



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



*Hosts Gordon L. Porter, Jacqueline Specht and Diane Richler*



***Guest:***

***Gillian Parekh***

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Gillian Parekh is an Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in the Faculty of Education at York University in Toronto, Ontario.

Gillian is a former special education teacher and research coordinator with the Toronto District School Board. With a doctorate in Critical Disability Studies, Gillian has conducted extensive research with the Toronto District School Board in the areas of structural equity, special education, and academic streaming. Gillian is a member of Inclusive Education Canada's Network of Associates. She has written commentaries for the IEC website and served as a facilitator and speaker at sessions organized by IEC. Gillian is also a member of the Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education. Her work explores how schools construct and respond to disability as well as organize students across programs.

# Key Issues in this Chat Session:

**1.What Next?** Gillian observed that early in her career, when visiting “special schools” or “self contained sites for special education”, there was great emphasis on developing social relationships among students. However, while this may have occurred in the “self-contained” setting, the longer-term outcomes for far too many individuals who attend these programs are dismal when they transition to post-school life.

**2.Redirecting a Large Ship is Challenging:** The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is a challenging case study for the successful adoption of inclusive practices. It is difficult to redirect a big ship (i.e., the TDSB) when it is set on a specific path. Historically, the TDSB has been grounded in the special education model, so moving towards inclusion requires undoing the separations among students and teachers that have been made. Many who work in the TDSB have high levels of anxiety about this matter.

**3.The TDSB Cares about Research:** The TDSB conducts research on its practices. In Gillian’s experience, the TDSB both supported the research and seriously considered the recommendations made.

**4.Inclusion Into What?** Gillian discusses the negative effect the ableist frameworks, structures, and attitudes found in classrooms and schools have on achieving inclusive education.

**5.Representation Matters:** Representation of people with disabilities within schools is important. For example, having teachers with disabilities in the school and ensuring that the experiences of people with disabilities are included in the curriculum can help to challenge ableism.

**6.Celebrating Differences:** Gillian stresses that inclusion does not equal assimilation. She says that sometimes educators think this is the goal, but really, it’s about celebrating the unique identities of each student.

**7.Spotlight on the Positives:** The news media seems to cover what is going wrong, but perhaps change can come about by highlighting what is working well in the movement towards inclusion. This sort of positive attention might help to build momentum and demonstrate the possibilities of inclusion to other educators.

## Potential Discussion Questions (before viewing):

1. Can schools help to challenge the current stereotypes of people with disabilities? If so, how might this be done?
2. In your own experience with education/at school, did you ever notice the representation of people with disabilities?

## Potential Discussion Questions (after viewing):

1. Do you think recognizing positive stories of inclusive education could help to move more schools in the direction of inclusive education? Or would it be more effective to demonstrate that the current, segregated models are not working as they are supposed to therefore inclusion should be implemented?
2. What do you think about the idea of creating gay/straight alliance type groups for students with barriers to learning in schools? Is this something you believe would help to foster inclusion?

## More from Gillian Parekh:

1. Parekh, G. (2013). A case for inclusive education. Toronto, Toronto District School Board.
2. Parekh, G., & Brown, R. S. (2019). Changing Lanes: The Relationship between Special Education Placement and Students' Academic Futures. *Educational Policy*, 33(1), 111-135.
3. Parekh, Gillian (2017) The tyranny of “ability”, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 47:4, 337-343, DOI: 10.1080/03626784.2017.1383755
4. Parekh G., Gaztambide-Fernández R. (2017) The More Things Change: Durable Inequalities and New Forms of Segregation in Canadian Public Schools. In: Pink W., Noblit G. (eds) *Second International Handbook of Urban Education*. Springer International Handbooks of Education. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40317-5\\_43](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40317-5_43)
5. Parekh, G., & Underwood, K. J. M. (2016). *Inclusion: Creating School and Classroom Communities where Everyone Belongs: Research, Tips, and Tools for Educators and Administrators*. Toronto District School Board.
6. Parekh, Gillian (2018) Exploring Inclusion in Ontario, *Inclusive Education Canada*, <https://inclusiveeducation.ca/2018/03/16/exploring-inclusion-in-ontario/>
7. Reid, Luke, Parekh, Gillian Parek &, Lattanzio, Robert (2020) A Relic of the Past: Identification, Placement and Review Committees in Ontario’s Education System, *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, Issue 194.

