



Let's Chat... about *Inclusive Education*



Hosts Gordon L. Porter, Jacqueline Specht and Diane Richler



Guest: Jess Whitley

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Jess Whitley's research and teaching are driven by a dedication to improving the school experiences of all students and teachers.

Her research focuses on mental health literacy, inclusive education policy, teacher preparation for inclusive education, and the wellbeing of children and youth with mental health issues. She conducts research in partnership with colleagues at universities across Canada as well as collaboratively engaging with community organizations.

Jess is part of the Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education and an associate of the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services. In her teaching, she aims to best prepare future teachers of inclusive classrooms and further develop the skills and knowledge of graduate-level learners. Jess is co-founder of the Comprehensive School Health B.Ed. cohort at the University of Ottawa.

Jess is currently co-investigator on a 3-year (2019-2022) project conducting a review of the implementation of a new Inclusive Education policy of the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Key Issues in this Chat Session:

- 1. From Policy to Reality:** Jess discussed the project analyzing the implementation of Nova Scotia's new policy on inclusive education (2019). She noted that this research is evaluating how effectively the policy is being implemented, not the policy itself. She notes that there are always gaps between intentions and how they play out in actual schools and classrooms. In this case, the Department of Education will respond to the evaluation and feedback and consider steps to improve implementation.
- 2. Professional Learning:** Jess noted the importance of engaging teachers and principals with cohesive and well-planned professional development in both knowledge and skills. Jess has found that this is essential for teachers to understand how the different facets of inclusion come together to ensure success in the classroom.
- 3. The Challenge of Scaling Up Change:** Jess stated that scaling up the implementation of new policies, like the inclusion policy in Nova Scotia, is a significant challenge often failed. In Ontario, for example, the over-arching policy on inclusion concedes diverse interpretations and approaches which has resulted in many different approaches in schools and district school boards. As a result, it would be very difficult to scale-up an inclusive policy in that province.
- 4. Change Takes Time:** Policy changes require both time and continuous effort to ensure effective implementation. Jess discusses the Ontario policy, "Learning for All", which was initiated in 2013, but remains incomplete in terms of the recommendations that have been implemented and are not fully realized in schools to date.
- 5. Issues in Virtual Learning:** Student success with virtual learning is a major issue in Canadian schools. Outcomes vary widely depending on the profile of the student. The effect on students who experience barriers to learning has been a particular challenge. She has found that training students and their families on how to navigate online learning platforms greatly improves virtual learning outcomes.

Potential Discussion Questions (before viewing):

1. Do you think inclusion can be incorporated within the virtual learning context? Why or why not? If yes, then how so?
2. How long do you think it might take to implement a new inclusive policy in a school that has no prior experience with it?

Potential Discussion Questions (after viewing):

1. What kind of professional learning do you consider critical to ensuring teachers can be successful with inclusion? Does it encompass both school and classroom practices?
2. Do you think virtual learning can be incorporated within the practice of Canadian schools and still maintain a commitment to equity and inclusion?
3. How can training for online learning platforms be provided to families and students successfully? Can this be done remotely? Do you think the training would be more effective if done in person?

More from Jess Whitley:

- Whitley, J., Matheson, I., Specht, J., & MacCormack, J. (In Press). Perspectives of parents of children with SEN: Supports and strengths during COVID-19 school closures. *Exceptionality Education International*.
- 2019-2022: Developmental Evaluation Services of the Implementation and Preliminary Outcomes of an Inclusive Education Policy Framework in Nova Scotia, Co-Investigator: Andy Hargreaves
- 2019-2020: Partnering to promote children's emotional well-being and educational outcomes Co-Investigators: Maria Rogers, David Smith, Crossroads Children's Mental Health Centre
- Whitley, J., Duquette, C., Gooderham, S., Elliott, C., Orders, S., Klan, A. (2021). Implementation of a differentiated instruction initiative: Perspectives of leaders. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 196, 49-64
- Sider, S., MacCormack, J. & Whitley, J. (2021, Winter). Schools as an Equalizing Force: What the pandemic has taught us about school leadership and inclusive education. *Canadian Association of Principals Journal*. <https://cdnprincipals.com/moving-forward-despite-uncertainty-leading-schools-during-a-pandemic>.
- Whitley, J., Klan, A., & D'Agostino, B. (2020). Narratives of funding related to Inclusive Education: Canadian news media from 2014-2019. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1821446>
- Whitley, J. (2020). Evidence-based practices for teaching learners with emotional and behavioral disorders.
- Lloyd, R. J., de Montigny, J., & Whitley, J. (2019). *Comprehensive School Health in Teacher Education and Schools: Becoming a Champion of Health*.
- Whitley, J., Smith, D., Vaillancourt, T. & Neufeld, J. (2018). Promoting Mental Health Literacy among Educators: Critical in School-Based Prevention and Intervention.



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