

# Beginning Teacher Study: The Development of Inclusive Practice



Issue 9 || Spring 2021

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## What have we learned about inclusive education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

by Steve Sider

In our research with school leaders over the past year, we have learned that inclusive education is still very much an ideal rather than a reality. Juxtaposed against this reality, we have also learned that inclusive education continues to get lived out in the day-to-day commitments that educators make to welcome and engage every child in their classroom.

Here's the unfortunate reality: The pandemic has shed light on the fact that inclusive education is simply not happening in many classrooms and schools. As one principal stated in an interview with our research team, "The pandemic has shed light on the inequities within our system and the need to develop and support a system that is more adaptive." Other principals shared examples of how their educational teams have struggled to meet the diverse needs of students. A focus on trying to address the seemingly constantly changing rules of "doing school" during the pandemic often meant that students with diverse needs were not prioritized. Instead of starting with the needs of these students in the planning process, their needs often seemed to be an after-thought.

Here's the good news: In our research, we have captured many examples of individual educators working diligently to make inclusive education central to their work, even in the midst of a pandemic. One principal described the challenges as, "How to meet unique needs without some of the environment, schedule, transitions, equipment, and relationships that support daily learning." Yet despite these types

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of challenges, educators demonstrated nimbleness in adapting to the constantly changing landscape in supporting the needs of all learners. As Gurr and Drysdale (2020) state, “Good leaders are able to make sense of ambiguous situations” (p. 27). These educators remained committed to inclusive education, despite a pandemic.

We have published a number of pieces that have examined school leadership and inclusive education during the pandemic. What each of these pieces has demonstrated is that, despite progress made toward inclusive education over the past 40 years, the pandemic has illustrated that we still have a long way to go to ensure that every child is welcomed and supported in their local school context.



### Reference

Gurr, D., & Drysdale, L. (2020). Leadership for challenging times. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 48(1), 24-30.

## Message from the Director

What a year it has been! Our education system has had to twist and turn to follow recommendations from ministries and departments of education across the country. Our educators are a resilient lot, but I hear the tiredness from too many changes and being asked to work in ways with which they are not familiar or do not think are good for students. Yet, they persist. I think of how much we can learn from the experiences of this past year for inclusive education. The biggest point that has been reiterated for me is how much educators want to be there for their students and how willing they are to learn and work in new ways to benefit their students. We can be more inclusive. We need to do better for our students. We need to support our educators in their desire to be their best. Thank you to all the educators (principals, school district administrators, educational assistants, classroom teachers, resource teachers) for all you have done this year. My hope is that the learning will continue, and the Fall will bring us renewed energy.

Dr. Jacqueline Specht



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## Join the Beginning Teacher Study



### **Are you a teacher in Canada in your first 5 years of teaching in K-12?**

Interested in participating in a research study on development of inclusive practice? Receive a \$25 Starbucks card as a thank you. If interested, [click here](#). For more information contact the lead investigator, Jacqui Specht [jspecht@uwo.ca](mailto:jspecht@uwo.ca)

## Research Update

As noted in our Fall newsletter, data collection for the longitudinal aspect of the project has been completed. We are in the process of finishing data collection for the sorting and rating of the experiences of new teachers and hope to have that completed by the end of the summer. The process has been a little slow because we are sure that new teachers are feeling overwhelmed with the work that they have had to do this year. However, as the school year winds down, we hope that more will participate. The advertisement (above) in this newsletter is a reminder of the call for more participants. We continue to write and present.

A new publication can be found here:

Experiences that shape pre-service teachers' inclusive practice beliefs. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1862403>. Delorey, J., Specht, J., Fairbrother, M., Ismailos, L., Villella, M., Charles, E., Vanderloon, M., Gallagher, T., Howell, G., & Whitley, J. (2020).

Additionally, the study research team has organized a symposium at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education conference at this summer's virtual conference:

*Inclusive education and beginning teachers: Implications for research and practice*. Symposium presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Edmonton, Canada. (virtual) Specht, J., Charles, E., de Lugt, J., Delorey, J., Gallagher, T., Haider, F., Howell, G., Ismailos, L., Lau, Z., Maich, K., McGhie-Richmond, D., Metsala, J., Sider, S., Thompson, S., Whitley, J., Young, G. (2021, June).

## International Connections



The travel restrictions of the pandemic have not prevented the Beginning Teacher Study team from contributing to international work on inclusive education. Here are two virtual presentations coming up later this year at the Inclusive and Supportive Education Conference 2021:

***Experiences that shape beginning teachers' inclusive practice beliefs: a group concept mapping study.***

Presented at ISEC 2021, London, UK. (virtual) Specht, J., Delorey, J., Ismailos, L., Fairbrother, M., Charles, E., & Vilella, M. (2021, August).

***Experiences that promote the development of inclusive practice in beginning teachers in Canada and Germany.***

Presented at ISEC 2021, London, UK. (virtual) Miesera, S., Specht, J., McGhie Richmond, D., Howell, G., & Weidenhiller, P. (2021, August).



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## Graduate Student News

### **Graduate Student Team Member Wins Research Award**

Zita Lau, a member of our Graduate Student Research Team has won the 2021 Jessica Jean Campbell Coulson Research Award for her research on beginning teachers' development of inclusive practice.

Zita's research uses data from the Beginning Teachers' Study and is based on Sharma's (2018) framework which suggests that pre-service teachers should be prepared with three apprenticeships: the *head* (confidence in teaching diverse learners), the *heart* (beliefs about inclusion and teachers' responsibilities), and the *hands* (effective inclusive instructional practice). Zita is examining the development of a group of new teachers over four years.



This award was established through Foundation Western by the late David Campbell in memory of his daughter Jessica, who was an inclusive educator. Each year, one award of approximately \$2,000 is given. Congratulations Zita!

Zita Lau, graduate student (at right) with Grace Howell.

## Helpful Resources and Publications

Across Canada the researchers with the Beginning Teacher Study have been examining the implications of the pandemic on inclusive education. They have been voicing concerns and sharing strategies in news media of all kinds. Here find a select list of these important conversations:

Here is a publication focused on supporting students with exceptional learning needs through remote learning. The authors include: J. Whitley, J. MacCormack, I. Matheson, J. Specht, S. Sider, and K. Maich.



### [Diversity via Distance](#)

Lessons learned from families supporting students with special education needs during remote learning

We recommend checking out Jess Whitley's website for more information: [www.jesswhitley.ca](http://www.jesswhitley.ca)



[Schools as an equalizing force: What the pandemic has taught us about school leadership and inclusive education.](#) *Canadian Association of Principals Journal*. S. Sider, J. MacCormack, D. Anderson, and J. Whitley (February, 2021).



["I kept thinking, does it have to be that hard?": Principals' stories of supporting students with special education needs during emergency schooling.](#) *Education Canada*. J. MacCormack, D. Anderson, and S. Sider (January 2021).

[Schools after coronavirus: Seize 'teachable moments' about racism and inequities.](#) *The Conversation*. A. Eizadirad. and S. Sider (July 24, 2020).



## Helpful Resources and Publications continued



Research team member, Tiffany Gallagher, was interviewed in Today's Parent magazine (July 15, 2020).

[E-Learning tips for parents: What to do if distance learning doesn't work – Today's Parent](#)

Our researchers are also busy contributing to the field of inclusive education and teacher education through peer-reviewed journals. See:

- MacCormack, J., Sider, S., Maich, K., & Specht, J. (2021). Self-determination and inclusion: The role of Canadian principals in catalysing inclusive-positive practices. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 17(2). <https://journals.sfu.ca/ijepl/index.php/ijepl/issue/view/213>
- Sider, S. & Trépanier-Bisson, N. (April, 2021). What have we learned from the COVID-19 global pandemic about school principals and the inclusion of students with special education needs? *Apprendre et enseigner aujourd'hui* (10),2, 34-38. <https://conseil-cpiq.qc.ca/publications/revue-apprendre-et-enseigner-aujourdhui/>
- Sider, S., Maich, K., Morvan, J., Vilella, M., Ling, P., & Repp, C. (2021). Inclusive school leadership: Examining the experiences of school principals in supporting students with special education needs. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 21(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12515>
- **Sider, S.** (2021). Policies that foster education for all: Implications for economically wealthy nations. In Umesh Sharma (Ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Inclusive and Special Education*. Oxford University Press. <https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-1027>
- Sider, S. (2020). School principals and students with special education needs in a pandemic: Emerging insights from Ontario, Canada. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 48(2), 78-84. <http://cceam.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ISEA-2020-48-2.pdf#page=84>

## Research Team

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### Follow Us:



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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](mailto:jspecht@uwo.ca).