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**0:00:08.1 Nathan Cheney:** Hello, and welcome to another episode of Popular Podagogy. I'm your host, Nathan Cheney, and this podcast is being brought to you by the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. We're very fortunate today to be joined by a Queen's faculty member at the Faculty of Education and a researcher who's looking at students with exceptionalities and how they've been affected during this pandemic. So I'd like to welcome on Ian Matheson. Ian welcome to the podcast.

**0:00:36.8 Ian Matheson:** Excited to be here, Nathan, thanks for having me.

**0:00:38.4 NC:** Absolutely. So Ian obviously over this past year, things have been a little bit challenging for everybody, it's been a little bit different for everybody. Everything has changed, and a big part of that has been the school system, and we're filming this or recording this at the end of May right now, we're in Ontario, there's a lot of discussion about what is the benefit of going back to school at this point in time. What is not the benefit? And you're looking back at the past year and also seeing who was affected and how was that affected, so can you tell us a little bit more about some of the implications that learning from home have had on students with exceptionalities and on individuals who maybe are not being brought up in that conversation or that discussion.

**0:01:29.8 IM:** Yeah, that's a great question and a broad one, a lot of themes we could probably go into, but maybe the best place to start, Nathan, is that it seems like we're seeing from preliminary research findings focused on the pandemic, that vulnerable youth, whether they're students with exceptionalities or just part of a broader category of vulnerable youth are experiencing greater adversity at home, because again, as teachers we're less positioned to be able to notice the types of things that

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we might have been able to notice. I think I saw a recent stat that in Quebec, they've seen a decline in the number of reportings that teachers have made on behalf of students because again, we're not seeing as much happening, and when you think about particularly students with special education needs, students with exceptionalities we can see less and therefore we can do less, I think in a remote environment necessarily.

**0:02:22.5 IM:** But that doesn't mean there isn't a lot that we can do in terms of finding opportunities for direct support, but I really sympathize with teachers, my wife is one, because we have a lot of discussions about how really we're dropped into this kind of environment and we're doing what we can to still have rigor in our teaching to follow the curriculum to allow students access, but then also to balance that with understanding they're going with... Going through a lot of challenges right now, socially and emotionally, and so sometimes that particular direct support tied to their IEP or whatever it may be... You're kind of negotiating that. I think as a teacher and thinking, Well, I want to be able to focus on the academics, but I also want to give the students some space, and so that's kind of almost like an extra accommodation that we didn't necessarily consider, at least to the same degree when schools were in person.

**0:03:13.2 NC:** So what would be some advice that you would have for teachers who are working through that type of situation and trying to balance making sure that the students feel emotionally healthy and are cared for and feel welcome, but also ensuring that academically we're trying to keep up as best we can?

**0:03:35.5 IM:** I think trying to find time and space to connect individually with those students would be the biggest... Best piece of advice I could give, it seems like a lot of us experience this collectively, that a lot of screens are black, blank, and we don't necessarily know if students are engaged or if they've just signed on and the mic is muted and so I think it can be challenging to know what kind of experience we're having, and so just like in person, the best advice I think that any teacher can take is connect with all of your students and those with special education needs are no different that I think we need to best understand what their challenges are, and that can come through the IEP and the IPRC process and their history and academics, previous teachers, parents, but I think a big part of it can come from what their experience is, how they're finding things, and that's why I think it's really important.

**0:04:30.9 IM:** And my wife has done this a number of times, I think a lot of teachers are doing this, they're finding time and space to connect to students, and that seems to be making the difference because students are ultimately the ones signing on, they're the ones working through assignments and probably struggling to connect socially with peers because there isn't really a space to do that, so I just think that check-in where it's not public, it's not in front of any other students, it's really a one-on-one, just as it would be in school, honestly, is sometimes easier because in school, if you had a student stay behind for a couple of minutes, they may feel like, Oh, I'm the student who has to stay behind or in class, or the teacher has to talk to me quietly and privately and others are seeing that. Through Zoom

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and other online platforms, other students don't have to see that. No one needs to know that there's that connection being made, so I think in some ways it offers an opportunity for even more privacy and and anonymity for students that are struggling with that compared to their peers.

**0:05:28.0 NC:** So one of the things that you mentioned earlier, and it kinda builds off what you were just talking about, is the vulnerable students have been almost more vulnerable as a result of this, and one of the things that I was thinking about is we had a lot of students, when I was teaching that, the school was kind of their... I don't wanna call it a safe place, but it was a second home, it was a place that they could come and look forward to coming to and be comfortable at. And so during this pandemic, how do you reach those students who are looking to have that kind of escape or are looking to have that as an alternative to being at home?

**0:06:09.6 NC:** And, I mean all of us have gone a little bit crazy, I'm sure. Staying at home for as long as we have, it's not unreasonable to then think about what that does to students who maybe are looking to have at different atmosphere than what they have at home right now, so I guess my question is, how can we reach those students and make it so that during this time, we're actually able to better support them too, because as we've noted, the equity gap can increase quite a bit when we get to this point, and trying to minimize that also means trying to reach those students who are maybe hard to reach right now.

**0:06:50.4 IM:** Yeah, that's such a difficult and important question, a great question to ask, Nathan. I wish I had a great answer for it, but I guess what I think about primarily is that just reaching them is the most important thing, so whatever it looks like, maybe is less important than us just trying to connect and trying to reach out and find time to say like, Hey listen, even if you're not able to make it to class, Let's try once every day or every couple of days to find five minutes together where we can connect. I think this is where we get into this space as educators of considering priorities here and what matters most, and ultimately, of course, there's a pretty easy hierarchy there that we want students to be safe and happy and healthy, and to be okay generally, and curriculum and meeting curriculum expectations probably are always going to be secondary to that.

**0:07:46.5 IM:** But like you say, when students aren't coming in every day, and when we're not able to see if they're okay and see how well they're doing, and we know about the importance of having social connections, direct social connections, when that's not happening, I think we need to say that our teaching needs to change and focus more on just finding time to check in with students and get the best sense we can of how they're doing, what their experience has been like at home, what they're dealing with, what their challenges are because... Again, one of the big responsibilities we have as teachers is the duty to report when things aren't going well. Whether that's because parents are absent, there's neglect happening, or whether it's because parents are working as hard as they can and they just can't provide what their students need, that's a reality too, and it's no one's to blame in that case.

**0:08:38.1 IM:** But I think it starts again, where we have to ask ourselves, what is our responsibility as educators? And a lot of provinces and territories, we're seeing these programs where schools are willing and able to provide access to internet, access to technology and that type of thing, so we're hopefully eliminating that possibility where students just don't have the economic means to be able to connect and access education, ultimately, I just think it's about finding a channel, a direct channel to students, and it's great if 70% of them are able to come online and attend a class and engage every day, and we get a sense that they're doing okay, but when there's this collection of students we're never hearing from, I think we need to take it or put it to the top of our list as educators to say, Okay, my job now is to find out what's going on with the student. Why am I not seeing them? Why am I not hearing from them what's happening now?

**0:09:31.8 NC:** Absolutely, and I think you hit the nail on the head there when you talked about making that connection, and it's nice that it actually is a little bit more of a private connection, but if we can have that connection between the student and the teacher, that's a trust factor that maybe couldn't be in existence when, like you said, when they're having to stay behind after class or they're having to do that in front of their peers. This is a much more private setting for them to build that trust and if you can get buy-in on either side, that's a really big win.

**0:10:06.0 NC:** And I wanna spin this into a positive light here and not go too far and too deep, but that's one example of something that could be really good that comes out of this pandemic and this... And not that it's a good thing that's coming out of the pandemic, but it's a positive change in the way that we do things. So I guess my next question is just looking at, are there any other things that have been actually a positive about the shift to home learning for some of these students, and is there anything that we can learn from this and then take forward as we move into the school system of the future, or how has this pandemic changed what we're going to see in schools in the future to better support students?

**0:10:56.6 IM:** Yeah, great question. And obviously, it's nice to go to a positive place here because so much has been stressful and negative with this experience, this universal experience. A couple of things jump out to me, one being that it seems like parents, in some cases, are getting to know their children better they're getting more time with them because they're at home, of course, with them, and so I think they're seeing their child as a student in a way that they maybe never had before. They're having direct experiences, seeing them struggle with things and seeing them succeed, and so in that way, I think you're getting to know your child more and... Well, it's negative in some sense, to see them struggle. It's information for a parent to A, realize, Oh, this is what it's like for them, I kind of understand them more, and therefore I'm in a better position to support them as a parent or a guardian.

**0:11:53.1 IM:** And B, that's information, that is something else I can share with the teacher, whether it's staying remote or when we go back, it's information to say This is what I'm seeing directly, and it's obviously something that you can't see because you're not here in my living room, or you're not able to spend X amount of time with my students because you've got 30 of them. Whatever it may be. This, I think, gets into this place of the role parents and families more generally can play in supporting the education of our students, is that they can notice and see things that teachers aren't in a position to notice because they've got a distributed responsibility across a group of students. So I guess that would be one.

**0:12:34.1 IM:** And two, I think that these things more broadly represent opportunities, I think there's a lot happening here that again, can be challenging, that hopefully parents, teachers, administrators, all stakeholders are noticing that we can say, Okay, these are things that really matter because we're noticing the absence of them now, we're noticing the absence of social engagement for our kids, how difficult it can be for them to focus online, I think we're learning more about what can work and what can't work for our students, and what really matters to them, so ideally, it's kind of nice to move into a summer where educators can... Along with taking so much deserved vacation time, hopefully educators can start to think about, hopefully returning and what kinds of things we really need to put more funding into, more resources into and support into.

**0:13:26.4 IM:** So if social connections and relationships really seem to matter, and that was probably one of the biggest findings of some of this preliminary research we did is that relationships seem to be the most important thing, how are we leveraging relationships within our school system, how are we promoting those and focusing on them to support our students, particularly with special education needs. It's interesting, we're moving into this really exciting positive space in the summer, but some parents we spoke to, particularly with children that have intellectual or developmental disabilities, they're moving into a space where their only social connection was the classroom because their kids maybe don't feel they really have any authentic or genuine friendships with students.

**0:14:08.9 IM:** So they go into the summer and those are maybe two months spent where they're looking forward to seeing their classmates again or their friends again because they don't really have that outside of it, so it makes me realize again, that I'm ever cognizant that the summer isn't the same for every kid, for me, it was a time where I could see my friends all the time, but for some of our kids, they don't have that put in place. And so I think it also pushes us in a direction of asking questions about what kinds of social programs can exist, maybe virtually that can go on and don't necessitate having a teacher there to formally run program or whatever it may be. Just social relationships are so important for kids, and when they're not something you can just have and create easily, it's something that really needs focus and action on the part of educators, administrators, whatever may be.

**0:15:02.1 NC:** Yeah, so I guess one of the areas that I was hoping that we would touch on is that, is that how can we take the information that we're learning, like the importance of relationships, and then

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apply it in a way that is going to help support the students as they move forward, and we've had a lot of conversation about online learning, we've had a lot of conversation about what is here to stay and what's not. And I think that there probably will be some form of blended classrooms in the future, I don't think that what we've done during the pandemic is necessary. Even though many of us would say, I don't ever wanna see a Zoom call again.

**0:15:37.5 NC:** I don't think that that's necessarily the way that things are going to go, and I think you bring up a good point in that school is so much more than just the academics. We have our classes, we have our curriculum, we have our teachers who are trained in delivering that curriculum, but for as long as I've been involved in education, you've always heard about the hidden curriculum, or you've heard about the social aspect of school or the extracurriculars and all of those things for a lot of students were taken away this year. And you don't often think about the positives that come along with it, which are there are students who maybe don't fit into some of those extra-curricular activities, or students who don't have those easy connections in another way, we were kind of pushed into that through the online format and how can we take those students who maybe were able to benefit in this format or who had more of an opportunity and bring that back to the classroom so that we're learning from what we've gained and we can build upon that. So I think that's a really good lesson that you've kinda highlighted, and I hope that we can continue to see that through your research there.

**0:16:56.3 NC:** So going back a little bit now, in terms of special education, there's been a lot of challenges over the past year and a lot of things that really have been exacerbated, and I know you've done a lot of work on this in the past, but for parents, it's been much more upfront this year, I think even then in years past, because they're there and they're seeing it and they're working through that with their child every single day. So how do you see the parent and teacher relationship kind of evolving through the pandemic, and you alluded to it a little bit earlier when you said that the parents are seeing it all the time now and they're a little bit more aware. Do you think that that will be stronger as we move past this and kind of return to a more in school, or do you think that once we get back to school and things kind of return to whatever the future of normal looks like, that that might go into the past. What's kind of your thoughts on that?

**0:18:02.0 IM:** Gosh, I hope it improves. I try to be an optimist, but we are seeing in some of our preliminary research again, that while some parents, in some cases are finding that they're happy and satisfied with teachers efforts, some, I think feel that there is more that could be done, and so in some ways this pandemic might create a little more tension in that parent/guardian and teacher/school relationship, which is such an important one. I just...

**0:18:35.0 IM:** I really think that the most important thing between parents, guardians, and the school or teachers directly, is that we try to describe what we're seeing, and remind ourselves that our shared focus is on the well-being of the student. I don't think any of us are in a good position to tell others how to do their job. Even if parents are teachers, and they're like, "Look, I'm a teacher. This is how... What

you need to be doing." They're not that student's teacher. They're not teaching that class. And so, they don't really understand. Just the same as... I don't think teachers are in a position to tell parents how to raise their kid. They're not at home all the time. As you talked about, Nathan, seeing what's happening with that child.

**0:19:13.2 IM:** So, if we can't acknowledge that, as both stakeholder groups, that we shouldn't be telling others how to do their job, and that our position should really just be on describing what we see, describing what we're noticing, describing the conditions, and sharing that information. Not prescribing to each other, "Here's how it should be done." But just saying, "Here's what we had. Here's what we know." And then collectively coming together, and saying, "With all of this information, what makes the most sense?" Getting everyone around the table. You know, I'm finding increasingly that I'm excited about the prospect of us as an education system involved in students, parents, guardians, more-and-more in the IPRC Process. Which, of course, leads to individual education plans. So, finding ways, particularly formally, to support our students with special education needs, and I just... I think that has to come with everyone sharing their perspective, their experiences, what they're noticing, and then coming together to say, "Okay, we have all of this information. We've got these resources available.

**0:20:14.0 IM:** What seems to make the most sense?" As soon as you leave somebody off the table, whether it's the student's perspective or the parents perspective, that's just less information to go on, and it's a couple of pieces of the puzzle that are suddenly missing. So, I just feel like broadly, while I like to remain optimistic that that can happen and I... I actually do think it can happen, it's difficult sometimes when you have a negative experience. And therefore, maybe parents or guardians are less willing to work with the school, because they perceive that the school has not done enough, or parents are feeling like... Oh, the... Or, sorry, teachers are feeling like the parents aren't doing enough at home, because they're just kinda letting their child plug in and they're not doing what they maybe need to to support. So, I just think conversation, communication, has to happen, and eventually that can lead to the sharing of resources, information, knowledge, that type of thing. So, that's hopefully where it will go. I guess time will tell. But ultimately, again, we just need to acknowledge that none of us are experts in every position concerning the child, but we do share, hopefully, a common interest in their well-being and development.

**0:21:19.5 NC:** Absolutely. And I think a lot of what you're talking about there, is a lot of what I actually have seen and felt when I've been reading through some of your articles and research and everything else. And that's the key factor of communication, and the communication between all stakeholders, whether it's parents, parents-to-students, students-to-parents, parents-to-teachers, teachers-to-parents, administration-to-parents, and all the way along there. And... I was reading through a past co-publication that you had had, and there was an example that was given there, and it was describing the different types of parents a little bit and talking about what they were like. And there was a parent who was advocating for their child, and I think it's fantastic that they were advocating for their child. But the scenario was, I'm guessing, a fictional scenario, and it had the parent who had sent the teacher a message at night, and then the teacher didn't respond. And so, the parent then went to the school

principal and said how the communication was so poor. And as a former teacher, I got my backup, and I was like, "Well, it's night. It's nighttime... We have to have a break.

**0:22:30.9 NC:** We can't always be on and doing that." And then, I started to think about it. I was like, "Well, okay. But what could have been done before that to have gotten to that point? And how could we have improved that communication?" And so, I'm of two minds here. As a former teacher and knowing how busy I was and how challenging it was to have that type of communication between myself and parents, and keeping that going. I have the thought of, "Okay. Well, how do we make that communication better without adding more work to a teacher." But then, as a parent, I can also see their side of it, where it's, "Well, how do I know what's going on with my child? And how do I know what I can do there?" So, what I'm hoping... Or, what I wanna ask of you is, "What are some ways that both sides can improve their communication, while not adding to the plate of the other too, too much?" Because teachers are very busy all of the time, and it's very challenging to carve out 20, 30 minutes every day, every second day, a couple times a week, to have those conversations.

**0:23:38.4 NC:** Especially if you have student... More than one student in your classroom who is on an IEP or who has this type of need. But at the same time, if I'm a parent and I'm a parent of a student that I need to have that information, so that I can better support them at home. Again, going off what you're saying, which is assuming that all stakeholders are looking out for the best well-being of this child. What is it that we can do that's better? Is there any solution to that?

**0:24:06.2 IM:** Yeah. My kids are so young that I can't put myself in a position to say like, "Here's how to parent an adolescent or a middle schooler." But I'll do my best here without trying to preach too much. 'Cause I think it's a great question, Nathan. One thing...

**0:24:22.6 NC:** And I also recognize it's probably a million dollar question, right? It's probably one of those things where, if we had a bonafide answer to it, it would have been done by now. It's not a simple solution. So, I understand where you're coming from with that. But I... I have to put you in a hard spot, it wouldn't be fun otherwise.

**0:24:41.2 IM:** Fair enough. Yeah, I know. And I think it's a great question. Like, it's a good exercise. I think that we should always be asking ourselves, as teacher, "What can I do this year to foster that relationship?" Because I know it's going to benefit. Overall, having more people involved is gonna benefit. In the same vein for a guardian or parent. One thing that... Just to, I guess, praise my wife a little more, which is important. I do think she's doing a phenomenal job, and she gets this, I think, from other teachers and probably her own thinking. But she is so willing to share her, I think, Google classroom with parents, and any time they've connected and said, "Just wanna check and see how things are going." She's very quick to say, "I've got everything up there, and it's got as much information as the students



have." And I really love that approach, because it's kind of... It's pulling back the curtain, and saying, "Listen, there's nothing we're doing that I'm not okay with you seeing. You can see everything."

**0:25:32.7 IM:** So, for teachers, broadly, opening up their teaching, opening up what's happening in the classroom so that parents can access, I think, is so important. And you talked earlier on about how we may have more of a hybrid or different kind of looking education going forward, because of this experience we've had, and perhaps the opportunities that have come from it. So, whether we have all of our learning online in a Google Classroom or it's a newsletter or whatever it may be, I think teachers can ask themselves, "How accessible is what's going on in the classroom? And the learning that's taking place in the classroom? How accessible is that to parents or guardians, should they want to access it?" Because, again, every parent's gonna be a little bit different in how much they get involved. But I think teachers can ask themselves, "To what degree can I make that information available, should they want to have it?" That would be one thing I would say for the side of teachers. And for parents, it's tricky. 'Cause again, like I said, I'm not there and I don't necessarily have a great answer for that. But I suppose...

**0:26:35.2 IM:** I think if parents were willing to reach out to their kid... Child's teachers, and just say, "This is a bit about my situation." It doesn't have to tell specific details, but just to say like, "My routine with my child, in relation to their education, is this. This is the degree to which we talk about it, this is how much I'm usually involved, this is usually when they're doing their homework, this is what I notice at home." I think that's great, and I don't think it's a lot to ask. Even if you have a lot of children, you love and care about all of them, and I think have a lot of valuable information. So, to at least be willing to introduce yourself, talk a little bit about your dynamic and context at home, what things are like. And then, what you know about your child in a descriptive way, not a prescriptive way. Just to say, "Here's kind of the way things are for us, and the way I understand my child." I think that can only help teachers.

**0:27:24.3 IM:** And again, you've been a teacher, Nathan, and you know that when you've got dozens of students, it can be hard to find the time, extra time, to go through all those details. But what's nice about it is that, as you know, when as teachers, we apply principles of Universal Design for Learning and when we differentiate our instruction, we don't necessarily have to do something specific for every child. If things are set up inclusively, that can really help maybe most of our students. And so, then it's only in a situation where we notice something is going awry, the students challenged with something particularly, that we have that information available and we can say, "Well, now I might reach out to the parent. I know how they prefer to be reached out to, I know their work situation a little bit more, I've got this extra information. I can use that." I think it just... It opens the door up for that kind of communication. I don't think teachers need to be calling on the phone every parent or guardian, and certainly not all the time. I think that kind of thing...

**0:28:26.6 IM:** It's great when that can happen, but I think we need to, again, recognize... Like in your situation, a weekend for a teacher should be the same as a weekend for anybody. That people need a

break from things, and that you can't be expected to respond to emails at all times. I think everybody needs to be able to recharge a bit. And so, again, it's just about having information accessible to us on both sides, so that it just betters that relationship, makes it easier to connect when that sort of thing needs to happen.

**0:28:55.3 NC:** And I think one of the key things that you mentioned there, and I don't want it to fall under the... Because there was a lot of important information that you provided there. But it's the way that we approach our conversations. And so, you brought up the difference between descriptive conversations and prescriptive, and descriptive is a much more approachable way, I find, of having that conversation between two people. I don't... I have never met, and I don't think I ever will meet, a perfect teacher. And I would say that I have never met, and I don't think I will ever meet, a perfect parent. And the reason for that is because there is no prescriptive way of doing things. There is no, "This is exactly how you have to do it." But I think we get our backs up when someone comes and talks to us in a way of... And this goes both ways, from both the teacher and the parent perspective, of, "This is exactly how you have to do it." Because the person that is best suited to be that child's parent or guardian is their parent or guardian, and the person that's best suited to be that child's parent... Or, teacher is their teacher.

**0:30:00.7 NC:** And there's different things that are involved with that. But if you're having that communication where you're describing what you're doing, it also allows the other to better work off each other. And so, I think that's a really important thing that we can often forget, and I also think that makes that communication easier so that there's less blame or less shame, even, that comes from either side of, well, if my student's struggling, instead of say... Or my child is struggling, instead of saying, "This is your fault because you're not doing X, Y, and Z." It's saying, "Okay, well, this is what I'm doing. What are you doing? And how can we make it so that there's a bigger gap... Or that it closes that gap, so that this is benefiting the child?" And once we get to that point of communication between the two, and realizing that your allies and not enemies, is really when we're going to, I think, improve upon the situation for everybody. And it sounds very simple, but we're all human beings and we all have our own egos and our own challenges and our own time challenges and frustrations with communication. If there was no frustrations with communication, the world would be a much happier place, I'm sure.

**0:31:13.1 NC:** But that's something that I think is a really important message to take out of what you just said there. So, I really wanna thank you for bringing that up.

**0:31:21.1 IM:** Yeah, and... Actually, you make me think of... I think you... You raised an important point yourself here, that... I'm thinking, in that relationship, it's important to try to do at least two things. One, to get a sense of what information that other party has. So, teachers finding out what parents have, and parents finding out what teachers have. But, also, I think it's important, and maybe this is one of the missing links, is asking the question, "Help me understand your perspective."

**0:31:48.5 IM:** And when we don't do that and we just assume we know their perspective or we understand the situation, that's, I think, where you can run into tensions and the ultimate breakdown of these relationships. If you look to try to understand, and ask, "Help me understand your perspective." Not necessarily with that language, but coming from a place where you genuinely wanna know, "What's it like to be the teacher of my child? What's it like to be a parent of this child?" I think that can foster this kind of bridge or a relationship, where it's like, "Oh, okay. We're trying to understand each other." I think that's, ultimately, where a lot of evil in our world comes from, right? Fear of the unknown, and that can lead to discrimination, all kinds of things, violence. To me, it's about trying to understand the other and their position, and then trying to get some information from them to serve that ultimate purpose of supporting the child. So, I just like how you put that, Nathan.

**0:32:40.8 NC:** Well, thank you. I really went for it there, and that's what I was going for. We're gonna take a quick break right now, but we'll be right back with more from me and Matheson.

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**0:33:52.8 NC:** Alright. Welcome back to Popular Podagogy. We're fortunate to be joined today by Ian Matheson, who is a researcher at the Faculty of Education here at Queen's. So, Ian, before the break we were talking a lot about communication, and how the parent-teacher, parent-administrator kind of triangle can be improved. And also including the child in that communication, as well. And one of the things that we talked about is changing the way that we communicate, and looking at how we're approaching each other. And I think that's another thing that we should talk about, is how can we encourage more positive communication? Because oftentimes when there's communication between a teacher and a parent, it's often when something has gone wrong or where there's stress. But increasing

that positive communication is something that might change that relationship, so... Can I ask you what are some ways that we can improve upon that?

**0:34:49.3 IM:** Yeah, good question. I feel like, again, because we were talking about, before the break, that there can be this range of parenting styles, and maybe even teacher styles too, in terms of communicating with the other party, I don't think it hurts to start with a guide that can be used for anyone that's looking to foster or just begin to build that relationship. Of the types of questions you might ask. For many parents, again, when they have a child with special education needs, there's a point before there's an identification, and then there's a lot of time after, of course. And maybe before they know nothing about what autism spectrum disorder is or what a learning disability is. And so, I think it would serve parents and guardians well. And everybody well, really.

**0:35:37.6 IM:** The student and the teacher, as well. If there was some kind of guide where it was like, "These are the types of questions that you might want to begin to ask." Because, again, we sometimes don't even know what to ask. We don't even know the right questions. So, having some kind of guide like that, I think, would be helpful for parents, whether it's initial diagnosis, you're just dealing with this and finding this information out and now where do you go, or whether it's about starting to build a relationship with your teacher. Again, some parents might never look at it and might feel they never need it, but I just think that having that kind of information as a starting place can be a really great guide. And it might give you pause to think, "Well, I was going to approach it this way. Now I might ask this question a little bit differently, because the way I ask it might change the dynamic of our relationship." So, I think that's helpful, and I think the same thing could be in place for teachers. Teachers are super smart, obviously, and very good at what they do, hopefully. But they don't necessarily get trained, at least I don't see a lot of that training happening in Faculties of Education, about how you should build a relationship with the guardian or parent.

**0:36:38.8 IM:** Important as it is or can be, it isn't the primary thing that we're helping teachers learn how to do, and in Faculties of Education and Teacher Education Programming. It's just another thing. So, sometimes, Nathan, I don't know if you felt this... But sometimes I feel like overwhelmed, almost vicariously, by the amount of things that we ask our teachers to learn how to do. And it's almost like, as they're walking out the door with their degree, it's like, "Oh, yeah. And there's this, this, this, this, this." And then you trail off and it's just like, "Whoa, what?" And then, they're dropped into things, right? So, it just seems like the role of the teacher has always been many things, and there are many, many more things. And one thing I've learned this year, I got to teach a course where it's focused on the professional learning community, we've really focused on the importance of teachers communicating with other teachers within their school. That can be so powerful and helpful, and I don't think anyone who's a great teacher does it in isolation. I think great teachers do it together. They're pulling the rope in the same direction. And so, whether it's venting and trying to understand why something didn't go so well, or even why a dialogue with a parent didn't go so well, or whether it's generating ideas for how to teach a particular lesson, connecting with other teachers, colleagues, I think, is really, really helpful.

**0:38:00.0 IM:** So, it's why it's so positive when we see these parental groups that get together online or in person or whatever, they can work together to tackle situations and understand perspectives and equip each other better, so I don't know whose responsibility that is necessarily to set them up, but I think in part, teacher education programs like ours, something we really, really need to ensure is that our teachers understand the importance of communicating with other teachers and of seeing communication with parents as a potential asset for better supporting students. And again, for parents, I think just helping them to be the other side of that relationship, helping them to foster it, that could come in part from some kind of guide to get them started on it, but I don't know. I just think as a teacher, I think maybe it's more your role to just try to reach out in some way, whether it's a direct phone call or not, it could just be a letter that you sent home. I think, try to invite that as teachers, you don't always know what you're gonna get with it, but I don't think it ever hurts to say that you're willing to try to connect with them because you really think you can help, and obviously they are an expert of parenting for their child, so. Yeah, I don't know. Lots to think about there.

**0:39:12.7 NC:** Yeah, absolutely, and I like that you brought in more than just the positive communication in the parent and teacher relationship, but also the positive communication that can come from talking to colleagues, talking to others who are in a similar situation to you and in working through that situation, because it's a way for you to have a resource network, whether you are a parent, whether you are a teacher, there's groups of people that you can connect to and not feel on your own, and when you're not feeling your own in any walk of life, that's when you're not feeling as vulnerable or as overwhelmed. And this is a completely different topic, but I became a parent in the last year, and one of the first things that we did is we joined like 14 different Facebook groups that talked about everything, and some of it's terrifying because you get all the scary things, but a lot of it is really good information and it's what prevents you from doing things that you shouldn't do and also helps you do things that help with the development of your child, and it's the same thing that goes for teaching, for parenting, for being an administrator, having that support group, having these other people, even if you don't know them directly.

**0:40:22.5 NC:** It could be really helpful. So I think that's a really good point. But we are going to go on a lighter note here, we've had a lot of serious conversation, and so we need to have a little silly. And so, as you know, if you have listened to this podcast before, we often have a segment in our podcast called the classroom confession, and the point of the classroom confession is just to lighten things up, we do tackle a lot of serious topics on this podcast, but we also would like to recognize that school and education in general is a fun place, and it's where we wanna have fun, and it's where we wanna laugh and enjoy ourselves. And so the classroom confession is also meant to show the lighter side of things, and so we ask our guests who come on, who have some experience teaching, who have gone through the education system, to share a story that's something funny or silly or goofy that has happened either in their classroom or while they were a student, and so Ian, we ask you today, do you have a classroom confession for us?

**0:41:23.0 IM:** Yeah, it's like a little story that I found kind of funny at the time, and ultimately I think led to some real bonding with my students; I was a teacher candidate here at our faculty many, many years ago, and we had... I think it must have been like a Halloween type event or something like that, where we asked teachers and teacher candidates to dress up just as students were going to. And I'm not the best at coming up with really creative ideas but I remember at that time thinking like... I had a grade six class, I think, and many of them were hockey players, and I'm not great at hockey myself but really enjoy it and come from a hockey family. And so I was like, "Well, what I can do is I can dress up in hockey equipment. And I think that would be really cool because I think a lot of students would like that I'm doing that." And it's kind of almost an over the top outfit when you put on all of the gear, 'cause there's a lot, as you know, Nathan. So I did that and it was really cool 'cause you've got a lot of shock from students seeing you dressed up and wearing a helmet and you look really big and in all the stuff, and that was great, and I didn't think to bring a change of clothes, I didn't even think past probably the first 10 minutes of, "Oh, this will be cool." because for the rest of the day, I sweat a lot as it is, but I sweat a lot more when I'm wearing the full gear and the classroom isn't necessary very cool.

**0:42:43.2 IM:** So as I'm going through the day as a teacher, of course, you're getting within a few feet of students leaning over their shoulder, helping, moving around all this stuff. I think everyone became increasingly aware of the smell I was generating, that was left on my equipment and probably new smells that I was generating just in sweating. So, I think it became kind of a joke that for the rest of the day, students were hesitant to ask for my help and I would, as a joke, walk by a group of kids and they would gasp at the smell, so it just became really fun and it became one of those things that you remember. And I think I'm reminded of how one of the most important and powerful things we can do with students is share experiences with them, because I think it brings us together, it teaches us about each other in different ways, and it can be a disruption to the every day getting to know you in the classroom when it's something silly or funny like that. So it was a joke we revisited a lot, and I think that even in the years later that I visited a supply teacher or a researcher and saw these students in later grades or eventually in high school, they instantly remember that and it's fun to have that.

**0:43:49.4 IM:** So I always think back to that and think while it was one particular story, it's a reminder that it's important to share experiences and do things outside of the curriculum with your students going forward.

**0:44:01.1 NC:** So, that's a very bold move because if I was to wear my hockey equipment through a school, I honestly think that you would be able to see the cartoon stink lines that come off of you and the students would like... It would be the parting of the sea, you wouldn't see anyone on either side of me, I would just have the hallway to myself. It'd be like Pepe Le Pew just walked through the hallways. If I was walking through with my hockey equipment. But I like what you said there, about shared experiences, and I'll practice what we're talking about here, 'cause I had a similar Halloween experience when I was in my bachelor of education program, and we had a very important lecture that was taking place on Halloween. And it was Halloween, and we were teachers, we are were used to being silly, we are were used to being a little bit goofy. So a friend of mine and myself, we decided, "Well, it's

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Halloween, we're gonna dress up. Obviously, because it's Halloween, and that's what you do on Halloween."

**0:45:00.8 NC:** So we showed up to this lecture and we were the only two people that were dressed up in the entire... Everyone else was wearing a button up shirt... Very nice clothing, very well-cap, very professional, and I showed up as Mario and set sat throughout the entire lecture, asked three questions of the speaker because I wasn't gonna back down from it, and by the end of the night, they were chuckling and laughing at our expense, but also with us because we thought it was pretty funny too. And I did share that experience with all of my students when we talked about dressing up for Halloween and what we were going to do, and they got a kick out of that too. So, I think what you said there makes a lot of sense, and sometimes you're embarrassed in the moment, but it makes a funny story afterwards, and that funny story can could break the ice with a lot of different people, and so that's a really good way of thinking about it, especially when you're sitting in the hockey equipment or in the Mario costume at that time, so thanks...

**0:45:55.7 IM:** I couldn't agree more.

**0:45:57.0 NC:** Thanks for sharing that. And thanks for coming on today. It's been really great to be able to have this conversation. I think it's an important one, and hopefully, we can continue this conversation another time too, and hopefully others who are listening to this can continue that conversation with you as well. So this is where I ask, where can people find you? What are you working on?

**0:46:21.2 IM:** Yeah, I don't have social media, really. I think I have a LinkedIn that I don't put anything up there, so probably this is a reminder that I need to go and upload some of my more recent publications and things I'm working on on my faculty profile page. So, I will do that but I'm in this new directorship role and a part of that is getting giving more time working with students in our graduate program, but for anyone who's listening, I love to chat with people just as we are here about any of these things, so... Where I'm going with my research, we're starting to look at, a colleague and I are both... How higher education institutions, post-secondary institutions are supporting students with exceptionalities and how we prepare them for that transition.

**0:47:02.9 IM:** I'm also doing a lot of thinking and work related to how students understand exceptionalities and how we can assist them in the identification process all the way through to understand what kinds of challenges they experience and to prepare them to self-advocate. That's kind of the area that I've been moving into. So if you're interested in having any of those discussions with me, you can email me at my first name dot last name at queensu dot ca. [ian.matheson@queensu.ca](mailto:ian.matheson@queensu.ca). It's really the only channel I can think of apart from giving away my cell phone number to connect with people because, like I said, I just don't have the social media channels, I think it comes back to that

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conversation we had, Nathan, about wanting to carve out family time and personal time and on that. And I think that's why I don't go on those things as much as I should, but just send me an email, reach out, and I would love to chat with anyone about any of these things, so. Yeah. Always open for conversation.

**0:47:57.1 NC:** Thanks, Ian. That's great, and thank you again for coming on and staying off social media in 2021 is probably the best idea you've ever had and that's not saying something. So, it's a better choice that I've made with myself so.

**0:48:11.4 IM:** Well, thanks for the opportunity, I love the show.

**0:48:14.1 NC:** Absolutely, thank you. And that'll do it for another episode of Popular Podagody, we'd like to thank our producer, Josh, for making us sound fantastic, and if you like what you hear and you're interested in hearing more, you can find all of our episodes and subscribe on pretty much anywhere you can get your podcasts, on Google Play, Stitcher, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, CFRC website, Faculty of Education website, and probably more. Thank you for listening and we'll see you next time.