. Like, we're...I, I find that people sometimes are uncomfortable having conversations about these topics. So, another opportunity to talk about definitions, to talk about terms, it's a little bit low stakes for people. We're just talking about definitions. What do we mean by using these words? It's a good entry point to conversations that might get a little bit more complex and uncomfortable as we continue.

**Dr. Venzant
Chambers:**

So, it's also a really great starting point sometimes for people to get the experience and to use those muscles of talking about terms that they may not be familiar with or comfortable with using, and then just highlighting that idea of, yeah, it's, it's hard because we don't even have a necessarily shared understanding of what these terms mean. So, if you're confused about it, that's okay. So, let's just talk about it right here, right now. And you

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

and I can come to an understanding, or those of us in this group can come to an understanding about what we think that inclusion means, or inclusive education means, or racism means, or what we talk about when we're talking about special education. Or what are, what are these terms, what do they mean, how can we use them more effectively? So, that's, that's to me, what's important: being...having conversations about what we mean and being more precise in that use of terms.

Dr. Diem: Peter also talks about the term inclusion and links it specifically to affirmation.

Dr. Piazza: I think about it as really similar to, to affirmation, to cultural acceptance, that your, your, your cultural background, your social background is affirmed in the curriculum, in your experience of school. And I don't know that it's possible to do inclusion without affirmation. These, these things feel so closely related to each other, almost to the point that their...the, the Venn diagrams are, are, are overlapping. And this is a time where, given all the threats to affirmation, I think it's important to, to, to highlight that explicitly as affirmation, because, you know, we're, we're, we're seeing so much that's pushing against different ways of being in the world, and it's really troubling.

Dr. Waitoller: But inclusion and integration is not just about ideas and concepts, but also about feelings and emotions. What does it feel to be included? How does it feel? Helena, Sino, and Jeff, the Donato-Sapp family, share some moments in Helena's life and in their own family lives when they felt they were included and sometimes when they were excluded.

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

Helena

Donato-Sapp: Yesterday we were having...at graduation, we were doing the Westerly Way and the Valedictorian Awards...

Dr. Waitoller: MmHm [affirmative].

Helena

Donato-Sapp: ...and they were...I, I could see them, and I looked at them, and they were like, crossing their fingers for me to, like, get one of them.

Jeff Sapp: This is the 6th graders in the crowd. Her friends in the crowd were all, like, looking at her as...the Westerly Way is like the big, not only an academic award, but you've got the...you, you, you most exhibit the characters, the mission and vision of our school. It's the big award.

Dr. Waitoller: Mmm [thoughtful].

Jeff Sapp: And so, all of her 6th graders were in the audience looking at her like this.

Dr. Waitoller: Got it.

Jeff Sapp: Hoping [inaudible] okay. And that felt really good to you, right?

Helena

Donato-Sapp: Yeah. And they also, like, they were saying that, that I was like one of the most kindest 8th graders. Like, I was, like, the only one or something. That's what they were saying. And, and...

Copyright © 2023 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D220003). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

Jeff Sapp: And tell us about, tell us about the day before when we walked into your Humanities class and all of your eighth-grade peers were signing yearbooks. Tell us about signing the yearbook experience and where you went to get your yearbook signed.

Helena

Donato-Sapp: Yeah, so they were in Humanities. They were playing a video of, like, some memories of our class. And so, I wanted, like, to have time for my, my friends in different grades to sign my yearbooks. And they, like, they all came and kept...were asking me to sign theirs. And I was asking them if I could sign, or if they could sign mine.

Jeff Sapp: Yeah, it's a little bit more stark than that. None of her peers would sign her yearbook.

Dr. Waitoller: Hm [curious].

Jeff Sapp: Ok. They were all signing each other's yearbook. And she was just like, she had told us this the day before, that they, they really would not sign her yearbook.

Helena

Donato-Sapp: They weren't really asking...

Dr. Waitoller: MmHm [affirmative].

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

Helena

Donato-Sapp: ...for me to sign theirs either.

Jeff Sapp: And so, she walked outside into the quad, into the courtyard, where the 6th and 7th graders were sitting at lunch tables, and she was swarmed with kids who wanted... But her peers, which, you know, were unanimously excluders, would not even, you know. So, you know, there were really just some really hurtful...

Dr. Waitoller: MmHm [affirmative].

Jeff Sapp: ...experiences that went on like that. And so that's why she came to us. She graduated yesterday, which is Wednesday. On Tuesday, she got into the car, and she was like, "I'm so exhausted by the excluding."

Dr. Waitoller: Mmm [understanding].

Jeff Sapp: The last minute of school. These are the last minutes. So, it was pretty painful.

Sino Donato: Two points on inclusion. Jeff makes, you know, Jeff reminds me that our, our feeling of inclusion is very much tied to feeling safe. You know?

Dr. Waitoller: Hmm [understanding].

Sino Donato: Feeling safety. When we feel safe, it, it, you know, it's just us...that's inclusive. It's really comes down to the basics, you know. I mean, for me,

Copyright © 2023 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D220003). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

inclusion interpersonally is, you know, whether you invite me to the table or you don't, you know. Literally, like, the most basic things...

Dr. Waitoller: Hmm [understanding].

Sino Donato: ...whether you ask questions, whether you ask questions about my life, and you're really interested. You know, how you can tell when...

Dr. Waitoller: Yeah.

Sino Donato: ...folks are really [inaudible], you get that energy.

Jeff Sapp: Yeah, I do just, I just also want to say, you know, you use the word caring...

Dr. Waitoller: MmHm [affirmative].

Jeff Sapp: ...and that, that absolutely is part of it. Sino used a word that we really like, and it was belonging.

Dr. Waitoller: Mmm [understanding].

Jeff Sapp: And I think those two walk hand-in-hand pretty beautifully.

Dr. Waitoller: MmHm [affirmative].

Jeff Sapp: And we can sense when we're cared about as an unusual family, and we can sense [bless you] we can sense when we're cared about...

Copyright © 2023 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D220003). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

Dr. Waitoller: Yeah.

Jeff Sapp: ...as an unusual, as a, as an unusual family, and we can sense whether there's a sense of belonging. And we've felt...we've not felt it often. And, and it is been our, our joyful labor that has built those relationships that at the end of our experience, there was a belonging, but it was, it was with the teachers, it was with the staff.

Dr. Waitoller: Mmm [understanding].

Jeff Sapp: It was not so much with the community itself.

Dr. Waitoller: So, Sarah, what do we make of all these understandings and terms to define integration and inclusion?

Dr. Diem: Well, Federico, as you can hear from our interviewees, how people define integration, inclusion, and inclusive education is really influenced by their cultural histories, disciplines, and struggles of their social groups. But there are also great similarities.

Dr. Waitoller: I think, I think you're right. Whatever the term is, what people to striving for, longing for, is beyond numbers and beyond people from different social groups being in the same space. Here people are talking about feeling welcome, feeling that one belongs to a place, feeling safe, respected, valued, and that the, the institution and the people in that community affirm who one is.

Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

Dr. Diem: Yeah. I really loved how Peter phrased it with inclusion being affirmation. And also, as Terah mentioned, we need to be very intentional when we use these terms and being specific about what we mean when we use these terms. Because instead of the opportunities that the terms may bring, we could actually do more harm when we misappropriate the terms.

Dr. Waitoller: So, the next question is, is all this inclusion, integration, inclusive education worth it? Should we continue to strive for it? What are the benefits of it? I know this may seem like a simple answer, but there are parents of students with disabilities who do not want to include their child with a disability into the school, because the school is, is not a safe space and not a good place for their children. There are also Black and Brown communities that prefer to have their own schools, but well-resourced and with quality staff.

Dr. Diem: Yeah, Federico, these are all really important and nuanced questions that we're going to talk more about in our second episode of *Learning to Live Together*.

Dr. Waitoller: So, stay tuned for our next episode of *Learning to Live Together*.

Center Announcer: This resource was brought to you by the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center. To find out about other Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center resources, visit our website at www.greatlakesequity.org. To subscribe to our publications, click on the Subscribe to Our Publications link located on the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center website.



Learning to Live Together

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

Episode One



Dr. Sarah Diem, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Missouri
Dr. Federico R. Waitoller, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Illinois

The contents of this resource were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (S004D220003). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

Additionally, this resource and its contents are provided to public school personnel, students enrolled in public schools, parents/caregivers of those students, community organizations and other community members. We ask that this resource is cited if research, ideas, or information from this document are used in any produced works.

No part of this resource may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means for commerce media or commercial purposes without permission in writing from the Great Lakes Equity Center.

Finally, the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center would like to thank the School of Education at Indiana University Indianapolis, as well as Executive Director Dr. Kathleen King Thorius, Director Dr. Seena Skelton, and Associate Director of Networking and Engagement Dr. Tiffany Kyser, and Associate Director of Partnerships Dr. Ruthie Payno-Simmons, for their leadership and guidance in the development of all tools and resources to support the region.

[End of Audio]

Copyright © 2023 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D220003). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

