

Episode #9: Interview with Dr. Donald Gillian-Daniel and Robin Greenler, co-leaders of NSF's Eddie Bernice Johnson INCLUDES Aspire Alliance National Change Team

Dr. Ivory Toldson:

Hello and welcome to Collaborative Strategies for Inclusive Change. This is the official podcast of the NSF INCLUDES Coordination Hub and your source for exploring the innovative projects and partnerships transforming the STEM enterprise. Each episode of this podcast series will feature an in-depth conversation between me, Ivory Toldson and special guests about their groundbreaking work and broadening access and participation in STEM fields. Here we discuss a range of topics from successful outreach programs to implementing best practice strategies that ensure underrepresented groups can reach their full potential. Plus, you'll gain valuable insights into how we can increase diversity and create real lasting change within our communities. Today, we're honored to be joined by two incredible educators who are using their talents to revolutionize the way STEM education is delivered and experienced. First, we have Robin Greenler, the Assistant Director for the Center for Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning.

She has spearheaded this initiative of the Network National Learning Community with 43 institutions focusing on implementing research-based active learning pedagogies and inclusive teaching practices. Next we have Dr. Donald Gillian-Daniel, the Director of Professional Development and Engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Assistant Director of Wisconsin's Equity and Inclusion Laboratory. His current work focuses on supporting faculty in their development of inclusive professional practices in both higher education and STEM disciplines. Additionally, he co-leads the NSF's Eddie Bernice Johnson INCLUDES Aspire Alliance change team. Join us today as we talk to these two amazing educators about their work and how it's making a difference across the STEM landscape. Thank you all so, so much for being here.

Dr. Donald Gillian-Daniel:

Thanks, Ivory.

Robin Greenler:

Thanks so much for having us, Ivory.

Dr. Ivory Toldson:

Yeah, absolutely. So first, can you tell us a little bit about your work with Aspire Alliance, focusing on development and execution of an inclusive professional framework? Let us know how the framework was developed and how you're using it?

Robin Greenler:

Yeah. So the inclusive professional framework is a piece of work that we've been working on through the NSF Eddie Bernice Johnson INCLUDES Aspire Alliance. In a nutshell, the goal of the Aspire Alliance is to increase the diversity of STEM faculty and supports systemic change in the higher education system. So that's a big goal. The Alliance is looking at three leverage points as a way to do that work. There's an institutional change where they really focus on the higher education institution and they're looking at what are the practices, the policies, the culture in that institution. They have a team of people who make a multi-year commitment and they have cohorts of teams that are doing this work that starts with reflection and assessment and then moves to action planning.

The next leverage point for the Alliance is regional change. And the regional change team is stepping back and looking at a broader ecosystem and saying, within a given geographic region, there's a number of institutions of higher education. There might be a large R1 research institution, but there's also a lot of other two year and community colleges often in that same area. And a lot of people go through those community colleges, those two year colleges, and make decisions about whether they want to pursue a STEM career, whether they want to go into the STEM workforce. And so the regional change is saying, how can those two very different types of institutions work together to help increase the visibility, the existence, the retention of underrepresented STEM faculty so that we can create a more welcoming environment for underrepresented students seeing themselves as belonging in stem?

The third leverage initiative that Don and I co-lead, which is the National Change Initiative, and we're going to talk more about that. But in that work we're saying broadly, how can we impact faculty nationwide to help them, give them the tools to be more inclusive and be more socially just, and help create a more welcoming environment in their classroom, in their department, in their institution? How can we start helping people see how to bring an equity mindset to all of the work they're doing? The theory of change for the Aspire Alliance is that in order to do this kind of transformative change, we need to work at multiple levels. So you see that with the regional, national and institutional change, but each of those teams is also working from an organizational perspective, but also individual perspective, and that both of those perspectives are necessary for that transformative change. In that context, we worked on development of this inclusive professional framework, which is one that is really at the heart of the work that Don and I have been doing in National Change.

Dr. Donald Gillian-Daniel:

So the framework came out of work that we did in an INCLUDES pilot grant that was part of the CERT network. In that project, one of our strategic goals was considering the different competencies that faculty needed to be inclusive in their teaching, advising and mentoring in research. One of the things that we noticed was that there were elements that were common across all of those different faculty roles. When the Aspire Alliance was formed, we continued that work and what we realized was there were three core domains that were common across multiple faculty roles.

First one is an identity. Understanding your own and other social and cultural identity and how that impacts the teaching and learning space. The second was intercultural. Thinking about building skills to navigate intercultural differences more effectively in both domestic and international settings. And then the third one was relational. Taking those two initial ideas and applying them through the relationships you build in the way that you communicate with others. And so the framework allows us to look at those core domains as they apply to student-focused faculty roles like inclusive teaching, advising and mentoring and research as well as institution or peer focused roles like collegueship and leadership.

Dr. Ivory Toldson:

So thank you all for giving us a little bit more information about the Alliance. And I was particularly struck by the three leverage points because you all talked about the higher education aspect of it, the regional change and the national initiative. And I think about how we get so caught up in our own silos a lot of times, you know you have these community colleges around you, you have minority serving institutions, you have these large research one institutions all in the same region. But a lot of times we don't think about how they fit together and how we can create the type of system together that creates this national change. So I'm wondering how you all go about getting people to think differently about where they are and how do you implement these leverage points in order to create that national change?

Robin Greenler:

So I think a lot of it comes back to that inclusive professional framework and it has to do with this idea that transformative change really needs to happen at multiple levels. And whether that's within your institution or broadly thinking about region of clusters of institution or thinking about nationally where it is that faculty not only in their institution, but what are the other places that they interact and need to think about how to be more inclusive and more equitable. So when Don and I think about this, we often think about three levels of work that needs to be done in order for transformative systems change. So not changing an individual, but really looking at the whole system. And I think this gets at your question, Ivory, about how do we think more broadly and get out of those silos.

And at the top level is structural change. And this is where, honestly, academics love to be. They like to talk, "If we need change, we need more money, we need more initiatives, let's throw in a policy, let's hire a person in this office." Those are all structural changes. And when we're thinking about equity and inclusion, that's really important. It's really important to look at where the money is and creating people and resources and policies that support diversity, equity and inclusion. But if you go down to the next level from that structural change level, we're getting at the changes of relations. So what are the power dynamics? What are the relationships? What are the connections amongst people? Because those policies rely on a culture that has relationships where people are able to interact in ways that are equitable and inclusive and that we have to also spend time helping people see where their mental models are actual blinders and are not seeing and are making assumptions and biases that are not true.

And so we have to get at that mental model level so that people can be changing the way they see the world, the assumptions they're making, the understandings. And it's at that level the National Change team hopes to work at both those levels. We need to look at systems and we need to look at policies, but we also need to look at individuals and the mental models that support all of those. And there's no policy in the world that's going to be effectively implemented if the individuals aren't also changed. And so we're trying to work at both of those levels.

Dr. Ivory Toldson:

Yeah, thank you so much. And Donald, that sounds like it connects to the framework, the identity, the intercultural and relational. How do you see that fitting into the larger picture?

Dr. Donald Gillian-Daniel:

The framework allows us to really poke at those mental models and do that individual level work to really focus on the biases and assumptions folks hold so that when they engage in those interpersonal relationships, that middle level that Robin was talking about, where you're looking at relationships and power dynamics, they're coming into those spaces thinking more equitably about it. So that when those final policy and procedure and resource allocation decisions get made, they're done through an equity lens. And so the framework is really a good way of doing that individual level work to promote broader level systems change with an equity focus.

Dr. Ivory Toldson:

Yeah, absolutely. And I know that you've applied this framework too, you have adapted for professional societies. I wanted you to talk a little bit more about that and also how can this framework be applied to other settings?

Dr. Donald Gillian-Daniel:

So because the framework allows us to focus on both what individual mental models or biases, assumptions exist, they also let us think more deeply about the biases and assumptions that are baked into systems and structures, higher ed, professional disciplinary societies. And so we've worked in both NSF Advanced Partnership and NSF RCN:LEAPS projects to use the framework to think about, at a society level, what are the different functions that societies have? So there are things like leadership, membership, marketing communications, award structures. If we do that individual level work around mental models, when the individuals in the societies perform those functions, they can do so with an equity-based mindset. And so it really allows us to think from both an individual to an organizational level and we think that it applies much more broadly, as Robin can tell you,.

Robin Greenler:

So in a sense, this focus on identity and interpersonal and intercultural mental model change allows people to develop this equity mindset that they will then critically assess all the roles and all the decisions they're making. And so it might be that they need to carry that into all their

different roles, whether it's the classroom or whether it's leadership roles or whether it's working with colleagues. And some of us might be very familiar with the idea of bringing diversity and equity consciousness into all the work we do, but even then, how can we extend that consciousness into different contexts and different aspects of equity?

We thought about race and ethnicity a lot, but haven't thought a lot about neurodiversity. How do we be welcoming in there? Or gender identity. So there's different kinds of interventions, there's different kinds of equity aspects to think about and it allows people to really bring that mindset in and then critically look at everything they're doing through that lens. And obviously there's not a point where you're there, but we're just constantly understanding more about our own identity and therefore understanding about the identity of other people in the room and how we can accommodate that.

Dr. Ivory Toldson:

Yeah, I really appreciate what you all are saying. And Donald, when you talked about biases being baked into the system, a lot of times we don't think about that. And a lot of times our societies and other organizations, they'll put out statements and they can affirm their core values, but do they actually practice what we preach? And it sounds like you all are talking about taking that deep dive, looking at the functions that we play, looking at the activities that we do and who really benefits. So I really appreciate that. My last question is, talk a little bit about some of the activities of the project and where do you see the project going?

Dr. Donald Gillian-Daniel:

So one of the key things that we've done is created a summer institute and we wanted to have an immersive, holistic professional development experience. We focused on most recently Center for Teaching and Learning in STEM and center directors as well as institutional administrators, department chairs, deans, and provosts, because these are really change agents with decision making power at an institution and broad reach. The institute really follows the inclusive professional framework. So it begins with an exploration of social and cultural identities, building intercultural awareness, and then thinking about skills for fostering more inclusive relationships and communicating more effectively. We also build in strong organizational action planning process with an equity lens so that institutional teams leave there with clear direction for the way that they want to move diversity, equity and inclusion change forward on their campus.

Robin Greenler:

Yeah, I think one of the things that can be challenging, especially in the kind of grant environment of three-year, five-year grants that want to see change. And we all want to see change, but we also need to understand, I think that this is a long game and we're all needing to be in the long game on this. It's going to need varied approaches and some projects work at different leverage points. And I think that's going to be really important. It's a long-term investment in changing individual mental models incrementally and continually, but it's also changing organizations structurally at their very core with their policies. What's tenure and

promotion policy? Or what's the pay structure policy or hiring policies? So it's changing at all those levels and we have to work at different points in this whole ecosystem of higher education and say, "So this work is a long-term investment in changing mental models individually, incrementally and continually." There's ongoing process and in changing the structural organizations, looking at the policy and the practices that those organizations do. And that's the way we're going to really change the face of STEM and higher education.

Dr. Ivory Toldson:

Thank you so much. You all have given us so much to think about. And when I think about the theme for this podcast, Inclusive Strategies for Collaborative Change, you all have really helped us to think differently about how we accomplished that. Some of my key takeaways is that it starts with yourself and your own identity, your culture and how you relate to others. But then you have to look at yourself in relation to the environment around you, both those that are very close to you in proximity and those who are a little bit further away, but still in your sphere. People who are working in the same organizations, but also those working for organizations that do different types of work, but that can fit in with what you're doing and how all of these things that happen at a local level can affect national change. So the model and the framework that you all have built is really compelling and something that I think we could all incorporate into our own work and lives. So thank you all so much for what you're doing.

Thank everyone who is listening right now for tuning in to this podcast. You can look at this and other podcasts on the NSF INCLUDES National Network website as well as social media. We put it all on Twitter, LinkedIn, various newsletters. But we want everyone to know that through collaborative strategies, we can create the kind of STEM landscape of the future, one that truly represents the diversity of this nation. So thank you to our participants today and also thank you to all of our listeners.

Speaker 4:

The findings in this podcast are based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under grant number 1818635. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.