



Forum on Inclusive Practices: Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean

A Virtual Event Hosted by DISES October 15, 2022

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In this session, we continued the examination of the international 2022 UNESCO REDS report and the impact that the global pandemic has had on learners and teachers across the globe. This interactive virtual event highlighted panelists from Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean who shared positive strategies being used in their countries along with hopes for our future. Dr. Rebekka Jez moderated as Dr. Aleksandra Ristić (Slovenia), Dr. Argune Chitiyo (eight African countries), and Dr. Melinda Pierson (Haiti) shared about their work around the globe. The audience came together to learn, share, and grow in their international special education and services knowledge, and skills. To frame the event brief, descriptions of the UNESCO REDS Report and cultural reciprocity are provided.

UNESCO REDS Report 2022

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2022) Responses to Educational Disruption Survey (REDS) surveyed 11 countries to learn about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education (Meinck, Fraillon, & Streiholt, 2022). The results indicate there were disruptions in educational access, challenges with getting learners the support they needed (e.g., reduced rigor of schoolwork, internet access), and an impact on the emotional well-being of students, teachers, and leaders. Other factors that were identified in the report included inequities based on socioeconomic statuses, such as less support for learners and families. For example, some learners said they were not confident working independently, and some teachers agreed that they were unable to support some of the learners' needs outside of school. Many learners and families reported they were unable to access academic work due to connectivity challenges and conflicts with their jobs. Overall, the educational experiences during the pandemic differed across countries with some students completing all of their work on school campuses and others doing their work solely at home. Even with these different models of schooling, COVID-19 shifted the global perspectives of what access to schooling could mean for individuals with disabilities.

Cultural Reciprocity

Kalyanpur and Harry (2012) define cultural reciprocity as the responsibility educators have to continuously engage in deep self-reflection on their own culture and the cultures of their students. This work requires educators to first confront their assumptions and biases and then examine the impact of White cultural norms that are inherent within the education systems around the world (Jez, Osborne, & Hauth, 2022; Tevis et al., 2022). Once educators have named these challenges, they need to confront the barriers experienced by learners identified as having a disability. With a more robust level of cultural proficiency, educators can begin to build learning experiences from the assets in the community (Quezada, Lindsey, & Lindsey, 2012). This may include amplifying the engagement of multilingual members, connecting individuals with differing abilities, or creating space for families from different cultural backgrounds to connect. It is through introspection that learners, families, and educators can build stronger community bonds, can feel more empowered to speak up, and are able to make more informed decisions.

Panelist Biographies

Dr. Argune Chitiyo is an assistant professor of Applied Behavior Analysis at Ball State University in Indiana. His research interests focus on evidence-based practices for students with emotional disorders and autism. He also does research focused on Special Education development in Sub-Saharan Africa. Having taught at K-12 schools back in Zimbabwe, Dr. Chitiyo is passionate about

policy changes that address special education teachers' professional development needs to better serve students with disabilities. **Dr. Aleksandra Ristić** has a master of theology and a doctorate of science in special education. She is currently a special education teacher in Slovenia. She believes in empowering all in need to impact the world. She has volunteered thousands of hours working with persons with disabilities and connecting research to practice to find solutions for children with special needs. She worked on the UNESCO REDS Report 2022. **Dr. Melinda R. Pierson** has been the Chair of the Department of Special Education for 15 years and the Director of the International Partnerships in Education for 12 years at Cal State Fullerton. She has published over 100 articles, book chapters, and grants on best practices in special education with a focus on international teacher training, inclusion for all in all countries, and effective characteristics to support struggling learners. Dr. Pierson has led 12 studies-abroad trips with more than 125 participating pre-service teachers to Haiti and Germany where the focus is on inclusive schools.

Summary

Africa

During his presentation, **Dr. Argune Chitiyo** discussed research-based strategies in managing the classroom as a means to address challenging student behavior. Dr. Chitiyo adopts Smith & Fox's (2003) definition of challenging student behavior, defining it as a pattern of behavior (or perceived behavior) that impacts optimal learning or engagement with peers and adults. Concerning student behavior may manifest as students being disruptive, withdrawn, violent, self-harming, or exhibiting inappropriate social behaviors. Such student actions, when left unchecked or not properly addressed with research-based behavior management practices, may have negative effects in the classroom and can yield the following outcomes:

- Disruption to learning
- Interference with students' social-emotional development
- Harm caused to other students and the self
- Teacher burnout

Dr. Chitiyo shared that classroom management is critical to preparing teachers with student behaviors in the classroom (Auld, Belfiore, & Scheeler, 2010; Ficarra and Quinn, 2014; Kennedy & Thomas, 2012) and yet preparation in this area is often not enough (Ficarra and Quinn, 2014; Levine, 2006; Oliver & Reschly, 2007, 2010). For example, Dr. Chitiyo found that across four African countries—Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe—behavior management ranked high as requiring further professional development (Chitiyo et al., 2016; Chitiyo et al., 2017; Chitiyo et al., 2019; Chitiyo, Jumedzro et al., 2019). In consequence, schoolteachers across these countries felt unprepared to manage challenging student behaviors.

In his focus on student behavior management, Dr. Chitiyo explored various teacher preparation programs across eight countries in Africa in an effort to examine the extent to which teacher preparation programs include evidence-based behavior management practices in their preparation of schoolteachers. Evidence-based behavior management practices are rooted in scientific evidence, are person-centered, and improve a student's social, emotional, and academic functioning (Cardona and Neas, 2021; Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008). The default management practices in Africa, Dr. Chitiyo shared, are punishment-based methods, which do not address the function of challenging behavior. In looking at a total of 17 programs within 11 teacher training institutions across eight African countries and analyzing multiple teacher preparation curricula, Dr. Chitiyo discovered that three of the 17 programs offered at least one course specific to behavior or to manage the classroom, and only one of these programs addressed critical features of evidence-based behavior management practices. This makes a convincing argument that classroom management and behavior management continue to be important tools missing from many teachers' repertoire upon completion of their preparation programs.

Europe

Dr. Aleksandra Ristić shared research detailing perspectives of Slovenian pupils with distance learning due to COVID-19. With 1.5 billion children across the planet affected by school closures due to the COVID-19 outbreak (UNESCO, 2020), several nations were motivated to use remote learning approaches to instruction, and preparedness for this transition greatly differed across countries. In a chart of the 2003 and 2017 e-learning index (Arneberg, Keegan, Lössenko, and Mázár, 2003) by country, a visual for where Slovenia was in comparison to the rest of Europe indicated that the country possessed one of the lowest e-learning index scores in Europe. The e-learning index indicates a country’s ability to produce, use and expand Internet-based learning [...by measuring] connectivity, Capability, Content, and Culture (Ristić, 2022). When compared worldwide, Dr. Ristić showcased Slovenia’s e-learning index as compared to that of developing countries.

While the EU created Digital Education Action Plans to address and possibly transform the acquisition of digital skills and competency of Europeans, the pre-pandemic reality was that by 2018, only 23% of teachers in Europe had Information and Communication Technology (ICT) knowledge, 70% of students still needed to develop their ICT skills and this gap was wider across vulnerable groups (i.e., girls and persons with disabilities). Europe, and by extension Slovenia, was just beginning its talks on technology literacy, skills, and competence in schools when the pandemic hit, and when education shifted to remote learning.

Using the Educational Disruption Survey, Dr. Ristić launched a quantitative study between March and April of 2022 and surveyed 86 pupils (37 boys and 49 girls) between the ages of 13 and 14 for their perspectives on distance learning. Key findings on distance learning due to COVID-19 from the Slovenian pupils’ perspective included both positive and negative sentiments. Positive or satisfactory responses included increased teacher support, safety, and grades. Negative or dissatisfactory responses included feelings of being unempowered, reduced use of personalized strategies for learning (i.e., being in the role of the listener), and increased stress. Overall, the challenges of distance learning for Slovenian pupils include disconnections in communication between teachers and classmates. The table below (Table 1) provides a general overview of the top satisfactory and unsatisfactory responses provided.

Dr. Ristić concluded that the transition to e-learning in Slovenia was done quickly, and ineffectively since many experienced little to no access to digital technologies. Most (80%) pupils were ready to return to “normal” teaching practices and nearly just as many (72%) felt there were gaps in their knowledge from the experience. Suggested supports for future implementation were further discussed during breakout sessions. A significant conclusion (among several) was that creativity is needed to build more engaging and impactful learning experiences for students regarding e-learning.

Table 1. *Findings from Slovenia’s REDS Survey*

Top 5 Findings: Satisfaction	Top 5 Findings: Dissatisfaction	Top Findings: Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 89% received needed teachers’ support • 79% had more time for other activities • 53% felt home safer than before • 50+% received higher grades than before • 42% upgraded their ability to access materials online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 92.3% teachers used written feedback to pupils • 73% of pupils unempowered with digital technology needed for eLearning • 60 % of the session is in the role of listener • 60% in Europe (39% in Slovenia) with/out insufficient teaching assistance of family members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80+% of Slovenians found e-learning as the most difficult form of learning • 80% obtained information mostly online (50% did not understand the materials they received) • 66% missed contact with classmates

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- 60% express that distance learning was stressful for them
 - 60% were stressed by e-learning without preparation
 - 50+% had big concerns about long-term knowledge
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Caribbean

Dr. Pierson discussed her work on a Teacher Training research project in Haiti. She began by sharing the context around education in Haiti and her experience working in the area for the past ten years. During her travels, Dr. Pierson attended conferences, provided professional development to teachers at the schools, and facilitated teaching opportunities for college-level students in the U.S. to practice their skills with students in Haiti. Dr. Pierson indicated that prior to recent events in Haiti (i.e., the pandemic, economic crisis, the assassination of President Moïse, and natural disasters) education was already a challenge. A primary reason for education being a challenge in Haiti is that one's ability to access school is focused on the amount of money a family generates. This is because most, if not all, schools in Haiti require tuition. In fact, 80% of primary schools in the country are nonpublic and even with paid tuition, quality is in question. For example, 60% of all schools, including schools with tuition, do not have a toilet. With the continuing rise in school tuition, the scarcity of jobs, and the need for parents to rely on child labor to help feed the family, it is no wonder that only 20% of secondary-aged kids are enrolled in school. Access to good education is limited since there is no oversight to school effectiveness in Haiti, and any type of formal education is non-existent for students with disabilities. Of those that attend primary and secondary school, only 1% of Haitian students matriculate to university.

In her project, Dr. Pierson provides inclusion projects for students at the orphanage schools. With this approach, students are provided with some learning access they would otherwise not receive. Due to the current economic and political upheaval in the area, the project has turned into virtual professional development for teachers through zoom. The focus of these virtual sessions has been on literacy, interweaving literacy activities across all subjects, citizenship skills, and addressing challenging behaviors in students by developing a positive classroom environment.

As part of her work in Haiti, Dr. Pierson would typically bring suitcases of free resources with a focus on low-tech resources to make the training more accessible to all teachers and offer food for training. Each conference session is focused on small group activities and discussions. There is a focus on the reciprocity of learning where preservice teachers that joined Dr. Pierson, are expected to facilitate small group discussions around implementing various strategies in the classroom. Dr. Pierson shared that teachers from the U.S. develop cultural awareness throughout this process, learn more about access to tools, educational styles, and spaces outside of the U.S., and develop cultural sensitivity as they collaborate and communicate with education in other cultures. Participating teachers earn a certificate to show evidence of continued education.

Breakout Group Discussion

In an effort to exchange strategies for the implementation of evidence-based management practices in teacher preparation programs in Africa, in addressing digital competence within schools in Europe, and in providing inclusive literacy, behavior, and positive classroom environment teachings in the Caribbean; speakers, and participants were placed in breakout rooms. In this space, each group and speaker collaboratively identified strategies to develop the capacity of classroom or pre-service learners (and their respective stakeholders) with critical practices in literacy, behavior, and digital competence.

Dr. Chitiyo’s group identified challenges in education in Africa that may contribute to challenging behaviors of students, such as large classrooms. The group also discussed resources still needed to support all students and platforms, such as conferences that can offer additional learning spaces for educators. Dr. Pierson’s group discussed further challenges to education in the Caribbean, the work still being done during the current political climate, albeit virtually. Dr. Ristić’s group identified the next steps for e-learning in Europe and identified micro-credentialing as a means to build capacity. The table below (Table 2) provides discussion points from each breakout room.

Table 2. *Breakout Room Recommendations*

	Evidence-based management practices	Digital competence for all learners	Literacy and positive classroom environment
Student Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide screening & assessments ◆ Understand that underlying disabilities may contribute to challenging behaviors ◆ Look at technology access and availability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Establish educational centers for ITC technology ◆ Build morale & offer peer learning ◆ Support for transition - emotional well being ◆ Provide ITC Digital learning skills in primary schools ◆ Low tech - Assistive technology ◆ Offer project-based activities ◆ Provide families & students with access to educational centers ◆ Create differentiated knowledge groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Inclusion - include students with a variety of disabilities ◆ Dual Immersion - utilize English in schools as many of the students are adopted by English speaking families ◆ Emphasize building relationships with students ◆ Lead community outreach to provide support, including webinars to train teachers on ways to better support SWD
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Training on conducting functional behavior assessment (FBA) ◆ Collaboration among Teachers & Families to address challenging behaviors ◆ Address the student to teacher ratio ◆ Look at technology access and availability ◆ Participate in international conferences and trainings for awareness and/or training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Personal training for teachers ◆ Digitize text material into video context ◆ Form connection between schools and share best practices ◆ Create platform/network for European countries with their digital e-learning systems to collaborate ◆ Provide webinars for Professional Development support ◆ Create a Buddy teacher program where teachers from different countries can connect ◆ Offer Blogs to share experiences ◆ Offer microlearning certificates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Consider funding sources for supporting teachers in Haiti. For example, Dr. Pierson- donations through social media ◆ Learn about the teachers’ priorities in order to plan for professional development ◆ Provide materials in French and English ◆ Hire appropriate staff to support an English immersion model (hire English-speaking teachers)

Recording

A recording of *Forum on Inclusive Practices: Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean* can be accessed on the [DISES YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irGBUKV3VF0) page or <https://youtu.be/irGBUKV3VF0>.

Panel Resource List

Chitiyo Argune, PhD

- The Challenge of Inclusive Education in Sub-Saharan Africa
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31005>
- USAID Studies exploring trends in Inclusive Education in Africa
<https://www.edu-links.org/learning/usaid-studies-trends-disability-inclusive-education-africa>
- Financing Inclusive Education in Zimbabwe
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/SRJ-02-2020-0039/full/html>
- Finance, inequality, and Inclusive Education in Sub-Saharan Africa
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0313592620304008>
- Local knowledge in inclusive education policies in Africa: informing sustainable outcome
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8831928/>
- Transforming Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan African Countries Towards the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030: New Opportunities, Challenges, Problems, and Prospects
<https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/35909/transforming-teacher-education-in-sub-saharan-african-countries-towards-the-achievement-of-sustainable>
- Challenging Behavior in Secondary School Students: Classroom Strategies for Increasing Positive Behavior
https://www.academia.edu/33908429/Challenging_Behaviour_in_Secondary_School_Students_Classroom_Strategies_for_Increasing_Positive_Behaviour
- Disabilities and education sub-Saharan Africa: A fact sheet based upon the findings from the 2020 Gem Report on inclusion and education, All means All.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375017/PDF/375017eng.pdf.multi>
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 - <https://www.haiti-now.org/education-in-haiti/>
 - <https://www.we.org/en-US/our-work/we-villages/education-around-the-world/education-in-haiti>
 - <https://www.hhao.org/education-in-haiti>
- YouTube Videos About Haiti and Education
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgGZcuYiaOU> Haiti Education System



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YzSmU3M8kw> What Does It Take to Fix a School System in Haiti?
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbJu4FTdZLs> Haiti's Education Challenge

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