

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

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



**Guest:**

***Kathryn Underwood***

*Professor,  
Toronto Metropolitan University,  
Toronto, ON*

Kathryn Underwood, Professor, School of Early Childhood Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University investigates how society responds to and constructs childhood in social institutions. Kathryn's interests are in human rights and education practice, particularly with regard to disability rights and inclusive education.

The focus of her research has been on how constructions of disability in education and early childhood program contexts are used to organize children, with particularly interest in intersectional identities of all disabled children. Dr. Underwood has conducted a number of studies that focus on parent viewpoints and the work of families to engage with institutions.

Kathryn Underwood is the Principal Investigator for the Inclusive Early Childhood Service System Project. This collaborative partnership project, funded by the County of Wellington, the Social Sciences and Humanity Research Council (SSHRC), and Toronto Metropolitan University, aims to better understanding experiences of disability in early childhood from diverse cultural, geographic, and community perspectives.

Her areas of expertise include a) inclusive curriculum, teaching and learning; b) disability studies in education and childhood; c) special education policy and practice; d) early years service planning and delivery.

## Key Issues in this Chat Session:

- 1. Inclusion and ECE are Related:** Kathryn explained that when she began working in early childhood education, she found that many of the important themes strategies that play a role in inclusive education are central to ECE. For example, parental involvement and a focus on each child's development are critical in ECE, just as they are important in inclusion in primary and secondary schools.
- 2. Moving Away From 'Ready to Learn':** Kathryn emphasized that there is so much more to ECE than preparing children for learning within the formal school system. Both academic and social learning can begin in the ECE years. Additionally, some of the ideas of 'ready to learn' are non-inclusive. For example, requiring a student to be toilet trained to be ready for school is exclusionary as some students may never achieve this ability.
- 3. Cautions Surrounding the Professionalization of ECE:** Although there are so many benefits to having ECE recognized as a professional career, Kathryn cautions against the exclusion of family involvement in ECE as it professionalized. Family expertise should be valued in the same way as the expertise of professionals trained in ECE.
- 4. Blurring the Line Between ECE and School:** Kathryn asserts that a child's ECE years and school years do not need to be as divided as they are now. ECE teachers and other professionals can share many valuable insights gained about student success from their experiences during the child's ECE.
- 5. Safe Spaces for Students and Families:** Provision of services for students experiencing barriers to learning need to take place in safe conditions and an appropriate manner. Kathryn has worked with families who have had harmful strategies used on their child. Programs and policies need to ensure that these negative practices are not used or tolerated.

## Potential Discussion Questions (before viewing):

1. How do you assess the ECE concept of 'ready to learn'? What do you think about it in relation to inclusive education?
2. In what ways do you think having multiple minority identities (e.g., being part of a racial minority and as well as a disability) impacts the experiences of students and their families?

## Potential Discussion Questions (after viewing):

1. What do you consider the most helpful lesson(s) to be drawn from Kathryn's experience working with indigenous families of children with disabilities or other special needs?
2. Should access to high quality ECE be considered an essential human right in Canada just as access to education for school-age children is a human right? Why or why not?

# More from Kathryn Underwood:

## Chapters

- Davies, K., Doucet, G., Atwal, A., & Underwood, K. (2021). Systemic knowledge at school entry: Learning from disabled children and their families. *Community, Work & Family*, 1-5.
- Underwood, K., Chan, C., Koller, D., & Valeo, A. (2017). Understanding young children's capabilities: Approaches to interviews with young children experiencing disability. In B. Kelly & B. Byrne (Eds.), *Valuing disabled children and young people: Research, policy, and practice* (pp. 72-89). Routledge
- Underwood, K., Church, K., & Van Rhijn, T. (2020). Responsible for normal: The contradictory work of families. In S. Winton & G. Parekh (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on education policy and schools, families, and communities* (pp. 89-106). Information Age Publishing Inc.
- Frankel, E. Underwood, K., & Goldstein, P. (2017). Principles and practices of early intervention. In M. L. Wehmeyer, I. Brown, M. Percy, K. Shogren & A. Fung (Eds.), *A comprehensive guide to intellectual and developmental disabilities* (2nd ed., pp. 495-508). Brookes Publishing.

## Articles

- Underwood, K., Frankel, E., Spalding, K., & Brophy, K. (2019). Is the right to early intervention being honoured? *Canadian Journal of Children's Rights*. 5(1), 56-70. <https://doi.org/10.22215/cjcr.v5i1.1226>
- Frankel, E., Chan, C., & Underwood, K. (2019). Inclusion is an experience, not a placement. *eceLink*, 3(1), 24-34.
- Underwood, K., & Snoddon, K. (2021). Deaf childhoods and inclusive early childhood education and care (Policy Brief No. 10). The Inclusive Early Childhood Service System Project.
- Underwood, K., & Parekh, G. (2020). Inclusion in early childhood: Difference, disability, and social justice. *Education. excel* [filehttps://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756810/obo-9780199756810-0265.xml](https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756810/obo-9780199756810-0265.xml)



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada  
Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

