



The Think Inclusive Podcast

Season 9, Bonus Episode

The Intersection of Race and Disability | Pop Up Podcast @ #CEC2022

Tim Villegas:

Happy Friday, Inclusionists! Today we have a special pop-up podcast interview with some folks I met at the CEC Conference in Orlando this week. I'm going to let them introduce themselves in a minute, but they presented a session called, "The Intersection of Race and Disability: Where Do We Go from Here?" I think it is an important reminder for us that inclusion and equity go together, and that when we are talking about inclusive education, we really mean all students. So, without further ado, here is a special bonus interview from the Council for Exceptional Children Conference in Orlando, Florida.

Tim Villegas:

So first of all, I want to welcome Dena Slanda, Zerek Mayes, Eric Wells, and Lindsey Pike to the Think Inclusive podcast. How are you doing today? We are actually recording this in Orlando in some random boardroom we've commandeered. And we want to just talk about their amazing presentation called "The Intersection of Race and Disability: Where do we go from here?" I was, I had the pleasure of going to it, I believe it was yesterday. And we had a lot of it was a lot of great conversation about equity. So why don't we first have each of you gonna introduce yourself who you are and where you're from?

Zerek Mayes:

Hi, I'm Dr. Zerek Mayes. I am from Jacksonville, Florida, but I'm now living in Chicago, Illinois, serving as a director of diversity equity and inclusion at a private school in the Chicago area.

Dena Slanda:

And I'm Dena Slanda and I am from the university of central Florida. And I am currently working on several teacher preparation grants through the office of special education programs.

Lindsey Pike:

My name's Lindsey Pike, I'm a doctoral candidate at the university of central Florida in exceptional education and fingers crossed I'll have my dissertation done this year. And I'm just excited to be here. And my focus is diversity equity inclusion, specifically at the intersection of disability and other markers of difference.

Eric Wells:

And my name is Eric Wells and I am at the Oregon department of education where I serve as the director of IDEA Programs.

Tim Villegas:

Fantastic. so we didn't have a lot of time to prep but I did share with you a question to think about to kind of get us started. So with your presentation, what was the big idea that you wanted educators to leave from? What did you, what did you want to educators to get out of what we talked about yesterday with your, in your presentation?

Dena Slanda:

I think that's a really loaded question. Honestly. I, I think that there was a lot of things that we wanted educators to get out of our presentation yesterday, but I think that the overarching thing that we wanted educators to get out of yesterday's presentation was really to leave thinking about what, how their practice whether they're in teacher preparation, whether they are at the school level, the district level we wanted them to leave thinking about and reflecting about how their actions, their interactions with students impact outcomes for students. And when we talk about outcomes, we're not necessarily talking about student achievement, but outcomes, as far as eligibility, as far as you know placement those types of things, how are they impacting disproportionality and special education? How are they, a impacting how students are valued in their classrooms and in their schools and in their spaces, how are they impacting how students are seen in their classrooms and in their spaces, that's what we really wanted them to be leaving with.

Dena Slanda:

We wanted them to consider and evaluate how current legislation, litigation and policies are meant to reduce over representation, but may not be leading to those types of outcomes. And we really wanted them to leave with action plans for addressing and reducing some of those. We know that sometimes we feel, you know, overwhelmed that, you know, we can't impact policy, but we wanted them to realize that there are things that they can do at their level regardless of what that level is that could leave to some of those changes. And that's kind of what I think we were looking for was what could they do? And know that there could be a grassroots movement.

Tim Villegas:

And I think that's really important. I do want to hear what you have to say about that, but just a, just a quick aside. And I think that the attendees I think your goal was met because we had so many questions at the end of like, what am I gonna, what, how can I help, what do I do you, right? Yeah. So, and we can talk a little bit more about that, but Zerek, do you wanna jump in?

Zerek Mayes:

Yeah, I was just going to build an add up. I love that Dena said this concept of thinking, because it's not so much, or it's not only what we're thinking or how we're thinking, but also getting to a place where we can ask ourselves, why am I thinking what I think? Because if, if I can deepen my understanding of my why, then I can have a better, hopefully a better concept of what is next and then allow that to inform where I'm going to go next.

Tim Villegas:

Absolutely. Thank you for that.

Eric Wells:

And I think I would add to what Dena and Zerek were saying, like for me, walking away from it, I really wanted to emphasize for folks that equity work has a lot of possible ways into it. There is no one right way to start doing the work. But the best things that folks can do as they're thinking about moving into equity work is what is personal local and immediate to my context, how do I show up in the context I serve in the skin that I'm in and the role that I play to make a change for students and to improve our outcomes?

Lindsey Pike:

Ditto to all of that, this is why we work so well together. I totally agree. I think it's basically saying encouraging people to think about what they can do either as their first step or their next step, because as Eric spoke about in our presentation yesterday, you know, we're all in different places on this equity journey. And so it's about what's my first step if you're just starting , or also what's, if I've been in the game, what's my next step and how can I really make an impact?

Tim Villegas:

So part of your presentation focused on the systems that aren't working. And so just to give a little bit of context for people who may hear conversation to be like, I thought, I thought special ed was working, I thought education was working? Could all of you talk a little bit about, you know, that it's not working and maybe, maybe the why.

Dena Slanda:

Sure, absolutely. I think that that's a really great question, right? Because sometimes we do feel that there are frameworks within education and within special education that may appear to be working. And in some schools, maybe they are working and in some places maybe they are working and maybe they are working for some children. But when we think about kids, we wanna see how can they work for all children. And that's the big question is who are they working for? Who are they designed to work for? And when we were discussing yesterday during our presentation, some of the systems that we were looking for or talking about our focus was on racially and culturally linguistically diverse students. And how does that how did students from racially and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds fit within the current frameworks?

Dena Slanda:

And so specifically special education right now in the intersection of race and disability is that the current systems really do not are not designed for students from diverse backgrounds. And so what we're finding is that students from diverse backgrounds are placed at a disproportionately high rate within special education and previous models continue to place students we've seen this since 1968 the office of civil right has continued to have data that supports that students from these backgrounds are placed in special education. So different policies, procedures, legislation, litigation has gone into effects since then in ways to mitigate that, however, that continue used to be a problem. And so frameworks that have come since then, such as multi-tiered systems of support, which we've seen in individuals with disabilities education act that are known as IDEA originally known also as the response to intervention came out in 1997 within special education as a way to reduce disproportionality in special education has also been included in the every student succeeds act, which is a general education legislation.

Dena Slanda:

So, but it still hasn't led to reduced disproportionality, right? We still haven't seen it addressed reducing the number of English language learners placed in special education. So MTSS has in, in effect really replicated previous systems that it was meant to replace. So and that's what we're talking about. That's what we were referring to is that if we are trying to reduce the number of students from diverse backgrounds placed in special education, we're not doing a really good job of that because we're replicating previous systems. And a lot of that has to do with really getting back to several areas. We talked about, how do we address that at the teacher preparation level? How do we ensure that teachers that are entering the field not just special education teachers, but how do we address that within general education?

Dena Slanda:

How are general education teachers learning, how to you know, understand and work with students from diverse learning needs and students with from diverse backgrounds. So it's not just students from diverse backgrounds, but diverse learning needs as well. How do we address that in school psychology? Our school psychologists that are entering the field when 90% of our school psychologists are white how are we addressing that when 80% of our teachers are white and 52% and growing of our student population are from diverse backgrounds. How are we addressing that when you know, our, our speech language pathology us how are we addressing that across all areas? Our administrators are predominantly white. How are we addressing that across everywhere? And then how are we addressing that as well then within other areas, not just with teacher preparation, but then how are we addressing that in other parts of the frameworks as well, how are we addressing that at the school level? How are we addressing that in the district? How are we addressing and ensuring that our administrators, our teachers, our educators, you know, creating school cultures that support communities and have teachers of diverse backgrounds, how are we attracting, you know, a diverse cadre of teachers? How are we ensuring that our, we have voices of the community at the table, how else are we addressing that?

Lindsey Pike:

So I think one thing, it just makes me think of sort of everything that you talked about just now Dina, the idea that, so we have these systems that haven't been working whether that's comes in the form of policy legislation, et cetera. But we have to remember that those systems are people. And I think that's really the issue that we're getting at here. So we have these systems in place that on paper look like they could really work, but the people that are involved in those systems now I would argue are not doing the individual equity work. And so then if I'm someone who has not done the individual equity work of looking at my own bias, understanding how, as Eric said, I show up in the world and the skin I'm in, in the role that I'm in, if I haven't done that work and we have systems filled with people that haven't done that work and don't stand the racialization of education and disability, and aren't doing that then inherently, when I go to play my part in that system, it's going to become subjective.

Lindsey Pike:

It's going to become influenced by bias. It's going to become something that continues to, it shows up, it manifests in that continued disproportionate whether that's over or underrepresentation of, of diverse students, because the people that are in that system are going to use it for that if they don't understand where their biases are and how, how those things work. So I think it's really looking at systems and when they're not working, looking at the people who are putting those systems into place because

systems are inanimate objects, but they're made up of people. And so we really have to look at that piece.

Eric Wells:

Yeah, I think it's, it's critical that systems are people. And, and one of the things I think about out often in, in doing this work is we can change systems overnight if we want to. I referenced in the presentation yesterday that my first equity training was courageous conversations about race. And they talked in there about 9/11 and how we fundamentally shifted our entire transportation system overnight because we had the political will to do it. And so we could make changes to our system to make it better and more equitable. I would also say that our system is not, not working, it's working exactly as it was designed and intended to work. And so there's a pretty popular phrase that goes around and say, like systems lead to the intended outcomes of them. And so we were headed down this track and we designed a track and a system to be inequitable.

Eric Wells:

We designed a system 'em that serves very well and works exactly as we would want education to, for all students, for our white cis male able bodied, wealthy students, our students who show up in the world with all the assets and characteristics that the system was designed for are doing incredibly well in our education system. How do we take that and make it work for every student, for the students who have been traditionally and are currently being marginalized by the system. And so when I think about that, I think of one of my champ, favorite champions of inclusion is Dr. Paula Kluth. And I heard her talk a couple of years ago and she talked about kids not being an outlier. And so what I would challenge listeners to think about is have you met one kid who the demographics would say, this kid should not be successful and they were? That's because we found a way to make the system work for that kid. And that kid is not an outlier. That kid is going on to be successful and doing wonderful things because we changed the conditions in us, them to allow them to do so. And we could do that for all kids. And we could find a way as Dr. Kluth says over, under a round or through to make that happen for every kid in our system, but we need to have just like we did with the transportation system after 9/11, the political will to make, to say these kids matter, and we will find a way to give them the outcomes they deserve.

Zerek Mayes:

So I think ultimately what we are saying without saying, and it's something that we all know, which is, you know, we constantly say, you know, the only thing that is constant is change. So we're talking about the need to be constantly assessing how change is happening right under our nose. Any even realizing as someone that I really just aspire and admire. Adam Grant says in the face of change, the routines that have often moved us forward can become the ruts that hold us back. And I think it's beginning to operate from that framework that what worked today may not be serving the students of tomorrow. And as long as I'm living from today, tomorrow crossing that, making that crossover, I need to be considering my practices. I need to be considering how I'm viewing what I'm viewing and why, and just being, being more aware of that.

Tim Villegas:

There's a lot, there's a lot to unpack there so the, this is, I wanted to talk about the equity gaps, right. That exist in policy and you highlighted four in your presentation, restraint and seclusion, exclusionary, discipline, white norm standardized assessments and continuum of alternate placements. I mean, that, that's, that's a lot, right. So when we're thinking about policy, like where do we start with, with closing

those gaps? Or is it, is it more like what Eric is talking about, where there's no sort of entry point you just have to pick one?

Dena Slanda:

I think that's a great question. I'm gonna hand that over to Eric. Cause I think you'll, you'll answer that.

Eric Wells:

So yeah, I think it is exactly that, that there is no entry point it's what's personal local and immediate to your work and the things that you do. And so where we ended up with those four pieces is there are significant federal and state policies that guide each of those things, there are conditions under which we can choose to apply or choose not to apply things like exclusionary discipline, and they get applied disproportionately against our black and brown youth. And so what we think about as we're going into this work is how is that policy showing up in practice in my context, in my setting? Are we using it the way that we need to and how can I change it? I may not be able to change state level policy about restraint and seclusion, but I can make the decision in my heart that I am not going to restrain or seclude a child.

Eric Wells:

And I can, I cannot maybe change policy about needing to have a continuum of alternative placements that we look at when we're working with our students, but I can make the decision in my heart that the general education setting is better for students because the purpose of the IDE is to improve outcomes for kids and the preponderance of the research over the last, going on 50 years now says, if we educate students in general education setting with access to general education curriculum with appropriate supplementary aids and services, then they're going to get a better education than if we educate them in segregated settings. And so that is not a, I, I would argue that's probably a universe where we probably don't have the system to place to make that true for all kids right now. And so I'm not advocating, like go change every kid's placement to a regular class setting. But I am saying like, we need to work on our systems and get them to a place where every kid can be educated appropriately in a regular setting, because that is how we improve outcomes for kids experiencing disability.

Tim Villegas:

So, real quick, I wanted to follow up a question with, because you talked about how the outliers, right. Or the, yeah, you referenced them. Paula's a friend, so, you know, I think she'll, she'll be okay with it. Okay, so what I was gonna get at was you said that if a student is, is successful, sometimes we, we, we can say, oh, well, it's just, it's just them, they're an exception to the rule. But what you and Paula are saying, well, we've actually changed how the, the environment for that system, so that for that student, so it could, it could, it could work, right? Yes. So it's the same sort of idea for students who are included that may, if we have more significant disabilities, right? So the, those kids are being included right now, all over the country and the world. Absolutely. Right. All we have to do is actually change the system for those students to be successful. It's not like those individual student are so exceptional. Right? Absolutely.

Eric Wells:

And there are really good models to follow for that. One of our former assistant secretaries for education, Tom wrote a book a while back with Lauren about effective inclusive schools and highlighted a few different case studies out of the Boston area, where they were very successfully, including

students who with significant support needs in regular settings as fully belonging, valued members of their school communities. If you look closer to my home in Oregon, we have a few districts that are doing really good, but I'll highlight Westland Wilsonville and the leadership Dr. Jennifer Spencer Iams, who they moved their system to a fully inclusive system and have worked incredibly hard to make that happen and work. And one of my best days at the department was a day that I got to go sit and experience that because what I noted over and over again is despite having been in classrooms for a lot of my life, it was not easy to pick out that these are our students who are being served through an individualized education program. And so when you change the conditions under which learning happens, and you use principles of universal design and you build structures and places for all learners, disability disappears. And that's, to me, the strongest evidence that it is a social construct. Disability occurs because we built barriers that make it, so students show up as they are in the world and access their education appropriately. And we can unbuild those barriers. Thank

Tim Villegas:

Thank you for that, Jennifer actually I interviewed Jennifer a little bit over a year ago. Fantastic. Yes.

Lindsey Pike:

Yeah. And just to kind of add to it Eric was saying, you know, one of the things that people will say when we talk about like, oh, full inclusion, like fully everybody in the same space with everything they need to be, to be successful, you know, a lot of times people will point to, well, we haven't fully funded IDEA, so, which is totally true, we haven't fully funded IDEA and we could do so much if we could do that. But the examples that Eric was pointing out shows that, you know, at the local level and at the state level, there's still the ability to do this even given in the current parameters that we have based on federal and state support. Right. And so, you know, even in places like Florida, or even in places similar that don't, that allocate their funding for schooling different and continually point to the federal government as to why they can't do things.

Lindsey Pike:

You know, that's, it's just simply not true because we have counterexamples to that. And so, you know, it, it, to not, to not be able to do something fully over is not a good excuse to not make strides towards that goal or that ideal. So we, we have to get out of this black and white all or nothing mindset. And unfortunately I think we use that as a crutch a lot to not take steps towards, towards inclusion, there's always room for improvement, if that is what your heart wants to do. And that is what you're committed to doing. You'll find a way, or you'll find an excuse, right?

Tim Villegas:

I like that.

Zerek Mayes:

I'll add onto it briefly. I think, again, it speaks to our courage to take risks in the face of change. And I love what Eric was saying, as far as, you know, they're not being one entry point and one thought that I've been having that I've not shared with the group as we've been having the conversation is I am the entry point. We each are the entry point, whether that be you know, whatever within my sphere, whether it's my classroom, my school, my whatever, I become the entry point. And if my desire is to include all, I begin to take on thoughts that ask, okay, if that door is too small for someone to come into,

just for an example, if it's not wide enough, what do I do to remove that barrier? How can I take action to really create this space and make it fully inclusive for all? I am the entry point,

Dena Slanda:

I think that's exactly the, the point that that you just made is the point that we were trying to make yesterday. And that we'll continue to make is that at the implementation level, you know, we continue to think that we need to make a difference at the policy level that we need to go big or go home. And that's not what we need to do. We need to start at the door. We need to start in my classroom. We need to start at that, that ground level implementation level is really where the impact is. And then we remove, or, you know, we, we make that change and we get the right people to continue that movement with us. So how do we do that? And, and that really is the, is the most impact impactful place, because when you start to think like that that's contagious, the person next to you is gonna wanna think that way too.

Dena Slanda:

And then that person next to them is gonna think that way too. And that extends and grows through the school. And if people don't like it and they don't feel comfortable around that over time, they're gonna leave. They're gonna be like, you know what, maybe this isn't the right place for me um and so you're really gonna then attract the right people to your school, attract the right people to the leadership at your school. So I think that that's the best way to enact change. I I'm so glad that you said that because the right entry point is gonna start with just one person.

Tim Villegas:

So let me, let me follow up up with that, with the, with where change happens, because I'll just give you my personal story. Cause you, you, you all don't know but you know, being a special education teacher a, a self-contained special ed class teacher for 13 years, and then three years at a district level. I mean the whole time I was a special ed teacher, I was trying to do this work. Right. My teaching credential was working with students with the most significant, you know, support needs. So I couldn't even get a job in a general ed class because of my credential. So as I'm trying to do this work and, you know, trying to, you know, send kids out and make change, you know, and, and preaching, trying to convert people to be inclusionists right. I get burned out and when I move to the district level, you know, my supervisors don't want to hear what I have to say. They don't want to know about my, my advocacy work. They're not interested, it's not important to them. It's not for that system to change. So then I was always like, well, what do I do? Where do I go? Where, you know, and fortunately, I was a, I had an outlet, right. I had this podcast, I had my writing, I had all that stuff, but if it does start with us, right, where, where is the point where it's like, well, we gotta really where's that top down part? You know what I mean?

Dena Slanda:

Well, I think, and it's such a great question because I think that it can happen in so many different ways. Right? So for example, some of the ideas that we talked about, where it happens at identification, it happens at evaluation and it happens at placement. So if we were just to take those three examples and I were to say, okay, within identification, if I'm the general education teacher maybe I don't have to really sit here and advocate because sometimes people are going to push back and there's gonna be resistance. But if change is gonna happen, then maybe within identification, it could just be that I'm referring less students. Maybe I'm educating myself more on what a multi-tiered system support is

supposed to be. I'm gonna learn more about how I can intervene for students, and I'm gonna learn more about, I can diversify my teaching strategies to reach more students.

Dena Slanda:

So that way I can refer less students or push less students to tier two and tier three of the multi-tier systems of support. And now there's less referrals to special education. That is a way I think of improving outcomes. And that's what I'm doing at the identification level. If I'm a school psychologist, and we're talking about the evaluation level, then maybe now as I'm evaluating students, I'm considering my own biases and my own assumptions. I'm thinking about judgment calls and assessments. I'm really taking a step back. And again, I'm not thinking about advocacy, I'm not pushing others, which again, thinking about what you just said, it, it gets too much, but I'm thinking about how I'm making decisions about how each child's assessments. I'm thinking about how I'm ensuring every result is accurate. I'm flipping that narrative where I'm thinking where it's strength based and it's not deficit driven.

Dena Slanda:

That's where I think I can make a difference. And then when it comes to placement, I'm a special education teacher. And now I'm really committed to those inclusive settings. I'm the decision driver on that. I don't have to convince anybody else. I'm gonna be committed to the least restrictive environment. I'm gonna be the person that's gonna ask myself and ask others pretty often, how do I get this child in the general education setting and access to the general education curriculum? What supports can we put in place to ensure that that's where that child is? What is the best way that we can get access to those materials and resources and other items for this child? What are the strengths that the child has so they can be successful? Those are the way is I think that we can make some of those most the, make the most impact. So that way one I'm not getting burnt out. Like you said, because that does lead to burnout. It does lead to stress because my voice can only carry for so long. And so far before I, I start to feel that impact and that pushback that might lead to at least a little bit of inner peace and a huge impact for the students that I serve over time.

Eric Wells:

The other thing I would add is I don't, I don't think it's either a top down or a bottom up thing. It's a, both, and it goes back again, I think, to knowing the context that you serve in. And so a significant amount of my work, because I work at the state level is policy work. And so the context that I work in a lot is what's personal local and immediate to me is trying to establish statewide conditions that lead to more equitable outcomes. And that's, that is the work of a state education agency. That's not necessarily the work of a local educate agent agency though. There's lots of policy options at the board level. We had a question yesterday after our session about how do I go advocate with the federal government and how do I make change in this?

Eric Wells:

And, and it's a great question because we think like, well, they're the very tip top of the pyramid. They're the ones who are going to make the decisions that allow things to happen. And there's absolutely good advocacy that needs to happen there. And so we shared ideas about how to connect with CEC and, and the folks there that do a lot of good advocacy work, but is that your best next step? And so my assistant superintendent talks about and has a, a post on the front of her that says, what is my best next step? And it's a reminder for her to know whether all her name and she's a great leader that there is really

wonderful work to be done no matter who you are, or how you show up in the system and your work and how you don't get burned out is, is thinking through what do I do next to move me towards the value and vision that I hold for, where we're headed

Lindsey Pike:

And just real quick. You know, for me, my focus is, and continues to be a lot about teacher preparation and building that new cadre of teachers and, and also in service, professional learning is important, especially when we talk about that induction piece, those first three to five years, if teachers don't make it past the first five years, they're less likely to make a career in teaching. Like we know that that's a statistic that's, that's coming up. And so, you know, for me, as, as we've been talking about, like, what can you do? Where's your role? And how can you affect change in your locus of control? When we talk about teacher preparation and what we're doing for building those programs, for those, for this next cadre of teachers that are coming in, you know, we always, we kind of harp on knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Lindsey Pike:

That's the key tenants for teacher preparation. And I think something that you know, we don't always leverage to the best of the ability is that disposition piece, you know, and something that I always come back is, you know, it's too, and it has really been a driving force for me. And maybe it's a little clue, but you know, my, my Angelou says that when you, you do the best you can until you know, better. And then when you know, better, you do better. And so I'm really committed to helping people know better, because I do believe that when people know better, most people generally try to do better. And so if we can help our pre-service teachers through those experiences, that they're having the knowledge, they're getting the skills sets they're, they're developing to know better than when they go into classrooms, they're going to do better.

Lindsey Pike:

And I feel strongly about infusing things like the sociopolitical history of disability and the sociopolitical history of special education, looking at policy and legislation specific to education and specific to special education, because it's both education and they impact all students in ensuring that our teachers have a really strong foundation there. As well as collaboration. So general education professionals, special education professionals relate to service providers, learning how to collaborate with parents, learning how to collaborate and speak with administration and creating that culture. So there's a, a great amount of work that I'm excited to continue doing and really get deeper in as it goes for teacher preparation, because, you know, we're, again, we wanna diversify that obviously, but we also wanna make sure that we're giving them the right disposition to where they have this same equity, minded, inclusion, mind, commitment to best serving all students.

Dena Slanda:

So I just wanna bring us back to kind of why we gathered today, cuz I know that we're focused on inclusion, but we also came to discuss racially, culturally and linguistically diverse students. And I feel like we've kind of strayed from that pretty significantly. So when we're thinking about that, I also wanna point out that the current systems were meant to segregate students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. And I think that that's an important point to make the you know, having self-contained settings was a way to continue segregation. It was a way that if we place students in subjective categories, which previously were MMR, mildly, mentally r***** was a way to keep students

of color out of our general education classrooms. It was a way to keep them out of our regular schools. So that is why this history continues.

Dena Slanda:

So I think that we need to remember that that's just history repeating itself. So if we want to change those systems, we have to look at our history. We have to look at why they exist in the first place. And that is really critical and we can't con you know, dedicate ourselves to equity if we don't look to our path. And I think that that is why we see some of the resistance that we see today because some of our current educators and even our upcoming educators and even why our multi-tiered system of supports replicates previous systems, because there's this idea that if I, if, if the child is referred to special education and they receive special education services, aren't they going to leave my classroom? If I, if, if I gather all the data that I need to gather and I send them to special education, aren't they going to go to this place?

Dena Slanda:

Hmm. And we seem to have forgotten that. And, and I believe it was Pressy that said this, that special education is not a place. It is a set of services. And that is a lesson that I believe our special education teachers have learned, but I'm not sure that all, all educators have learned that special education is a set of services. And I think that until everybody understands that we're going to continue to see MTSS replicate previous service pre previous frameworks and previous situations that we've had. And that I think is, is the biggest issue. And we're going to continue to see con you know, segregated settings, a lot of that self-contained classrooms. You know, we see students being placed in more you know can't think of the word right now, it's escaping me, but more secluded settings, more restrictive environments punished with more harsh sentences or not sentences, but more harsh punishments. And a lot of that stems back to our previous history and the previous you know, reasons why we have those self-contained settings in the first place. Hmm.

Tim Villegas:

Is there any anyone else like to add to that? Okay. So we have kind of embedded throughout this whole conversation. We've talked about things that we can do. But as we're closing our conversation and we have listeners who, who do want some concrete steps what are your, what's your advice to them and where can they learn more about like this equity work,

Eric Wells:

Find a critical friend and start the conversation. So we talked yesterday about though, there is no one entry point equity work starts with internal work. It's inside out work. First it's knowing who you are and how you show up in the world and is knowing how your actions may be perpetuating inequity or leading to more equity. And you only know that when you have good friends who are willing to call you on the actions you take on the actions you ache that are harming kids and families and communities. And so one of the things we talk about, particularly when we work in anti-racist work is we hold things very deeply as part of our identity. And so if somebody says, oh, you're a racist. Then the way we take that in white dominant culture is that means I'm a bad person, and we need to shift that mindset.

Eric Wells:

And so in some of the equity trainings that I've been involved and they talk about it as not so much being part of your identity, but being like, Hey friend, you got a little bit of spinach in your teeth. And so

if I'm a good friend to somebody, I'm gonna tell them that when I see them smiling, because I don't want my friend going around smiling and spinach in their teeth. And likewise, if I see you doing something that is causing harm to children and families, I am going to tell you that not because that makes you a bad person. And so that's what I don't want to anyone to walk away from this conversation thinking, wow, I must be a horrible person. If I'm trying to do these things, this is not a matter of shame, blame or judgment equity work is not, it's a matter of recognizing that we've built systems that are designed to have beneficiaries and the oppressed and that we need to rebuild those systems so that they're not designed that way. And that's not a moral fair in people that is a structural decision and a system decision that we've made that we need to unmake.

Lindsey Pike:

I love that you mentioned that piece about it's not a blame game, right. And we have to move past the idea of, if you have bias, it's not, if it's you have bias, where, or is it, and how does that come out in your, a actions? How is that manifesting? And then in this particular context, how does that show up in what you're doing in your, in education, right. And, and what you're doing with students that are diverse from you. And so that's, I I'm that that's so central to the conversation. And that is something that I think is really a crux of this work is people have to decide that it's not important about whether my feelings are hurt, or if I feel badly about, that's not the point of this, we have to agree that that's less important. Then the common goal moving forward, which is equitable and inclusive education for all students, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities needs, et cetera.

Lindsey Pike:

So I guess an additional suggestion that I would give is there are a lot of great resources out there that really break down some of these practical steps that you can take. And a lot of times, at least for me, the ones that seem to be most helpful are the ones that provide things like guiding questions, because there's not gonna be an answer for every single circumstance. There's just, there's too many. We're so diverse. There's every student is different. Every person that's trying to do this work is different. And so looking for resources that have things like that, the guiding questions is great. One thing that I would mention, and I mentioned yesterday is the antiracism antiracism and UDL book by Andrew Fitzgerald, and that's through the cast organization for UDL, you can go on their website, it's a fantastic read, and it has so any important guiding questions.

Lindsey Pike:

And it really gives you these great places to start or next steps to go to. So that's just one text, but really look for ones that, that have that practical piece, cuz I'm like that too. When I, when I'm learning about something, whether that's in a course or I'm a professional learning or wherever I'm going, like I'm constantly looking for the answer of like the, so what, and the, what do I do on Monday thing? And so I'm really appreciative of resources like that. So just start with your critical friend, maybe they have a great, maybe they have great resources and, and, you know, I'm, I'm fortunate to have three critical friends that are with me right now. And so we can, you know, we can, I constantly get resources or just talking through with them. So, so that's a great place to start educate yourself cuz when you know better, you can do better.

Dena Slanda:

I absolutely agree. I like resources that ask me questions that get me to think, but cultivating genius is another great place to start that and equity framework for how to develop schools that are equity

minded. So that is one resource that I would recommend and it has a lot of guiding questions for educators to set up classrooms. It does take an approach, more focused on literacy, but I do know that schools that are using it even for their mathematic setting up mathematics as well. So not just for literacy, so it can be applied to other types of context or content.

Zerek Mayes:

And then I'll just add one more resource. So I'm a mental health fanatic. I kind of lean in that direction. And so just even clinically, one thing that has helped me is studying case studies. And so I have a book called case studies on diversity and social justice education by Paul Gorsky and SEMA Patin. Again, it's a book replete of case studies with follow up questions. How would you have of reacted in this situation? How could you react? Interesting responded differently? Yeah. Case studies just to help us begin to process the idea.

Tim Villegas:

Fantastic. Fantastic. Let me see. We're about 45, 46 minutes. So before we wrap up and we say goodbye and we sign off is there anything else that's just on your mind that you just wanna share with our audience of educators?

Zerek Mayes:

I'll just pass it along. As we're doing this work, we've kind of hinted at it, but I would say give yourself grace, give yourself room to make mistakes, anything worth being done. They're gonna be some mistakes involved. So give yourself grace and be gentle and kind to yourself along the way.

Dena Slanda:

Ditto to that. I, I appreciate you saying that. I think that every day we learn something new. And you know, I think that that's a critical piece is just knowing that the work is never done. There's something to always to learn the next they, and continue, continue the process. It's a, it's a process it's a continual learning

Lindsey Pike:

To those that are a part of this work in the education setting or parents or whatever the case is. Thank you. You're doing it. Yay go. You like, yeah. You know we always think, oh, I could do better. I need to do more. You are doing it. You know, you are doing it. And thank you for that because I can't continue to do what I wanna do in terms of this journey without you and vice versa. And so thank you for being a part of it. And yeah, I don't know that sounds we, but you're doing it. Keep going. Good job.

Eric Wells:

I think I would echo Lindsey's things. I mean, it's no surprise. Education is really hard and has been for going on what, 20 months now? Well, long before that really, but it's been incredibly hard and near crisis levels for, as we went through the pandemic. And so we still have teachers showing up and doing the work every single day. We still have educational assistance showing up and doing the work related services providers and all these people who care deeply about the kids and the families and the communities that they serve. And it would be so easy to walk away from doing this work right now because there's no shortage of wonderful jobs out there that people can go get. And so thank you for continuing to show up for your kids every day for standing in the gap for equity for those systems were not designed to serve and just keeping to do doing the work.

Eric Wells:

The other thing I would add to that is like, even though it's hard, we still need to do the work. And so it would be very easy to say, oh yeah, this equity thing, like that's important, but we're in survival mode right now. And so let's not, let's put that off until next year. Mm. And so I would challenge anybody listening, like what is the one concrete step that you could take right now to do it? Because it is true that we can't finish the work and it is true that we are all struggling, but it is equally true that our kids need us to stand up and start moving towards a more equitable system,

Tim Villegas:

Well Zerek, Dena, Lindsey, and Eric, thank you so much for your time and being on the think inclusive podcast. We really appreciate it.

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