Cover Page
ADD*Ed
Research in Inclusive Education

Bridging research and practice for today's teachers

IN THIS ISSUE: Transforming Mindsets Towards Autism: An Interview with the Founder of Sikhs for Autism, Baljit Singh

Research Summaries.

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Advertisement
Geneva Centre for Autism Symposium 2024
Sheraton Toronto Centre Hotel
October 30-November 1, 2024

For more information:
https://symposium.genevacentre.ca/

Cover Art
“Untitled” by Artemis O’Grady

This piece symbolizes creating something new out of something old. This is demonstrated through the pieces of an old book being transformed into butterflies. The background is a warm and vibrant orange, red, and yellow colour. Artemis prefers creating 3-D art because it allows a diverse group of people to engage and interact with it. They enjoy art because it can be interpreted in many different ways, and so can stories, such as Mary Poppins, the book used in this piece. This piece also symbolizes the power of creativity and exploring education outside of the rigid lines of a book.

About the Artist
Artemis O’Grady (they/them) is a local autistic artist in Kingston, Ontario. They are a student in the Limestone District School Board and have a deep passion for creating symbolic and interpretive art. From a young age, they have always been creative and explored different mediums of art with their older brother and sister. Artemis is inspired by the genres of horror and fantasy and commonly tries to make their art cosmic and strives to evoke feeling through their work. They hope to continue to create art and want to create more welcoming and safe school spaces for autistic and other neurodivergent students through art and expression.

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From the Editor

Hi there! Thanks for picking up our very first copy of ADD*Ed. While this is our initial issue, we've been around for the last four years. ADD*Ed stands for Autism and Developmental Disabilities- Education and operates out of the Faculty of Education at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. We first started as a research group to give graduate students with an interest in this field a space to share ideas, discuss research, and collaborate. While we still focus on our shared graduate community and research, we have grown to include undergraduate student team members with similar interests, with about 30 incredible student volunteers to date. Also, we have expanded our focus to include engagement with future and current educators in this area of teaching. This includes both **research to practice**- supporting best and evidence-best practices in the classroom through original research and knowledge mobilisation- and **practice to research**- listening to and partnering with educators, schools, and boards to get a pulse on current practice, understand the most pressing questions and issues, and focus our research efforts where they are most needed and desired by those in the field.

Over the years, our motto has become *learn, connect, and build*. We envision ADD*Ed as a place where educators can learn about foundational and current research and best practices in special and inclusive education; connect with other educators and researchers across Canada and beyond to share ideas, resources, and encouragement; and work together to build a brighter future and unified profession in inclusive and special education for students with autism and developmental disabilities. What you are seeing here in our first issue, is an evolution that started with the basic idea of bringing people together. We are glad you found us, and we warmly welcome you as we learn, connect, and build together.

In this issue you will find highlights of some incredible members of our extended ADD*Ed community including those in research, school administration, and community advocacy. Also, you'll find some helpful summaries of relevant and recent research and resources in the field as well as a feature on inclusive-education related policy. There really is something for everyone here!

So again, thanks for joining us in this journey. And, if you haven't yet, help us build our family of collaborative and engaged professionals by sharing this issue with a friend and reaching out with your input and ideas for future issues. Happy reading!

Jordan Shurr, PhD
Director and Editor, ADD*Ed
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About Us

Editor and Executive Director

Jordan Shurr

Jordan Shurr is an Associate Professor of special education at Queen's University. In addition to his roles as a teacher educator and researcher, Jordan has served as a teacher, assistive technology consultant and inclusion coordinator. His current university teaching focuses on inclusive education and his research centres on curricular supports for students with autism and intellectual disability in addition to teacher identity and professional development. Jordan is the director of ADD*Ed and head editor of the ADD*Ed magazine.

Assistant Director

Alexandra Minuk

Alexandra Minuk is a PhD candidate at Queen's University in the Faculty of Education. Alexandra has worked as a teacher for students with autism and as an educational consultant for special education teacher training. At present, Alexandra is an instructor in the Bachelor of Education program with a program of research focused on teacher professional learning to support inclusion. As Assistant Director, Alexandra's role is to liaise with the leadership team to support research, outreach, and engagement activities throughout the year.

Engagement Coordinator

Haley Clark

Haley Clark is a PhD student in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. Haley completed her Bachelor of Arts (Criminal Justice and Public Policy with a minor in Family and Child Studies) and her Master of Arts in Sociology from the University of Guelph. Her research focuses on lived experiences of systemic ableism and disability identity in education, particularly as this relates to Autism and ADHD. As the engagement coordinator, Haley supports community partnerships, conference submissions, and school board engagement.

Managing Editor and Mentorship Coordinator

Holly Crump

Holly Crump is a Master of Education student at the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Western Ontario, and a Bachelor of Education from the University of Windsor. Her research examines newly graduated teachers' dispositions toward social justice education. Within ADD*Ed, Holly works as both the mentorship coordinator, where she recruits, communicates with, and supports volunteers, and as the managing editor of (whatever this magazine is called), where she oversees layout and design.

Research Coordinator
Akomaye Undie
Akomaye Undie is a PhD student at Queen's University in the Faculty of Education. He holds an undergraduate degree, a Master's degree, and a PhD in Guidance and Counselling from the University of Calabar, Nigeria. His research focuses on the availability and utilization of assistive technologies in the educational programme of learners with special needs at the lower basic schools in the south-south region of Nigeria. Within ADD*Ed, Akomaye serves as the research coordinator, where he identifies funding opportunities, organizes ethics materials and templates, manages timelines for conference proposal submissions and calls for chapters.

Communications Director
Adrianna Arsenault
Adrianna Arsenault is a PhD student at Queen's University in the Faculty of Education. She completed an Honours Bachelor of Social Science (Major: Criminology, Minor: Women's Studies) at the University of Ottawa in 2020, a Bachelor of Education at Queen's University in 2021, and a Master of Arts in Education at the University of Ottawa in 2023. Her research interests focus on examining the experiences of disabled students and their families through a critical disability studies lens. Her broad research interests include parent involvement, advocacy, narrative methodologies and systemic ableism.

Transforming mindsets towards Autism: An interview with activist Baljit Singh Ghuman, Founder of Sikhs for Autism

By Haley Clark

Baljit Singh Ghuman is the founder of Sikhs for Autism, a nonprofit advocacy group supporting Punjabi, Sikh, and South Asian communities in navigating autism services and education. As a parent of an autistic daughter, Baljit shares his story of advocacy, perseverance, and resilience as he strives to help other families access culturally competent autism support.

Now a young adult, his daughter was formally diagnosed with autism and ADHD at the age of seven, following several years of intense struggles and challenges in school. Before being part of the ASD stream classroom throughout her K-5 education, she received instruction in inclusive settings. Baljit credits his daughter's educational successes in these environments to the determination and support from her principals, teachers, and school board administrators.

When asked to share one of his best moments with his daughter, Baljit described the time she won a school progress award. He recalls some of the hardships they faced, including her being sent home, poor attendance, and frequent emotional outbursts. However, thanks to the intentional and directed support of dedicated educators during grades 4-5, his daughter began to flourish. He fondly remembers the moment she jumped and danced on stage as they announced her name for the progress achievement award, describing it as a glimpse of hope for many families like his.

Baljit emphasized that autistic students are intelligent but often process information differently. Of his daughter, he notes, "She's able to find solutions to many of the situations or concerns, but there are situations where she needs additional help and understanding." He explains that while his daughter may require extra support or accommodations, she is very intelligent and academically inclined.

He described his daughter's teachers as "superhumans" and commended them for their ability to manage many students with diverse needs. Despite staffing shortages, budget constraints, and administrative barriers, he recognizes the exceptional support his daughter received throughout her educational journey. Although he is aware that many parents struggle to communicate effectively with teachers and school administrators, he expressed his gratitude for the supportive, responsive, and caring educators who worked with his daughter.

As a political and education activist, Baljit wants educators to know that, as a parent of a child with autism, he stands with them. He advocates for both student learning access and opportunities as well as for increased teacher support through active lobbying on issues such as smaller class sizes and additional resources. Regarding the parent-teacher relationship, Baljit encourages teachers to "keep fighting along with us" to bring about change for both autistic students and their educators. He continues, "We are thankful for the work you do. We see your work. We appreciate it, and people like me, wherever we get a chance, we fight for you."

More about sikhs for autism:
Sikhs for Autism works to advocate and create awareness around autism, advocating and especially within the Sikh, Punjabi-speaking and South Asian communities. They strive to work collaboratively towards building inclusive communities through awareness and advocating autism acceptance that ensure the rights and needs of the autistic community.

This organization can be helpful for educators and school communities with large Sikh/Punjabi populations to bring awareness to autism and culturally relevant support services. Baljit, founder, frequently does professional development with schools and discusses his experiences with larger school communities. Baljit has dedicated the last two decades playing key roles in creating awareness around the issues faced by communities with a focus on disability and minority rights.

Baljit's work has included community activism, radio interviews, and writing for newspapers. Additionally, he has presented policy level presentations to various government ministries, tribunals, provincial committees, and regional police force committees. You may invite Baljit Ghuman to your organization to share his knowledge and experience.

To read more about Baljit
and Sikhs for Autism, visit: https://sikhsforautism.weebly.com/

Ask Ed
Research-based answers to real-life questions

Dear Ed,

We have a grade 3 student who wants to disclose his autism diagnosis to his class. How can we best support him?

Sincerely,

Student Advocate

Dear Student Advocate,

First off, what a wonderful question! It appears that you and your team have created a climate in which this feels like both a safe and important thing for this student to do. This is not always the case, so take some pride in that. At any age, revealing parts of ourselves, especially those that make us different, can be both a difficult and an important task. It can be difficult because it is not clear how others will react or think about us afterward. Will they still accept us? Will they still see us as someone with good days, bad days, and hopes and dreams? This can also be an important task as it allows people to see another part of the whole us, in many cases one that has a great impact on how we see and experience the world. Sharing this with others can help others to understand us better. It can also instill pride in another of one of the bits and pieces that make up ourselves.

So, what are some considerations for helping to support a student share with their class? I would say three important questions to start with include:
1) What does the student want to share?
2) How might the class hear and learn best?
3) How can the learning and understanding extend past this revelation?

For the first question, it could be helpful to sit down with the student and ask what they'd like the class to know. There is no one way to approach this; knowing what the student would like to share will help you to best direct support. Also, this helps to keep the student in the driver's seat as you continue to support their growth and development in self-advocacy and self-determination skills. For instance, does the student want the class to know how they see the world on a daily basis? Do they want the class to know that while they may be different in some ways, they are similar in many ways? Do they maybe want to share things that they are really good at? Maybe it's something else, or maybe even a combination of things. Just like you would do in creating a lesson, it could be really helpful to work with the student to set a learning goal or two. This might include the class gaining a basic understanding of a) autism, b) the student's individual strengths and hobbies, c) some supports that they find helpful.

Co-creating learning goals can be a really good way to ensure a positive and thoughtful start to this endeavor.

In terms of the second question, teachers may want to consider a) what their students already know on the topic (collectively and individually), and b) how they might learn best. These days, as opposed to 5, 10, or more years ago, students are much more familiar with exceptionality labels and basic definitions. Additionally, children often have less pre-conceived notions on the topic than adults. Taking a minute to consider what they might already know about autism could help in planning. As educators you surely know that there are a multitude of ways to present new topics for learning. You've likely used collaborative activities, direct instruction, discovery learning, and various other approaches to present a topic. Use the learning goals to lay out a few options for the student consider. It may be the case that they already have an idea of what they'd like to do- which is great. However, it could be helpful to talk through some potential options with the student. For a goal of gaining a basic understanding of autism, you might propose that the student or teacher read a pertinent book to the class, watch a short film, or maybe the student would want to present a slide show or poster board on autism. You could also pose similarly appropriate activities for any other goals like having the student co-present with a parent or sibling, make and present a representative collage, or some other activity. While it doesn't matter so much how the student gets their message across, the educator should ensure that the student has ownership and feels well-supported. Co-planning goals and activities can go a long way to help with both.

For the final question—how can you extend learning—the main emphasis should be on both normalizing and celebrating diversity. Ontario has defined inclusive education as "Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected."[1] In extension, think of ways that you can ensure that all individuals are able to see themselves positively represented, honoured, and respected in the classroom and school. It is quite conceivable that this student of yours will start something positive in class. Once someone shares in a safe and accepting environment, others often feel more comfortable to follow. How might you continue the momentum and highlight the use of education supports as well as individuals with exceptionalities? There are many great books, websites, and videos on the topic (see samples below). And, specific to autism, it should be noted that April is autism awareness month, with the official kick off on April 2nd, the United Nations sanctioned World Autism Day. Accessing resources and participating in related activities throughout the month of April could be a great way to extend the learning.

Related Resources & Information

- Holland Bloorview's Dear Everyone Campaign- includes resources, tips, and first-hand account of inclusion and ableism : https://deareverybody.hollandbloorview.ca/

- Childmind tips on sharing an autism diagnosis- while this is not specific to school, you may find some helpful info: https://childmind.org/article/sharing-an-autism-diagnosis-with-family-and-friends/
- Similarly, while not specific to autism and school, this page from the Indiana Resource Center for Autism has some helpful considerations for sharing information about autism: https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/learn-about-autism/getting-started-introducing-your-child-to-his-or-her-diagnosis-of-autism.html
- Teacher resource, including tips for sharing about autism and potential class activities, from Prince Edward Island: http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/ed_autisminc.pdf
- A selection of autism representation in the media from Reading Rockets: https://www.readingrockets.org/article/pbs-kids-and-autism-awareness
- Article from the Organization for Autism Research on teaching self-advocacy to individuals with autism: https://researchautism.org/help-children-learn-how-to-self-advocate/
- Holland Bloorview self-advocacy kit for individuals with autism: https://hollandbloorview.ca/sites/default/files/migrate/files/AdvocacyToolKit-July24-LINKED-LOCKED.pdf
- Numerous self-advocacy resources from the START Project of Michigan: https://www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter/start-connecting-self-advocacy-345.htm
- Quick fact-sheet on supporting self-determination in students with autism: https://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/sites/csesa.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/AAG-Supporting%20Self-Determination_final.pdf
- Dolly Gray Book Award- includes a list of books recognized for their positive portrayal of disability: https://www.dollygrayaward.com/

Reference

[1]Ontario Ministry of Education (2009). Realizing the promise of diversity: Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf

Leading with Purpose: One Educator's Journey From Classroom Teacher to Superintendent
An interview with Michele McGrath, Superintendent of Education for Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board
By Adrianna Arsenault

In education, the role of a Superintendent is dynamic and multifaceted. To shed light on this position, we spoke with Michele McGrath, Superintendent of Education for the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board (ALCDSB). Michele wears many hats: she supports the principals within her assigned family of schools, acts as a key problem-solver and mentor, and oversees the student services department. She collaborates closely with a team of five key stakeholders— coordinator of student services, mental health supervisor, clinical team lead, the board's mental health lead, principal of student services— while also engaging with community committees addressing critical issues for youth such as substance use and homelessness. Reflecting on this aspect of her work with enthusiasm, she says, "The community agency piece is a really big part of this portfolio, but it's a fun part too. We really get to know other community groups and what they're doing and how we can be in service of one another—ultimately towards our goal of helping kids."

Before stepping into the role of superintendent, and even before her time as a principal, Michele enjoyed a long and fulfilling career as an educator. When asked about her inspiration to enter the field, she chuckles, recalling a childhood memory that hinted at her future path. She once sequestered her younger sister in a closet and proceeded to instruct her, declaring she couldn't come out until she had learned to read. This early display of dedication to teaching was a clear foreshadowing of her lifelong passion for education.

Michele's official journey in education began in 1990 with ALCDSB, where she taught kindergarten to grade seven in five schools and three years supporting teachers in curriculum as a Special Assignment Teacher. Her career trajectory then took her to the role of vice principal at two different schools, followed by a decade as a principal in two different communities. Now, with 35 years of experience, she serves as a superintendent, a role that has been filled with opportunities for growth and learning.

Her first year as a superintendent began in January 2020, just three months before schools across the country shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflecting on this period, she acknowledges the unique challenges it presented. "Sometimes I had to admit that I hadn't faced this before," she says. "We just talked it through with my colleagues and we made decisions with the best interests of the students, families, and staff in mind." Despite the unprecedented difficulties, Michele found that these times also brought opportunities for growth and collaboration. When asked about the most rewarding aspect of her role, she spoke passionately about breaking down silos across disciplines and departments and fostering collaboration. One such instance occurred when schools reopened post-lockdown, and the importance of sound field systems, such as microphones for voice amplification, became apparent with everyone wearing masks. Michele partnered with the Learning Technology Services team, pooling their resources to ensure that new sound fields were rolled out in every

classroom from kindergarten to grade three across the board. “It's very satisfying when we work together to meet student need and think outside the box to do it. The best part of my job is when I can give people what they need to do theirs.”

But Michele’s impact extends beyond immediate problem-solving. Over the past four years, she has focused on creating professional development plans for educational assistants and youth workers, ensuring they have the support and resources necessary to excel in their roles. Michele has worked with Fielding International to plan intentional and focused professional development for all the school principals to support the new learning environments ALCDSB has been building. This investment in innovative facilities and learning practices will prepare leaders and educators for the future of learning.

When asked to offer advice to fellow educators, Michele draws from the wisdom she has accumulated throughout her career. “Be present in what you're doing right now,” she advises. “I never wanted to be a principal more than I wanted to be a teacher. There's nothing wrong with goal setting and working towards some of those goals but be where you need to be in the moment.” This philosophy of mindfulness and dedication to the present moment is also reflected in her deep respect for those who have influenced her journey.

When asked a hypothetical question on who she might like to share a dinner with, including anyone living or passed, Michele paused to reflect before naming Alice Yardley, a British author and educator. She recalls the profound impact Yardley’s books had on her as a young educator in 1990. “Yardley spoke extensively about universal design and teaching to the margins,” Michele explains. “Her work inspired me to introduce what was then considered innovative ideas, like having a water table and a sand table, in my very first classroom at St. Joseph Catholic School.” Yardley’s influence on Michele went beyond practical classroom changes. “She also ingrained in me the importance of making decisions that were always research-based and thoughtful,” Michele continues. “Throughout my career, I’ve tried to stay true to that approach. Yardley empowered me to trust my instincts and experience, not just for the students and families I taught, but also for the systemic changes I’ve been able to implement as a superintendent.”

Michele’s story is one of dedication, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to student wellbeing and educational excellence. As she moves closer to retirement, her legacy of fostering collaboration and supporting educators will ensure a lasting impact on the community. Her journey and insights offer valuable lessons for anyone in the field of education.

In the News: How Well Is Inclusive Education Policy Working in Schools?
By Alexandra Minuk & Holly Crump

The last few decades have seen substantial support for the inclusion of all students in the general education classroom[1], including those with autism and developmental disabilities. Inclusive classroom placement is one of the central tenants of inclusive education, including also academic and social elements, such as access to educational accommodations and opportunities to socialize with same-aged peers. While some of the support for the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education is philosophical in nature and tied to international human rights, much of it is practical, emphasizing the benefits of inclusive education for student learning and society more broadly. Accordingly, intention and efforts to promote inclusive education are clear in both policy and practice across Canada[2].

While inclusive education has gained traction across the country, all jurisdictions, with the exception of New Brunswick, have retained a dual system of special and general education through a continuum of options for classroom placement. In Ontario, for example, students with disabilities can have a full-time general education placement, full-time special education placement, or experience a combination of both (e.g., full-day general education placement with designated time in a resource or special education classroom).
While Ontario's model of educational placement is considered inclusive, New Brunswick's is technically considered *full inclusion.* This is because New Brunswick has mandated the closure of special education schools[3]—a decision that has garnered significant praise on the global stage. What distinguishes inclusion from full inclusion[4], strictly regarding classroom placement, is that the former allows for special education placements, when necessary, whereas the latter de-legitimizes them completely. It should be noted, however, that this model emphasizes physical inclusion in general education, often over and above other academic and social elements of inclusive education.

While full inclusion in terms of classroom placement is an admirable goal, updates to inclusive education policy promoting this are not necessarily aligned with the day-to-day realities of schools. Without significant reforms, those who are meant to benefit from inclusive classroom placement can be adversely affected. Students with disabilities might be included in a physical sense (i.e., they are in the same physical space as their peers), but the extent to which they are included in an academic or social sense is unclear.

A recent report from New Brunswick[5] found that hundreds of students with disabilities and behavioural challenges who attend the province's inclusive schools are now on "partial day" plans. According to child and youth advocate Kelly Lamrock, excluding students from the classroom for significant periods of time without offering opportunities for skill-building or behaviour management is not only against provincial policy—it's unlawful and in direct contradiction of the Education Act. As Haley Flaro, Executive Director of Ability New Brunswick, put it: "sending children home has become the easy solution to an inclusive education system that is often under-resourced."

Given its global reputation, news of partial-day plans and challenges implementing inclusive education may come as a surprise when they're about New Brunswick. Less surprising, however, are the oft-published stories from other provinces and territories with the term "inclusive education" appearing in headlines next to phrases like "national embarrassment[6]." Such news stories call on jurisdictional governments for various supports, including but not limited to increased funding for services[7], solutions to staffing shortages[8], and additional special education training for all teachers[9].

While these news stories paint a dark picture of inclusive education, they also create important context for policymakers and school boards pushing for a model of full inclusion that focuses on classroom placement. Until we are on the path to full inclusion, meaning students receive the individualized academic and social supports they require to succeed, current approaches to inclusion across Canada can certainly be improved. For administrators and teachers, the classroom placement decision-making process may be a good place to start. Research featured in this magazine (see page 31) has shown that certain student, school board, and regional characteristics—such as student age, educational assistant staffing, and urbanicity—are associated with certain classroom placements outcomes. Additionally, even though placement decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, policy exists that ties certain disabilities to certain placement types (e.g., developmental disabilities and specialized settings). Though classroom placement is only one piece of the inclusion puzzle, school staff participating in the placement process should be mindful of these and other factors that may be influencing placement decisions, ultimately affecting how inclusion is implemented in practice.

Implementing inclusive education beyond mere changes to placement will take time, however, changes can be made at the classroom, school, and board levels to improve outcomes for students with autism and developmental disabilities. This requires more than just increased funding. It will demand cultural shifts in the ways we think about disability and inclusion and will require us to engage with research that centers the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals with disabilities. Until this work happens, full inclusion will remain a compelling ideal that stops short of serving students.

What do you think about this story? Send us your thoughts, perspectives, and experiences here: https://www.addedrg.ca/contact.html

Have questions about inclusive education? We'd love to answer them! https://www.addedrg.ca/ask-ed

Notes

[1]A Summary for evidence on Inclusive Education: https://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf

[2]Disability and inclusion in Canadian education: https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/disability-and-inclusion-canadian-education
[3]Closing special schools: Lessons from Canada: https://inclusiveeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/12/Closing_special_schools_lessons_from_Canada.pdf
[4]Competing visions for educating students with disabilities: Inclusion versus full inclusion: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00094056.1998.10521956
[5] Schools denying education to hundreds of vulnerable students, advocate says: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/schools-denying-education-advocate-1.7219933
[6]Inclusive education in Nunavut a 'national embarrassment,' says NTI: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/inclusive-education-nunavut-tunngavik-1.3752246
[7]B.C. students with complex care needs increasingly excluded from school activities, report finds: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/exclusion-students-complex-care-needs-1.6967182
[8]The death of a child with a disability at an Ontario school urgently calls for government action: https://theconversation.com/the-death-of-a-child-with-a-disability-at-an-ontario-school-urgently-calls-for-government-action-231924
[9]More training needed to help kids with disabilities, say some early childhood educators in N.S.: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/more-disability-training-needed-for-eces-in-nova-scotia-1.7163683

Coming Full Circle: From practice to research and back again - an interview with Dr. Bree Jimenez

By Adrianna Arsenault

The world of special education is one of continuous evolution and innovation. To delve into this work, we took the opportunity to speak with Dr. Bree Jimenez, a researcher known for her work on general curriculum access and assessment for students with extensive support needs (previously referred to as moderate to severe intellectual disability). Dr. Bree Jimenez's career in special education is marked by exploration, passion, and a dedication to improving teaching methods and student learning experiences. As she prepares for a new chapter as the department chair of educational psychology at Baylor University, her story offers invaluable insights into the evolution of special education and the vital link between classroom experience and educational research.

Dr. Jimenez's journey began in the late 1990s when she worked as a special education teacher. "I started in elementary school, then moved on to high school," she shares with a reflective smile. Back then, the idea of providing students with intellectual disability and autism greater access to the general curriculum was still in its infancy. "Honestly, no one really knew what that meant," she admits. It was during these early years that Dr. Jimenez encountered a transformative influence, Dr. Diane Browder, a prominent researcher who had just moved to North Carolina. "I had the opportunity to be part of a research study where Dr. Browder would come into my classroom and help me think through things and we would pilot work on alternate assessments." This opportunity was transformative for Dr. Jimenez who reflected on how this led to her realization that her own teaching efforts were not resulting in the progress she had hoped for.

This realization ignited a desire in Dr. Jimenez to better understand how to support her students. She pursued a Master's degree in curriculum and supervision at UNC Charlotte, hoping to gain the tools needed to make learning more accessible. However, she soon found that her true passion lay in research. "I really loved thinking about the curriculum, thinking about research and asking how we know if things work, and tying that research and practice piece together," she explains. This curiosity led her to a doctoral program under Dr. Browder's mentorship, all while she continued to teach high school. Dr. Jimenez's experiences in the high school classroom helped to shape the questions she asked in her research work, "I realized that we were still doing the same thing with these kids in high school that we were doing in elementary and that led me to question, why? Is it that the kids can't learn? No, so it must be that we're not really sure how to teach them, and we're not using research to inform our practice."

In her Ph.D. work, Dr. Jimenez delved into the challenges of general curriculum access for students with disabilities, a subject that would shape her career. Over the next 14 years, her research took her across the globe, including to Australia, where she collaborated with schools and universities to build a research-to-practice infrastructure. It was in Australia that she saw firsthand how evidence-based practices and a deliberate approach to professional development

can directly inform and improve classroom practices. JiTHmenez notes however, that in order for these programs to work there needs to be a system wide commitment and teacher buy in. Dr. Jimenez illustrates this with a metaphor:

> "Imagine someone insists you learn tennis, even though you don't enjoy it. You might go through the motions because they tell you it's great exercise, but your heart's not in it. Now, what if instead, they asked what sport you enjoy? Say you love bowling—it's not traditionally seen as the best workout, but as you practice, you build core strength and coordination. Then, when you decide to try tennis or another sport, you're already in better shape and more motivated. The same goes for professional development: if we start with what teachers are passionate about, their growth will be more meaningful and lasting."

Dr. Jimenez was able to apply this approach while working in Australia, "we had a teacher who was resistant to change, focusing mostly on vocational training like cooking. However, knowing he loved cooking and technology, I suggested creating a video for his student to follow during cooking lessons. He was initially hesitant but agreed. As we walked through the process, he began to see the value of using least intrusive prompts and video modeling. The turning point came when he saw how well it worked, leading to an "aha" moment where he said, "This works, and I love it!" With that success, he was ready to apply these strategies to his writing lessons as well. By tapping into what he already cared about, I was able to introduce new methods effectively." Despite these advances and positive experiences, Dr. Jimenez is deeply aware of a persistent challenge: the gap between research and practice. "There's this immense pressure to figure out why evidence-based strategies aren't consistently translating into classroom practice," she notes. "We've made significant progress, but there's still a disconnect. We know what works, but ensuring that it's actually happening in schools is another story."

Reflecting on the early days of her career, Dr. Jimenez recalls a time when the educational landscape was vastly different. "We didn't have the literature base we have today," she says. Back then, the focus was on systematic instruction and functional life skills, with little research on teaching academic subjects to students with intellectual disability. The introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act, a US mandate for assessment and curricular access for all students- including those with significant support needs, marked a turning point. This legislation initiated the process of setting higher expectations for students with disabilities and recognizing the importance of rigorous academic goals. This shift was exciting, but it also brought new frustrations. "It's concerning that, years later, these practices still aren't commonplace in classrooms," Dr. Jimenez points out. The challenge now is not just to innovate but to ensure that foundational evidence-based practices are being consistently implemented.

One of Dr. Jimenez's most groundbreaking projects is a collaboration with fellow researcher Dr. Ginevra Courtade, exploring engineering design and learning behaviors among students with extensive support needs. "We're looking at how problem-solving and inquiry can enhance self-determination, a crucial skill for post-school success," she explains. However, the project has encountered unexpected challenges. "We realized we needed to step back and

focus on true tried foundational research based strategies before we could introduce something as complex as engineering design."

This experience underscores a key lesson Dr. Jimenez has learned over the years: innovation in education must be balanced with a strong foundation. "It's a balancing act—moving forward while also revisiting the basics," she says.

As Dr. Jimenez prepares to take on her new role at Baylor, her mission remains clear: to bridge the gap between research and practice, ensuring that every student has access to a meaningful education. "The sky's the limit when it comes to what we can teach our students," she says with conviction. "But we must never lose sight of the foundational practices that have brought us this far. By valuing both the old and the new, we can continue to push the boundaries of what our students can achieve." Our interview concluded with a powerful quote from Dr. Jimenez, highlighting a core principle of her approach: "When teachers know how, our students can." For her, this means that when educators are equipped with the right knowledge and skills, they are better positioned to help their students reach their full potential.

Do you have thoughts or experiences in academic access for students with significant support needs that you'd like to share with our readership? Send us an email: added@queensu.ca

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Ontario CEC's 67th Annual Special Education Conference

"Well-being, Equity, and Success for All"
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On behalf of the Ontario CEC Board of Directors, I am pleased to extend an invitation for you to join us in celebrating Ontario CEC's 671h Annual Provincial Special Education Conference, which will be held November 24-25, 2023 at the Marriott Downtown CF Toronto Eaton Centre!

The theme of the 2023 conference is Well-being, Equity, and Success for All; presentations will focus on evidence-based practices, instructional strategies, and technology to equitably support the well-being, learning .and achievement of a1III students with special education needs. The confe1rence program features more than 70 lecture and poster presentations in numerous topical areas, including: accessibility; diversity, equity, and inclusion; paraprofessionals; low incidence exceptionalities; mental health and well-being for students and educators; at-risk children & youth; autism; assistive and adaptive technology; literacy and numeracy; transitions; managing challenging behaviour; learning disabilities; developmental disabilities; indigenous education; and post-secondary initiatives.

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For further information, please contact:

Cindy Perras
Conference Co-ordinator: cindy.perras@gmail.com
https://ontario.exceptionalchildren.org/cec-ontario-events

Resource Summary: Iris Center
By Akomaye Undie
https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/at/cresource/#content

Are you looking for resources on assistive technology in the classroom for students with disabilities? A great place to start is the IRIS Center modules! The IRIS Center at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, offers a comprehensive module on assistive technology (AT), among many other topics, designed to support educators who support students with disabilities. This resource aims to equip educators, administrators, and other professionals involved in special and inclusive education with valuable information and tools for understanding, implementing, and evaluating AT. While the resource is written for a US audience, it remains a highly relevant and useful tool for basic understanding of what AT is and how one can develop competence and confidence in AT classroom supports.

The module is divided into several key sections including: an overview of AT, detailed information on AT devices and services, school responsibilities regarding AT, steps for considering, implementing, and evaluating AT, and ongoing monitoring of AT. It also includes references and additional resources for further exploration.

Notable highlights of this resource include a clear differentiation between AT devices—tools and equipment—and services—support and training. It emphasizes the role of the IEP team in integrating AT for students with disabilities and provides detailed steps for evaluating the effectiveness of AT, along with the importance of continuous monitoring to ensure it meets students' needs.

For educators, this module serves as a valuable guide to integrating AT into the classroom. It can help educators make informed decisions about AT and ensure its effective use to enhance access to learning.

A Life of Dedication to Increased Access: An Interview with Dr. Oluseyi Dada

By Akomaye Undie

Dr. Oluseyi Dada is an associate professor of special education at the University of Calabar, Nigeria, where his work spans various areas in the education of children, youth, and adults with special needs. He holds dual doctoral degrees, earning Ph.Ds in both special education and educational research measurement and evaluation. The overarching aim of Dr. Dada's research is to improve assessment tools and pedagogical practices for students labeled with learning disabilities, gifted and talented, and developmental disorders. He credits his initial passion for working with students with disabilities to an introductory special education class at the undergraduate level. Learning about the struggles and often untapped potential of these students ultimately led to his change in course from a degree in mathematics to special education.

Dr. Dada's passion and advocacy have led interest in issues surrounding diagnosis and support for students with disabilities in Nigeria. His work has identified specific gaps in the cultural and contextual processes involved in diagnosing and assessing exceptional children. In addition to his psychometric work, Dr. Dada continues to research and influence educational supports for students with disabilities. This work includes memory enhancement and improving learning for students with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities, classroom supports for inclusive education, IEP development and implementation, and curricular adaptations to increase accessibility to learning for students with disabilities. Dr. Dada joins many advocates globally in calling for increased prioritization and financial commitment to improving educational supports and services for students with disabilities.

Currently, Dr. Dada is pursuing research in assistive technology (AT) to support students with disabilities. Assistive technology can level the playing field and promote increased access and equal opportunities, especially when combined with inclusive systems such as Universal Design for Learning. These tools are pivotal in advancing inclusive education in Nigeria. For example, Dr. Dada points to the lack of a Nigerian sign language glossary in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields for students with hearing impairments as a significant barrier to accessing learning and careers in STEM, which could be addressed through AT.

In addition to his research in special education, Dr. Dada enjoys traveling and engaging in personal advocacy projects that promote recreation, leisure, and community inclusion for individuals with disabilities. His professional and personal endeavors reflect a genuine dedication and passion for improving access and equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in their education and careers. He believes that this orientation is essential for those working in the field of special and inclusive education, as well as for those in teacher training. Dr. Dada notes the need for continual effort to achieve best practices in special education. He values the importance of global collaboration and encourages Canadian educational professionals to consider cross-national partnerships to enhance knowledge, skills, innovation, and technological advancements globally in the field of special education and disability.

For more information on Nigeria and special education in Nigeria, see:

- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Database: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/countryprofiles/nga#goal-4
- UNESCO global education monitoring report: https://education-profiles.org/sub-saharan-africa/nigeria/~inclusion
- National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria from Federal Ministry of Education: https://www.rodra.co.za/images/countries/nigeria/policy/National%20Policy%20on%20Special%20Needs%20Education.pdf

Do you have an idea for collaborative research or practice between Canada and Nigeria? If so, share it with us: added@queensu.ca

Research Summaries: A look into exciting new research in inclusive education

In This issue:

- Text Access for High School Students with Moderate Intellectual Disability
  By Haley Clark

- Virtual Money Tool Enhances Math Skills for Students with Disabilities
  By Akomaye Undie

- Enhancing Educational Assistant Training: Insights for Supporting Students with Autism
  By Adrianna Arsenault

- Emerging Tech Tools to Support Emotional Regulation
  By Holly Crump

- Is Inclusion for Students with Autism Trending in the Right Direction in Ontario?
  By Alexandra Minuk

Text Access for High School Students with Moderate Intellectual Disabilities

Shurr, J., & Taber-Doughty, T. (2017). The picture plus discussion intervention: Text access for high school students with moderate intellectual disability. Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 32(3), 198-208. http://doi.org/10.1177/1088357615625056

By Haley Clark

This study explored how the use of the simple Picture Plus Discussion (PPD) technique can improve text comprehension for high school students with intellectual disability. This research focused on how PPD impacts students' understanding of age-appropriate texts across different types of reading material.

Breaking Down the Research

The study involved three high school students, aged 18-19, with intellectual disability, who were enrolled in a specialized program within a general high school. Using a single case multiple-probe across texts design, the researchers studied the effects of the PPD method while reading short grade-level texts such as a newspaper, employee handbook, or leveled reading passage. The PPD method involved showing students photos related to the text content, discussing the images, reading the text aloud, and then engaging in further discussion based on the visuals and text content.

What Did They Discover?

The researchers found that the PPD intervention positively impacted the students' comprehension. All three students showed improvements in their ability to recall stories. They also increased the number of relevant ideas and words used when discussing the texts. This improvement was consistent across various types of texts, including short informational stories, newspapers, and handbooks.

What Does This Mean for Educators?

This research suggests that PPD can be an effective tool for enhancing comprehension and engagement for students with intellectual disability. Educators can consider implementing PPD techniques, along with other picture-based or read-aloud strategies, to support students in accessing a variety of texts.

Key Takeaways

While reading skills such as decoding and letter sounds represent an important academic and life skill, comprehension of texts read and heard aloud are critically important. Adapted resources currently exist to allow students with low reading skills access to age-appropriate texts, sometimes referred to as “high interest/ low level” books. While these can be helpful for increased access, adaption can sometimes limit the full content and context. This research demonstrates the benefit of such user-friendly supports as PPD to enhance comprehension and engagement for high school students with intellectual disability on unadapted texts.

Reference

Shurr, J., & Taber-Doughty, T. (2017). The picture plus discussion intervention: Text access for high school students with moderate intellectual disability. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 32*(3), 198–208. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088357615625056

Virtual Money Tool Helps Students with Disabilities Improve Math Skills
By Akomaye Undie

A recent study explored how a virtual money tool can help high school students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) improve their math skills, specifically in making change. This study is particularly relevant for students in rural areas, where access to resources might be limited.

Breaking Down the Research

The study involved three high school students with IDDs who used a virtual money manipulative in an online setting using a single-case multiple-probe across participants design. Researchers presented math problems that required the students to make change, using both oral instructions and written math notation on a virtual whiteboard. The researchers guided the students through the process of representing money with dollars and coins, gradually reducing the amount of help provided as the students gained more confidence.

What Did They Discover?

The study found that all three students improved their ability to solve change-making math problems. Over time, they became more accurate and required less help. Notably, these improvements continued even after the study ended, indicating that the virtual tool was effective in supporting their learning and maintain their gains.

What Does This Mean for Educators?

For teachers, particularly those working with students who have intellectual and developmental disabilities, this study suggests that virtual money tools could be a useful addition to math instruction. By incorporating this approach into lessons, educators might help students develop important skills in handling money more effectively and independently.

Key Takeaways

Math skills are essential to everyday life and for increasing academic skills and knowledge. While tangible math manipulatives have been a staple of instruction for decades, virtual manipulatives are increasingly accessible and useful for classroom instruction. This study shows that virtual money tools can help students with IDDs improve their math skills, particularly in making change. The use of these tools in teaching could provide valuable support for students as they work on these practical math skills.

Reference

Long, H. M., Bouck, E. C., & O'Reilly, C. (2023). Just dollars and cents: Making change via a virtual money manipulative. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 43*(1), 14–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/87568705231216449

Enhancing Educational Assistant Training: Insights for Supporting Students with Autism
By Adrianna Arsenault

This recent study offers valuable insights into the experiences of educational assistants (referred to in this article as "paraprofessionals") who support students with Autism. By examining educational assistants' perspectives on their own knowledge, skills, training, and challenges, this research highlights areas for improving training and support.

Breaking Down the Research

The study analyzed responses from nearly 500 educational assistants who shared their experiences through three open-ended questions. The researchers focused on how educational assistants described their skills, training received, and the challenges they faced in supporting students with autism.

What Did They Discover?

The research identified three main themes:

1. **Training Challenges**: Many educational assistants reported that their training was limited, often too brief, and not always relevant to their specific roles. Some sought additional training on their own to bridge these gaps.
2. **Skills and Knowledge**: Educational assistants often developed their skills through hands-on experience, working with a diverse range of students. Personal experiences, such as having a family member with autism or a related background in healthcare, also contributed to their knowledge.
3. **Collaboration Issues**: Educational assistants faced challenges in working with other professionals and families. Confusion about roles and responsibilities often led to difficulties in collaboration, with educational assistants sometimes acting as primary instructors without adequate support.

What Does This Mean for Educators?

This research underscores the need for more tailored and comprehensive training for educational assistants. Such enhancements in training could include coaching, one-one-on support, modeling, and performance-based feedback. Additionally, educators and school boards should work to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each member on an educational team.

Key Takeaways

Educational assistants play a crucial role in supporting students with autism but often face challenges due to limited training and unclear roles. Enhanced support and resources for educational assistants can help improve both their practice as well as their job satisfaction.

Reference

Walker, V. L., Coogle, C., Mickelson, A., & Masud, A. B. (2024). Paraeducator Perspectives on Supporting Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder: Implications for Improving Paraeducator Training and Supervision. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 0*(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/10883576241232887

Exploring Emerging Technologies to Support Emotional Regulation in Students with Developmental Disabilities

By Holly Crump

This article provides an overview of how emerging technologies are being used to help individuals with developmental disabilities understand and regulate their emotions. Emotional regulation is crucial for social functioning, allowing individuals to control and adjust their emotional responses to fit different situations. This study looks at various tools designed for this purpose, examining how much research has been done on these technologies and how effective they are.

Breaking Down the Research

The researchers conducted a systematic review of 39 studies focused on emotional competencies, with 10 specifically targeting emotional regulation. These studies were categorized based on the type of technology used, such as smartwatches and mobile devices, as well as newer technologies like relaxation modules and virtual reality.

Examples of Technologies

The study highlighted different technologies designed to support emotional regulation in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). A few highlights include:

- **ASD**: A smartwatch app that measures heart rate and suggests coping strategies when emotional changes are detected (Torrado et al., 2017).
- **ADHD**: EmoGalaxy, a game that helps users recognize, express, and regulate emotions (Hakimirad et al., 2019).
- **IDD**: A smartphone app that allows caregivers to send behavior cues to a child's smartwatch (Zheng & Motti, 2017).

What Does This Mean for Educators?

This research highlights a growing field with incredible innovations and potential. While much discovery is occurring, there is much more still on the horizon for researchers in this area. Special education practitioners can use this review to learn about new technologies that support emotional regulation and consider how these tools might be integrated into their teaching strategies. It could also inspire new ways to use everyday technology to help students manage their emotions more effectively.

Reference

Lara, M. H., Caro, K., & Martínez-García, A. I. (2023). Technology for supporting emotion regulation of individuals with developmental disabilities: A scoping review. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 136*, 104467. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2023.104467

Headline:

Is Inclusion for Students with Autism Trending in the Right Direction in Ontario?

A recent study dives into the evolving landscape of classroom placements for students with autism in Ontario over a current 12-year period. The focus was on tracking trends in inclusive classroom placements and understanding how factors like Educational Assistant staffing and population density impact these placements.

Breaking Down the Research

Researchers started by securing a data-sharing agreement with the Ontario Ministry of Education, which provided insights into the number of students with autism placed in various classroom settings from 2006 to 2018, as well as Educational Assistance staffing in the province. By analyzing this data, they tracked the proportion of students in each placement type over the years and calculated a new variable to show the proportion of students with autism in inclusive classrooms annually. They then used descriptive statistics and graphs to reveal trends at both the elementary and secondary school levels. Additionally, they explored whether staffing levels of Educational Assistants and local population density, from Canadian census data, influenced the proportion of students with autism in inclusive settings.

What Did They Discover?

At the elementary level, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of students with autism included in general education classrooms, while those in specialized placements have decreased. However, the story is different at the secondary level. Although there is an increase in inclusive placements for secondary students, the reduction in specialized settings hasn't followed suit. Interestingly, the study found that at the secondary level, more Educational Assistants were associated with fewer students in inclusive settings. Similarly, higher population density was linked to a lower proportion of students in inclusive placements.

What Does This Mean for Educators?

For educators, understanding these trends is crucial for fully informed discussions around educational placement. While inclusion rates are rising at the elementary level, secondary students still predominantly access separate settings. Practitioners might need to address specific challenges related to implementing inclusion for older students, especially in high-density areas and in relation to staffing decisions around Educational Assistants.

Key Takeaways

It's important to remember that educational placement is only one aspect of inclusive education. Other critical considerations include access to high level academic content and

sufficient educational supports as well as regular and authentic opportunities for socialization and relationship building. An increase in one aspect does not always equate to an increase in inclusive education. However, placement is an important aspect and often the most straight forward to measure and address, at least as a starting point. The increase in inclusive placements noted here for students with autism is a positive trend, but it's not universal across all levels. Secondary students, in particular, are still more likely to be in separate settings. Additionally, local factors like population density and staffing levels can influence inclusion outcomes.

Original Article

Minuk, A., Shurr, J., Chahine, S., & Berish, F. (2024). Trends in the inclusive classroom placement of students with autism spectrum disorder: A retrospective study. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 59(1), 71–84.

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