

Beginning Teacher Study: The Development of Inclusive Practice



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Beginning Teachers & Inclusive Education During COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our teaching and learning, as well as our students' learning in profound ways. Teaching and learning at a distance, much of it online, became the norm due to required social distancing, with parents and caregivers taking on increased responsibility for the learning of their children. We quickly and have continually adapted our teaching (and our learning) approaches to provide continuity in education for all students. Without a doubt, this has created challenges for all. In this new teaching context, we wonder, how is the learning of students with special education needs considered and addressed? How has this new teaching context affected beginning teachers' instructional practice?

Findings from the Beginning Teacher Study show the vital importance that school leadership and mentoring play in beginning teacher reports of self-efficacy. Now, more than ever, it is critical that school leaders provide the support teachers need to effectively reach all students. Although the situation is challenging for all students, it is uniquely so for students with special education needs. For example, we encourage discussions around how strategies for online instruction may or may not be suitable for students with special educational needs. Moving rapidly to teaching in this new arena must include attention to universal design for learning and digital accessibility for students and teachers - we cannot presume that every student has the technology, time, skill, motivation or support to engage and to learn online. Monitoring how students adjust and manage this new way of learning is vital to ensuring that they are engaged and continue to learn.

In this issue, we have curated resources of particular interest to inclusive educators and school leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is indeed a time to reimagine teaching and learning – a time for innovation.

Finally, we remind beginning teachers that you can't do it alone. Connect virtually and in person, in safe ways, with colleagues and other professionals regularly for emotional and professional connection and support.

Message from Dr. Jacqueline Specht

It is hard to believe that we began this process 5 years ago. I thank the team of researchers that have worked tirelessly on this project over that time. It has been amazing to see how this work has created new teams and partnerships of people interested in inclusive education nationally and internationally. I feel truly privileged to work with you all.



I especially want to thank those teachers who have participated over the years in completing questionnaires and sharing experiences that have shaped their beliefs, instruction, and confidence in teaching in inclusive classrooms. Those who hold the core belief that all children belong and all learning is valued can share so much with other educators. There are times when it seems like the move towards a more inclusive world is slipping, but then I listen to our new teachers, and I am buoyed by the conviction and commitment. Your students will benefit greatly.

Research Update

In 2015, with financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Beginning Teacher Study began 5 years of research following preservice and beginning teachers as they progress through their education programs and out into their first few years of teaching. The 2019-20 academic year marks the fifth and final year of data collection. Year-to-year analyses are underway, and themes are emerging from the interview data.



In Year 1 (2015-16), the team collected almost 1,400 paper-based surveys from teacher candidates entering a two-year B.Ed. program at 14 institutions across 8 provinces. In Year 2 (2016-17) approximately 1,200 additional surveys were collected. Candidates from both cohorts who agreed to continue participating were contacted via email in their second year and invited to complete the survey once again, online. Follow-up telephone interviews with a sample of teacher candidates have been conducted annually since 2017. In 2019, follow-up surveys and interviews were conducted with all cohorts who are now beginning practicing teachers.

In 2020, the final online surveys and telephone interviews are being conducted with beginning teachers. This is one of the very few such longitudinal studies following new teachers and their development of inclusive practices.

International Connections

International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disability (IASSID) World Congress, Glasgow, UK, August 2019

Dr. Jacqueline Specht organized a symposium at the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disability (IASSID) conference. Team members Dr. Sheila Bennett, Dr. Jacqueline Specht and Dr. Scott Anthony Thompson shared research findings from the Beginning Teacher Study with the international audience.

European Congress of Educational Research, September 2019, Hamburg Germany

In September 2019, members of the Beginning Teacher Study presented at the European Congress of Educational Research. Dr. Donna McGhie-Richmond from University of Victoria and Dr. Jacqueline Specht, Western University have partnered with Dr. Susanne Miesera from the Technical University of Munich to compare how Canadian and German beginning teachers view experiences that contribute to the development of inclusive practice.



Dr. Scott Anthony Thompson and Dr. Jacqueline Specht at the ASSIDD



From left to right. Dr. Jacqueline Specht, Dr. Donna McGhie-Richmond, Dr. Susanne Miesera.

Student News

The Beginning Teacher Study welcomes graduate students Petra Owusu, Fizza Haider and Jessica Delorey.



Petra Owusu has recently joined our team of graduate student research assistants, and was one of three recipients of the 2020 Inclusive Education Research Award. This award is funded by Foundation Western and administered by the Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education. Petra is completing her final year in the School and Applied Child Psychology M.A. program at Western University. Petra's research project concerns the evaluation of the peer-to-peer support program from START (Statewide Autism Resources and Training). Under the supervision of **Dr. Jacqueline Specht**, Petra's research will focus on the effects of mentorship on students

who are at risk for suspension and expulsion. She is interested in further exploring the benefits of school-based mentorship programming and the impact it can have on students' social and emotional behaviours. Petra hopes to pursue further research surrounding this topic.

Student News continued



Fizza Haider is a M.A. student at the University of Victoria, pursuing graduate work in special/inclusive education within Educational Psychology under the supervision of **Dr. Donna McGhie-Richmond**. She is interested in investigating beginning teachers' attitudes and understanding of instructional strategies and frameworks (i.e., Universal Design for Learning) and auxiliary aids (i.e., assistive technologies) which have the potential to mitigate the educational challenges of students with diverse learning needs. Moreover, she wishes to research ways in which those attitudes can be molded and enhanced at the preservice level so that teachers can implement inclusive strategies more effectively. Previously, she has worked with both children and young adults with varying levels of cognitive, developmental and physical abilities, evaluating their needs, providing appropriate instruction, and facilitating the provision of academic accommodations. Fizza has recently joined the Beginning Teacher Study research team.

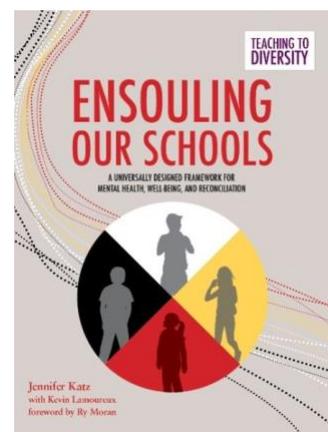


Jessica Delorey is a M.A. student in the School and Applied Child Psychology program at Western University. Under the supervision of **Dr. Jacqueline Specht**, Jessica's research focuses on understanding the experiences that shape beginning teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning in inclusive classrooms as they transition from their teacher education program into the early years of their career.

Book Award

Katz, J. & Lamoreux, K. (2018). *Ensouling our Schools: A Universally Designed Framework for Mental Health, Well-Being, and Reconciliation*. Winnipeg, MB: Portage & Main Press.

Each year, the editors of Exceptionality Education International select a nominated book that was published in the previous calendar year, and which addresses the area of special education. This year, it was awarded to Dr. Jennifer Katz and Kevin Lamoreux for their book, *Ensouling our Schools: A Universally Designed Framework for Mental Health, Well-Being, and Reconciliation*. In *Ensouling Our Schools*, author Dr. Jennifer Katz weaves together methods of creating schools that engender mental, spiritual, and emotional health while developing intellectual thought and critical analysis. Kevin Lamoreux, as former National Education Lead for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, contributes his expertise to this book regarding Indigenous approaches to mental and spiritual health that benefit all students and address the TRC Calls to Action.



Helpful Resources and Publications

Wide Open School is a free collection of online learning experiences for kids curated by the editors at Common Sense. See the [Learning Differences](#) section.

The logo for Wide Open School, featuring the text "WIDEOPENSCHOOL" in a bold, sans-serif font. "WIDE" is in blue, "OPEN" is in orange, and "SCHOOL" is in black.

Understood.org is dedicated to growing and shaping a world where everyone who learns and thinks differently feels supported at home, at school, and at work; a world where people with all types of disabilities have the opportunity to enjoy meaningful careers; a world where more communities embrace differences.

The logo for Understood, featuring a white stylized 'U' icon on a dark blue background, followed by the word "Understood" in white, sans-serif font.

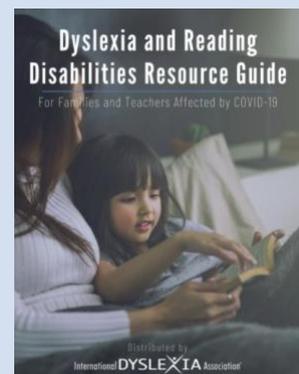
Understood has recently curated resources specifically for distance learning:

- Distance Learning: [6 Best Universal Design Practices for Online Learning](#)
- Distance Learning: [8 Tips to Help Your Child Learn at Home](#)
- See also Understood's page on [Coronavirus Latest Updates and Tips](#).
- And also from Understood "In a world that's built for the typical child, it's not easy to be different."...[The Surprising Benefits of Online Learning for my Not-So-Typical Child](#)
- [5 Free Low-Tech Learning Tools](#)

[Keep Learning](#) - Suggestions for parents and caregivers see BC Open School:

Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities Resource Guide For Families and Teachers Affected by COVID-19 Free download [here](#).

Here is a [curated list](#) by UVic Librarian Pia Russell. We highly recommend the video, "How to be a good parent during COVID-19".

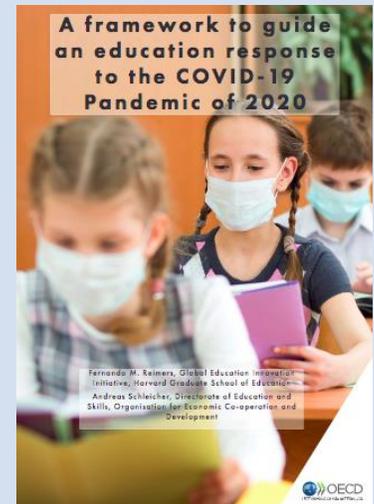


A CTV news item offers further resources on [How to Keep Kids Busy \(and Learning\) During COVID-19](#).

Helpful Resources and Publications continued

For **School Leaders** see:

- Recent report from BC Ministry of Education: [Supporting the K-12 Education Response to COVID-19 in B.C.](#)
- A comprehensive report from Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD): [A Framework to Guide an Education Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020](#)
- On the **Lead to Include** website www.leadtoinclude.org you will find [interactive cases](#) to support principals' professional learning in inclusive education
- From the University of Washington reminders on the design of online meetings: [Accessibility and Universal Design of Online Meetings](#)



Two upcoming **journals** offer important perspectives on Inclusive Education:

- **International Journal of Inclusive Education** Special Issue 2020 Focus: Resources for Inclusive Education: Impacts of Funding and Provision. <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tied20>
- **Exceptionality Education International** Special Issue: Collaborating for Inclusion: The Intersecting Roles of School Leaders, Teachers, and Teacher Education in Translating Research Into Practice. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/eei/>



Finally, a **podcast** resource:

- Gordon Porter – [Why Children are Less Disabled in New Brunswick](#)

Research Team

Principal Investigator

Dr. Jacqueline Specht, Western University,
jspecht@uwo.ca

Co-Investigators

University

Investigator

Acadia

Dr. Lynn Aylward

Brock

Dr. Sheila Bennett

Dr. Tiffany Gallagher

Concordia (Alberta)

Dr. Tim Loreman

British Columbia

Dr. Jennifer Katz

McGill

Ms. Roberta Thomson

Dr. Tara Flanagan

Memorial

Dr. Sharon Penney

Dr. Gabrielle Young

Dr. Kimberly Maich

Moncton

Dr. Angela AuCoin

Dr. Mireille LeBlanc

Mount Saint Vincent

Dr. Jamie Metsala

Ottawa

Dr. Jessica Whitley

Queen's

Dr. Nancy Hutchinson

Regina

Dr. Wanda Lyons

Dr. Jenn de Lugt

Dr. Scott Thompson

Thompson Rivers

Dr. Kim Calder Stegemann

Victoria

Dr. Anne Marshall

Dr. Donna McGhie-Richmond

Western

Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki

Wilfrid Laurier

Dr. Steven Sider



Contact Us

Connect with the Research Team member closest to you from the list to the left,

or...

For general inquiries:

Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education

www.inclusiveeducationresearch.ca

Tel: 519-661-2111

1137 Western Road London, Ontario, Canada, N6G 1G7

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Beginning Teachers Study

Thank you again for your support in this project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the principal investigator, Dr. Jacqueline Specht at jspecht@uwo.ca.