



## **Help and Support for At-promise Learners' Academic and Emotional Well-being: Moving the 2022 UNESCO Report to Inform Inclusive Practices in Our Communities**

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In early 2022, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released the report, *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Education: International Evidence from the Responses to Educational Disruption Survey (REDS)*, to share the global impact of COVID-19 on education (Meinck, Fraillon, & Strietholt, 2022). To address the 2022 UNESCO REDS report's examination of the impact of the global pandemic on the social-emotional and academic experiences of learners across the globe, the Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES) invited scholars from around the globe to share how each country was ensuring inclusive practices are being implemented. During this session, we focused on the UNESCO REDS report from the perspective of the Blackfoot Tribe hierarchy of life and introduced the term *at-promise youth* to dismantle the deficit lens through which special education is often viewed (Broomé, 2017; Feigenbaum & Smith, 2020; Franklin, 2000; Heavy Head & Blood, 2007; Hernandez, 2021; Michel, 2014; Stone Brown, 2014; Swadener, 2012; Whiting, 2006).

### **UNESCO REDS Report**

The report outlined the myriad of challenges experienced by students and educators since the disruption in schooling in March 2022. Learners shared they felt more lonely, anxious, and overwhelmed about the situation with COVID-19. Furthermore, they were concerned that remote learning did not provide them with the same level of support that they had pre-pandemic. Some reported that they had trouble with connectivity, did not have access to digital devices, and would go a long time without receiving lessons. Educators had the stress of transitioning to remote learning structures by adapting their lessons to online platforms and/or providing lessons outside of the school buildings. Educators also were concerned that academics that were previously provided in-person did not transfer well to remote learning platforms. Due to the unforeseen consequences of the pandemic on student learning environments, DISES decided to gather to discuss how the UNESCO REDS (2022) report matched the social-emotional and academic experiences of learners across the globe.

### **Blackfoot Hierarchy**

This virtual event was intentionally framed using two asset-based educational shifts: the Blackfoot Nation's influence on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the use of the term *at-promise youth*. Many educators are familiar with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) as the triangle of experiences one needs to fulfill in order to reach self-actualization, but few people know of the influence the Blackfoot Nation had on Maslow's after the six weeks he spent with them in 1938 (Stone Brown, 2014). According to Maslow's hierarchy, one needs to first have their physiological needs met, followed by safety needs; social needs; esteem needs; the need to understand; aesthetic needs; then self-actualization or when one has fully realized their talents, potential, and capacity; and ultimately, transcendence. During the virtual session, Dr. Jez shared the lesser-known research and historical narratives (Broomé, 2017; Feigenbaum & Smith, 2020; Heavy Head & Blood, 2007; Michel, 2014; Stone Brown, 2014) that indicate that not only did Maslow not give credit to the elders from the Blackfoot Nation for what he learned from them, but that the western perspective within his hierarchy is incorrect. For example, the Blackfoot believe one is born a self-actualized being and that caring for the needs and ensuring the safety of others is the ultimate level of human development.



As consciousness and unlearning have been at the forefront of critical work in research, we acknowledge that Maslow appropriated this framework from the Blackfoot Nation. We wanted to honor the Blackfoot Nation's indigenous perspective that people already have reached self-actualization because all beings are sacred and the community provides all basic foundational needs. As the child grows, they begin to understand their place in the community, which leads to cultural perpetuity, known as what Blackstock (2011) calls the "Breath of Life." Our goal for this event was to focus on how we as educators are supporting all our learners and ourselves in reaching that highest level, as individuals and community members.

### **At-Promise Youth**

We as an organization came together to discuss dismantling the deficit-based language often associated with learners with dis/abilities from historically marginalized groups by shifting the term "at-risk" to "at-promise." At-promise reframes the deficit language we often use when referring to youth from diverse cultural, linguistic, economic, racial, gender, sexual, and ability groups to a more asset-based language. These youth are only at risk because our systems have created negative experiences using racialized, ableist, classist labels not because they are less than their non-disabled, white peers from higher socioeconomic levels (Franklin, 2000; Hernandez, 2021; Swadener, 2012; Whiting, 2006). Since this is a global organization, vocabulary and the etymology of words are important to discuss, especially when bringing in inclusive framings, definitions, and dialogue from around the world. DISES is committed to unlearning oppressive practices as we commit to a promise of a better world for youth who have differing intersectional identities.

### **Panelist Biographies**

For this virtual event, panelists from around the globe were selected to provide insight on pandemic experiences for students as well as share their resources with the community. **Lara Ragpot**, PhD, is a professor and department chair at Trinity Western University in British Columbia. She focuses on child development and special education. Mrs. **Joan Phillips-Bennett** is an advocate for persons with exceptionalities and has been working closely with educators, parents, and various ministers in Jamaica to assist them in better catering to children with exceptionalities. Mr. **Elarbi Imad** is the President and Executive director of the Moroccan Center for Civic Education. He has been working as a teacher trainer, regional and international project director, international consultant, and expert in education, citizenship education, civil society, and youth. Ms. **Tanya Pinkerton** serves as a project manager for a USAID-funded cooperative agreement, the Higher Education Partnership - Morocco (HEP-M), and as a clinical assistant professor in the division of teacher preparation for Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. **Dr. Rebekka Jez** (University of San Diego) moderated the event.

### **Summary**

#### **Jamaica**

Mrs. Phillips-Bennett shared that positive strategies being utilized in Jamaica stem from Individualized Intervention Plans (IIP). Continuous assessment efforts are made to assist differently-abled students, also known as at-promise students. The Jamaican government has invested funding in developing a curriculum to support students who may need more life skill preparation, especially supports that focus on youth with more profound to moderate disabilities. The supportive guidance is intended to enhance intervention opportunities through hands-on and one-on-one interactions with educators and families. In Jamaica, some schools provide special education classrooms, unfortunately, most inclusive practices have been exclusionary through a pull-out structure where students are given separate instruction and are then placed back with peers who do not have the same needs as them.

The Disabilities Act in Jamaica (2022) was recently passed and provides a step ahead for the country although there is lots of work still to do. In Jamaica, they would like to see more multi-tiered strategies being implemented that promote more inclusive learning and environments. Moving beyond the



classroom setting and involving multiple stakeholders would provide insight into the systems that need to be in place for our learners and their families. “We have a lot of parents who have children who have exceptional needs but they have no clue what to do. They have nowhere to turn and they are not sure how to really cater to them.” A more developed support structure would enhance the experience for parents as they guide their children through this process. Mrs. Phillips-Bennet would like to see Universal Design for Learning implemented more to enhance opportunities for a more inclusive society. There is also a need for more assessment centers with trained assessors because the wait list is so long that years can pass by before students are assessed properly for their needs and would have benefited from earlier intervention. Also, there is a need for more speech therapists to support more non-verbal learners and their teachers with instructional strategies that will increase engagement in learning. The pandemic showcased the inequities, especially for students who needed physical therapy and other hands-on assistance. “COVID has really changed everything and more needs to be done.” She is reminded that “being isolated for a good amount of time we also have to look at our mental state, the mental health of our students, our children. There needs to be an emphasis on the disruption the pandemic had on the consistent routine in the daily lives of youth and how that has impacted all of them through this time. Arts is a good way, art therapy, music therapy, visual arts, to allow for young people to express themselves and break down any mental barriers they may have.”

#### **Morocco**

Ms. Pinkerton’s work on teacher preparation, both in the United States and with partnerships in Morocco, focuses on preparing teachers for inclusive education. Previously, teachers would have a bachelor’s degree in various content areas, now preservice teachers can obtain a bachelor’s in education with an emphasis on inclusive practices to meet the needs of at-promise learners. There is an emphasis on the context of disability, language, and the specific needs in rural areas. In 2021, Morocco came out with a new progressive development model that focuses on developing human capital not only in schools but across all sectors. The pandemic has spotlighted critical gaps in education not only in Morocco but across the globe by providing insight into the lack of access and support for at-promise learners in remote learning environments. In Morocco, strategies are focused on inclusive education in collaboration with a number of development agencies, USAID, UNICEF, and others. The Higher Council for Educational Training in Morocco has created roadmaps for educational training and research based on the inclusive initiative released by the Morocco Reform Strategic Vision 2015-2030. These initiatives focus on equity and equal opportunities to address inequities and disparities for a more inclusive society. It ensures the *right to education and training* for people with disabilities and for people in very specific situations in urban or rural areas. With teacher preparation being a focus, we are developing a curriculum framework for inclusive education in collaboration with UNICEF. Also, we are creating reference competencies in the curriculum framework to integrate civic education and civic engagement. The Ministry of Education is also developing, with the stakeholders, reading support for deaf children at early ages as well as sign language. This will support the creation of a national frame of reference for both public and private schools.

Mr. Imaad shared about Morocco’s exploration in the increasing early childhood education for at-promise learners. He explained there is not only a need for quality educational training for teachers but a need to provide multiple pathways for special populations using intentional integration of a vocationally-focused curriculum. He hopes to have a clear assessment and delivery process that would equip learners with the knowledge, skills, mindsets, and capabilities to further their education. “Most of the time we, as educators, think about math, physics, reading, but we sometimes forget about civic education, the universal values, the promotional democracies of human rights, and these concepts are so important for the at-promise learners.” He wants to explore how to best provide adequate resources in terms of digital literacy in addition to textbooks and hands-on material. He would like there to be more



engagement of stakeholders in the curation of these materials through established professional learning communities to share best practices for inclusive education.

In Morocco, there is a focus on implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies in partnership with higher educational institutions. There is a focus on faculty training in educational departments in using UDL through an 8-part webinar series during the pandemic focused on assessments for students. Ms. Pinkerton said, “Recently, we trained 300 higher education teacher preparation faculty on implementing UDL in their classrooms as a model for primary students and I have been so pleased to say that we have we’ve received really positive feedback from faculty wanting to incorporate those strategies in order to meet the needs of the diversity of learners, not just students with disabilities.” Mr. Imad also highlighted the importance of dealing with inclusive education at all levels— educational, the governmental, and the schooling systems— by enlisting “our local authorities, our national authorities, and policymakers so that they would be able to provide quality education for all.” Finally, there needs to be a focus on pre-service training, in-service training, and professional development to support at-promise students through formal and informal educational models.

### **South Africa**

Dr. Ragpot focused on the South African teacher experience from her time in Johannesburg, specifically, teachers’ limited access to resources. It is well documented that government (township and rural) teachers who went through pre-service teacher training during the apartheid segregated system had limited and scarce resources, however, these trends seem to continue almost 30 years later. Recently, the University of Johannesburg received funding from USAID, the European Union, and ALMA philanthropies to create resources to support teachers’ professional development. They created a webpage where teachers had access to knowledge, lesson plans, templates, and resources. Through her work of bridging art and knowledge, she produced short documentaries focused on various aspects of child development in the new tradition of transformational science. They focused on making the content and resources accessible to the general public to encourage consumption beyond traditional peer-reviewed academic journals. The videos were based on current research and knowledge with an emphasis on being short, sharp, and focused to engage the audience. The films were a communal effort and focused on an aspect of child development. At the end of each video is an analysis for educators through a South African context yet, they may be transferable universally. The films are located on a webpage called “Knowledge for Action” and through Youtube for easy access.

Dr. Ragpot also mentioned South Africa does not have enough assessments or assessors and that “students have to wait quite a long time to be assessed and by the time they have designation a lot of difficulties have set in which could have been addressed early on.” This is a universal call for more trained psychologists and therapists to support schools. Also, there is a need for more teacher programming that equips teachers to work with at-promise learners. Even with teacher preparation coursework, she has been a part of in South Africa and Canada, teachers still feel underprepared to support at-promise learners. Teacher education programs need to take more responsibility in preparing teachers for this reality. When thinking about empowering at-promise youth, Dr. Ragpot mentioned that teacher preparation needs to take “into consideration indigenous knowledge systems.” Through decolonization, her university is working alongside elders in the community and the local district where over 190 languages are spoken to focus on the assets of cultural wealth versus deficit-based narratives. Also, they are utilizing non-western-based definitions of at-promise learners through indigenous eyes to support our learning as a community.



### **At-Promise Learner Support: Breakout Group Discussion**

One theme that emerged in the group discussions was the need for families to dialogue with local and national governments to move educational promises to action. Since the onset of the school system, families have organized to increase engagement with all stakeholders. Another major recommendation was to increase the focus on developing teacher pedagogical (curriculum and instruction) knowledge with our primary and secondary educational partners to ensure research is linked to practice during preservice and in-service development opportunities. The following are specific social-emotional and academic strategies to support at-promise learners the groups mentioned in their discussions.

#### **Social-Emotional**

- Support learners using multi-tiered support structures (MTSS) such as Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). This begins with learning about the youth holistically from multiple assessments, observations, and people’s perspectives. Then, creating a culturally responsive/sustaining plan of support that includes training on and providing well-managed group and individualized strategies and resources. Finally, continually re-evaluating the successes and/or changes that need to be made to support at-promise youth’s growth.
- Due to the pandemic, there is a high need for social-emotional support for students, families, and educators. It is important to start enhancing early childhood development programs with more social-emotional programming rather than pure academics.
- Mentorship and capacity building of those who work with at-promise youth to ensure unbiased, compassionate, and supportive interventions are being used with fidelity. For example, emphasize mentorship between students and counselors to support academic performance and well-being during the transition to adulthood. This should decrease segregated behavioral disciplinary practices.
- Systematically evaluate the teaching expectations (e.g., large student cohorts to teacher ratio, paperwork requirements, lack of personnel) to decrease teacher burnout and inequity in the classroom.
- Focus on educator well-being for preservice and in-service teachers. There have been multiple factors leading to attrition and teacher “shortages” since before the pandemic. We need to identify ways to improve the teaching experience and increase teacher retention.
- Build knowledge within the community on frameworks, behaviors, and structures that focus on assets-based support of at-promise learners versus deficit-based labeling and “othering.” Dismantle deficit-based labeling for students because it causes discrimination and harm to at-promise students. Students' basic needs must be met in order for them to feel like they belong and are cared for at school (Love, 2019).

#### **Academic**

- Educators utilize software applications such as GoalBook to support students through the UDL framework. Teacher preparation programs need to lead the development of inclusive training for all educators. It is concerning that anyone is allowed to teach because of teacher shortages, which is a major concern.
- Teacher Preparation: Teacher prep programs need to focus on creating dual credentialing programs focused on serving general education students and at-promise students. Universal early childhood education like Head Start can support having students gain academic skills much earlier. Academic skills need a balance with arts-based programming to focus on whole-child development.
- There is a need for more assessors to help provide services for students expediently based on their individual needs. The learning gap has widened since the onset of the pandemic due to student attendance rates. Some schools have begun sending community members to people's homes to convince families to send students back to school. It is important to get back to face-to-face

classes for students who need support as we continue to explore effective remote learning environments. Lastly, funding models need to provide programming that supports the academic performance of all students within the school environment.

- There should be a communal initiative to empower all school staff to gain professional development, certification, and knowledge/skills to work with at-risk learners. Educational policymakers and departments need to fund projects with local community members to establish new goals and outcomes that support and enhance teacher retention by being focused on local initiatives. In the classroom, coaching models of professional development for educators should focus on inclusive practices and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) differentiated instructional models.

### Recording

A recording of *Culturally Sustaining Partnerships with Families Around the Global* can be accessed on the [DISES YouTube](#) page or <https://youtu.be/PHCBI9zIawc>.

### Panel Resource List

#### Lara Ragpot, PhD

- Background and Context to Transformation of Science Academic Film Documentaries
  - Screen time and media use in childhood:  
<https://knowledgeforaction.co.za/knowledge4action-uj-tv/>
  - Attentional Difficulties in Childhood:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUMZGo6g6iE>
  - Childhood Executive Functioning: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hykRelyCk-c>
  - Phonemic Awareness and intervention series (3 episodes)
  - Episode 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2fPXpej3Eo>
  - Episode 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9M9DhUyAju>
  - Episode 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F78VwImzGys>
  - Motoric development in childhood series (2 episodes)
  - Episode 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCHKCf30enI>
  - Episode 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uB1iDcDNWak>
  - #TaxiMaths – How young children make their world mathematical (5 episodes)
  - Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3VZVF4UsoQ>
  - Episode 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeoYuTgFBU0>
  - Chapter 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH-3vwSrkaY>
  - Chapter 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1185yHsynLc>
  - Episode 4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5w8edFknkik>
  - Chapter 5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNdmTk7wBjE>
- Thesis writing series (5 episodes)
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tihg6GB8Nqw&list=PLmbDDo1ahGjBkc0MRU4c-AM2V2V-pQI1P>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOM5ywgOHGQ&list=PLmbDDo1ahGjBkc0MRU4c-AM2V2V-pQI1P&index=2>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS3Ct1rfWtU&list=PLmbDDo1ahGjBkc0MRU4c-AM2V2V-pQI1P&index=3>
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UN\\_qPuj9TGA&list=PLmbDDo1ahGjBkc0MRU4c-AM2V2V-pQI1P&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UN_qPuj9TGA&list=PLmbDDo1ahGjBkc0MRU4c-AM2V2V-pQI1P&index=4)
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBFaVRdMvO0&list=PLmbDDo1ahGjBkc0MRU4c-AM2V2V-pQI1P&index=5>

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#### Joan Phillips-Bennett

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- Cross Academy
  - <https://kpcrossacademy.org/videos/>
  - <https://kpcrossacademy.org/downloads/>
  - Special Needs Webinars: <https://www.facebook.com/specialneedsja/videos/>

#### Elarbi Imad

- <https://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/resources/case-study-inclusive-education-development-morocco>
- [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356002374\\_Teaching\\_practices\\_in\\_Moroccan\\_schools\\_Are\\_they\\_inclusive\\_A\\_case\\_study\\_from\\_the\\_South-East\\_of\\_Morocco](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356002374_Teaching_practices_in_Moroccan_schools_Are_they_inclusive_A_case_study_from_the_South-East_of_Morocco)
- [https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/6586/file/Morocco%20Country%20Report%20on%20OOSC%20Summary\\_EN.pdf%20.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/6586/file/Morocco%20Country%20Report%20on%20OOSC%20Summary_EN.pdf%20.pdf)

#### Tanya Pinkerton

- [Distance Learning Webinars](#)
- Center for Applied Special Technology: [Universal Design for Learning guidelines](#)
- Educational Technology Tools
  - [Pear Deck](#)
  - [Flip Grid](#)

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