

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

Hosts Gordon L. Porter, Jacqueline Specht and Diane Richler



Guest:

Monique Somma

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Monique Somma is an assistant professor and scholar in the Department of Educational Studies at Brock University. Currently, she co-develops and teaches courses to teacher candidates on topics including child development, cognition and the inclusion of students with exceptionalities, in order to help prepare future teachers to effectively meet the needs of diverse learners in the classroom. As an elementary school teacher herself, having taught special education and inclusive classes for 15 years, she understands firsthand the challenges and the successes of working with children with exceptionalities in the 20th century. Her research focuses on preschool to secondary educator preparedness for inclusive education, from attitudes and beliefs to learning and practice, best practices for creating inclusive classrooms and schools for students with exceptionalities, and how peer involvement can enhance inclusion.

Monique and several of her colleagues at Brock University collaborated with Inclusive Education Canada to support strengthening inclusion in Montessori schools. The project resulted in a publication documenting key strategies to enhance the success of teachers in Montessori schools and making inclusion a reality.

Key Issues in this Chat Session:

1. Successful Experiences with Inclusion Matter: Monique speaks to her personal experience teaching in self-contained special education classrooms. When she used integration strategies in regular classrooms with her students, she saw them flourish. Observing inclusive education practices work changed her view. These experiences led her to commit to inclusive education and may help other educators do the same.

2. Formal Assessments have their Pros and Cons: Although formal assessments can help identify students eligible for access to resources and supports, Monique has serious concerns about their effect. She cautions educators to use information from an assessment as a starting point when working with a student. Students are so much more than what their formal assessments reveal about their abilities and challenges.

3. All Teachers are Special Education Teachers: When working with teacher candidates, Monique stresses the importance of using *universal design for learning* as a starting point. Inclusive classrooms result in all teachers working with a diverse student population where every child is unique and as a result the teacher is a special education teacher.

4. Experimenting is Crucial for Success: During teacher training, Monique encourages her students to be innovative and to try new instructional strategies. She believes that using this training period to attempt to make learning accessible for all learners is important for new teachers' future success with inclusion.

Potential Discussion Questions (before viewing):

1. What benefits and drawbacks can you identify with the use of formal assessments of a students' barriers to learning? Can the results of these tests cause students harm?

2. Reflect on inclusive experiences you have had throughout your lifetime. In what ways did these experiences shape your values, commitments, and career or personal goals?

Potential Discussion Questions (after viewing):

1. Do you agree with Monique's assertion that all teachers need to consider themselves special education teachers? Does inclusion make this inevitable?

2. How can new teachers be supported to sustain their commitment to inclusion as they leave teacher training and enter actual schools and classrooms?

More from Monique Somma:

- Bennett, S., Gallagher, T. L., Somma, M., White, R., & Włodarczyk, K. (2021). Transitioning from segregation to inclusion: An effective and sustainable model to promote inclusion, through internal staffing adjustments, and role redefinition. In *Resourcing Inclusive Education*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Bennett, S., Specht, J., Somma, M., & White, R. (2020). Navigating school interactions: Parents of students with intellectual disabilities speak out. *Current Developmental Disorders Reports*, 7(3), 149-154.
- Bennett, S., Gallagher, T., Somma, M., & White, R. (2021). Transitioning towards inclusion: a triangulated view of the role of educational assistants. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 21(3), 187-197.
- Somma, M., & Bennett, S. (2020). Inclusive Education and Pedagogical Change: Experiences from the Front Lines. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, 6(2), 285-295.
- Somma, M. & Marini, Z. (2020). A Bully and a Victim: The Bullying Experiences of Youth with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders. *Exceptionality Education International*, 30 (1), 25–41 I.
- Bennett, S., Dworet, D. Gallagher, T. & Somma, M. (2019). *Special Education in Ontario Schools* (8th ed.). Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON: Highland Press
- Bennett, S., Gallagher, T., & Somma, M. (2019, February). The Inclusion of Students with Intellectual Disabilities: Parent Perspectives. In 2019 Conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education.
- Maich, K., Somma, M., Hill, R. (2018). *Canadian School Programs for Students with Emotional/Behavioural Disorders: A Decade of Programs, Policies, and Practices*. Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.
- Somma, M. (2018). From Segregation to Inclusion: Special Educators' Experiences of Change. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. Online. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2018.1464070
- Bennett, S., Gallagher, T., Shuttleworth, M., Somma, M. & White, R. (2017). Teen dreams: Voices of students with intellectual disabilities. *Journal on Developmental Disabilities*, 23 (1), 64-75.
- Somma, M., (2017) The Case of Drake. In Kim Calder Stageman & Angèle AuCoin (Eds.). *Inclusive Education: Stories of Success and Hope in a Canadian Context*. Toronto: Pearson
- Somma, M. (2015). Changing the Spots of Leopards: A Look into the Process of Teacher Change and its Impact on Inclusive Pedagogy. *Teaching and Learning* 10 (1). (16 pgs)
- Włodarczyk, K., Somma, M., Bennett, S., & Gallagher, T. (2015). Moving Towards Inclusion: Inclusion Coaches Reflections and Discussions in Supporting Educators in Practice. *Exceptionality Education International*. (30 pgs)



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