

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 second show of *Learning to Live Together*, a podcast about inclusion and school integration in the 21st century. In our first episode, we explored the different terms and meanings of inclusion and school integration.

Dr. Diem: In this episode, we examine an even more important question: Should we continue to strive for inclusion, school integration, or inclusive education? Is it an all or nothing approach, or should we be thinking about it differently depending on the context? Is it always worth it? And what are the benefits and challenges?

Dr. Waitoller: So, to continue our journey, let's go back to our insightful interviews.

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Dr. Diem: And Federico, you know, I really like what Peter says about integration and how he contextualizes it in this current sociopolitical moment. Let's take a listen to what Peter has to say.

Dr. Piazza: Yeah, I am a firm believer that, that schools should try [school integration]. I think right now we're...this is, this is not a...I, I, I, I'm not going out on a limb on saying this, right, that we're at a crisis moment for American democracy. We had an insurrection at the Capitol Building in the not at all distant past. And that's just one example of a number of, you know, unsettling threats to democratic life. And I am a firm believer in school integration because I think it is the best preparation for thoughtful participation in a multicultural democracy. Thurgood Marshall's dissent in *Milliken* is, is, is sort of like the beating heart of my work in integration. It's why I believe in it so strongly. "Unless our children begin to learn together, there's little hope our people will begin to learn to live together." I might not have gotten it exactly verbatim, but you get the idea.

Dr. Piazza: And I know you know it. But I...yeah, I'm, I'm concerned about what we're seeing. And I think public... in society in general, and I think that public education is positioned in, you know, maybe, maybe this unique place in American life where, in a segregated society, it's one of the only places where we have opportunities to interact with people from different racial and social backgrounds. And in...so, in, so integrated environments, you know, and the research shows us as well, that integrated environments can lead to these positive outcomes for students in terms of reducing racial prejudice, increasing cross racial friendships, so on and so forth. I am a

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parent of two kids, six-year-old and three-year-old, and those are exactly the things that I want for them to get out of their schooling experience.

Dr. Waitoller: What Peter says is very interesting, particularly the idea that integration or inclusive education and inclusion, it's a medium to prepare citizens, to prepare people, to work together in adulthood and to work together in a multicultural democracy. The Donato-Sapp family also share their wisdom. They share some interesting points about their...how they feel about their impact and, and how it's important to keep in the struggle for inclusion and integration because it will impact the life of many, many childrens that comes after them. But they also point out that sometimes it's not a choice to not engage in the fight. Let's listen to them.

Jeff Sapp: I can tell you that in the wake of our work and in the wake of Helena's presence on that campus, the way teachers are going to teach and support kids with disabilities has been altered forever.

Dr. Waitoller: Mmm [affirmative].

Jeff Sapp: The culture of the school has changed dramatically because of this work. And we believe that there are other children who will benefit from the pain that we've gone through in doing this work. And that makes the work very worth it for us...

Dr. Waitoller: Mmm [affirmative].

Jeff Sapp: ...to make the world better for other children.

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Dr. Waitoller: Hmm [thoughtful].

Sino Donato: One of the, one of the kind of pushbacks, sometimes a mild pushback—sometimes not so mild, actually [laughs]—one of the pushbacks we get as a family in doing our work, and in particular in allowing Helena to do this work and exposing her to all these kind of heavy questions...

Dr. Waitoller: Hmm [thoughtful].

Sino Donato: ...one of the pushbacks is, you know, “Why, why do, why do you do that? Why, why do you want to do that?” Well, Jeff, Jeff answered it. I want to expand on it. It’s...there’s a thing that Helena says that, “The world brings the fight to her door.”

Dr. Waitoller: Mmhm [affirmative].

Sino Donato: And our activism, our activism and our work is a resp--, is a direct response to the world, to the fight that is brought to our door in all these area...all these intersectional areas, right? All our identities. There’s a, there is, it’s a constant, you know, fighting for our safety and fighting for just being, fighting for a level playing field, or whatever the fight is that day. But I would say that we cannot opt out of it.

Dr. Waitoller: Yeah, you have no option.

Dr. Diem: So, Terah’s a little more cautious. She goes on to talk about the challenges and tensions to integration and that, yes, it’s something we should definitely

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be striving for, but there are real tensions involved, particularly for racially minoritized students. And Terah really emphasizes and encourages us to consider that integration is not just a question of what, but how we're going to go about realizing it.

**Dr. Venzant
Chambers:**

You know, this is a really hard question because I feel like even me, as one person, I have several conflicting perspectives about it. And I want to say that depending on which hat I'm wearing, my perspective shifts. But that's also not exactly accurate because I experience the tension within all the hats. So, I'm a parent, and so there is, a parent of a Black child, so that's important to say. I'm a Black woman. I have a Black child. And so, there are tensions on both sides of this, all sides of this, of, you know, do I want my child to experience an integrated environment? I mean, theoretically, yes. But I also very much understand the cost of the fight for integration historically and the need for him to be in spaces that are supportive. And that that hasn't always been the case in these desegregated—and I don't know if we've ever seen an integrated environment—so I should just be using the word desegregated environments in the past. It's the same with any other hat that I wear.

**Dr. Venzant
Chambers:**

So, I'm also on the school board in my local community, and I feel that tension as a school board member. Do I want our racially diverse, ethnic-- ethnically diverse, diverse in all of the kinds of ways community, to experience integration? I do. I desperately do. And I would fight for that. And I also understand that there are ways that these, especially the

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minoritized groups within my local community, but certainly more broadly, have borne the brunt of integration in the past. And so, as a school board member who is charged with supporting all of our students, I can't just go pie in the sky like, yeah, let's just go for integration without a clear understanding of how all of our students will be supported, but particularly those who have, who are most minoritized and have been historically minoritized, and have the greatest... are more likely to be forgotten in this process. So, you know, parent, school board member, researcher, certainly I have tensions as a researcher, and just as a community member. I mean, no matter what hat I put on, this is not a black and white issue. It's not cut and dry. It's not something that I can say, there's a slam dunk answer here.

Dr. Venzant

Chambers:

I think with most things in my life, research or not, it is not a question of what. It is a question of how. Ooh, I can hear my graduate students in the back saying, "Oh, here goes Dr. Chambers giving her 'not what but how' lecture." But it's true. It's not so much what we're going to do, but how we're going to do it. So, should we achieve integration? I don't know until I know how we're going to do it. Then I'll be able to better weigh in on whether I think it's a good idea or not.

Dr. Waitoller:

Seena also agrees with Terah that it's worth it, yes. But like Terah, she also adds a few caveats.

Dr. Waitoller:

Do you think should community schools...and communities, should continue to strive for these ideas of integration, inclusion, inclusive education?

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Dr. Skelton: I do. I do, but...I do—and yet there's sort of a, a, a, not a caveat but, but, but with the understanding, with the understanding that a part of one's humanity, a sense of agency, a part of one...of being able to truly be integrated is to also be able to decide when you, when you want to be with, with people that you share a common history and set of practices and set of experiences; that you can...you, you can sort of use shorthand language around because you know the people with you share, have that same, very similar kind of experiences. And for me, integration and, and inclusion is the ability to choose when and where you want to be together with others, and also when and where you want to be with people who share, more, you know...in a more salient way, share some of your, you know, similar lived experiences. To me, they're not mutually exclusive.

Dr. Waitoller: So, what do we make out of this, Sarah? What do we make out of all these thoughts and insights from our interviews? Is, is it worth it? Is it worth it to do it?

Dr. Diem: You know, I think our interviews were in favor of integration and inclusion, but I also think that they're cautious about it, as we talked a little bit about earlier. In general, they, they long for more inclusive and integrated schools and, you know, an inclusive and integrated society, but it really depends on how it's going to be achieved, as the lessons of past efforts show us that they can have contrary or unwanted effects.

Dr. Waitoller: Yeah. And for some of them, for the Donato-Sapp family, it's not even a question. It's, it's, they don't have a choice to not be [inclusive], according to them. So, given this need for a more nuanced approach, and maybe even a

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new approach altogether, how to do integration and inclusion is of utmost important. In episode three, we will discuss how, the how to's—the how to of inclusion or school integration.

Dr. Diem: So, stay tuned and listen to our next episode of *Learning to Live Together*, a podcast about inclusion and school integration in the 21st century.

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Learning to Live Together
Equity Spotlight Podcast Series
Episode Two



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