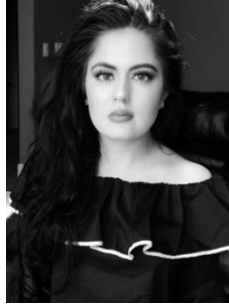


# 2025 Award Recipients



***Hassina Alizai, PhD***

## **Learning to teach while Muslim: Examining Muslim teacher candidates' experiences in Canadian teacher education**

Dr. Hassina Alizai recently completed her PhD at Queen's University in Education – Social Justice and Inclusion stream. She is currently a sessional lecturer and has instructed B.Ed. and graduate-level courses. An OCT-certified educator, she began her teaching career as a secondary school teacher both abroad and in Ontario. Her dissertation examined the experiences of Muslim teacher candidates and the various challenges they encountered while enrolled in Ontario teacher-education programs, including in-class and practicum placements. Her research areas include Islamophobia, decolonization, and equity-centred teacher education. She actively works to dismantle educational barriers faced by marginalized and racialized learners in both higher education and the K-12 system. Her lived experiences, particularly as a racialized individual with intersecting identities, coupled with a steadfast commitment as an anti-racist scholar and educator, deeply inform her research and teaching practices across diverse contexts.

[Poster Presentation](#)



***Mandeep Gabhi, PhD.***

## **Dominant or Underrepresented: How Social Position and Program Context Impacts Teacher Candidates' Professional Identity Formation**

Dr. Mandeep Kaur Gabhi is a passionate educator and researcher specializing in teacher education, with a focus on supporting underrepresented teacher candidates (TCs) in Canadian teacher education programs. Her doctoral

research at Queen's University under the supervision of Dr Lee Airtton, highlighted the challenges that TCs face, particularly during practicum placements, and proposed actionable solutions including differentiated support, mentor-mentee connections, and a critical audit of course content. Her work emphasizes the need for teacher education programs to actively address microaggressions and privilege, ensuring a more inclusive and supportive environment for all TCs. Currently, Dr. Gabhi is the Research and Learning Coordinator for the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at Queen's University, overseeing program evaluation and monitoring, as well as leading the knowledge mobilization plan for program completion. In her role as a research and learning coordinator, Dr. Gabhi works to improve inclusion and accessibility in global educational initiatives through this collaboration between Queen's University and the University of Gondar in Ethiopia.

[Poster Presentation](#)



**Michael Holden, PhD.**

### **Classroom assessment for emergent learning**

Dr. Michael Holden is an assistant professor of pedagogy and praxis at the University of Winnipeg. His doctoral dissertation – *Classroom assessment for emergent learning* – leverages complexity thinking and a multicase action research design to identify six enabling conditions to provoke and support emergent learning: (1) flexibility, adaptability, and iteration; (2) mutual trust and student agency; (3) valuing learning as a shared, ongoing process; (4) anchored pedagogies; (5) equity in context; and (6) joy and confidence. Michael's research in classroom assessment, teacher education, and equity has appeared in 19 peer-reviewed publications as well as over 100 other scholarly outputs, including 3 publications with CATE (Holden et al., 2021; Holden & Kitchen, 2017; 2019). He has previously served as a CATE Graduate Student Representative and as CSSE's Conference Manager. He is especially interested in research partnerships that support students and teachers to navigate the complexities of classroom assessment in diverse contexts.

[Poster Presentation](#)



**Lee Iskander, PhD**

## **Gender normativity in teacher education: A Critical Participatory Action Research study with trans and gender nonconforming pre-service teachers in Canada**

Lee Iskander is an educator and education researcher who recently received their PhD in Curriculum Studies from the University of British Columbia. Lee's work explores how discourses of gender and sexuality shape identities in educational spaces. Their dissertation study used critical participatory action research to study gender normativity in teacher education with trans and gender non-conforming preservice teachers in Canada. Broadly, Lee's research interests include queer and trans pedagogies, the lived experiences of trans educators, and young people's activism about education. Their writing has been published in several education and interdisciplinary journals, including *Curriculum Inquiry*, *Teachers College Record*, *Teaching Education*, and the *Journal of LGBT Youth*. Before their doctoral studies, Lee completed a BA, BEd, and MEd at York University and worked with several community organizations serving 2SLGBTQ people in Toronto.

[Poster Presentation](#)



**Sonja Johnson, PhD**

## **Addressing Skills Gap: A Systemic Reframe and Redesign of Capstone using Design-Based Research**

Sonja Johnston has been a faculty member at the Southern Institute of Technology in Calgary since 2018, and teaching in post-secondary institutions since 2012. Her passions are anchored in experiential learning and participatory pedagogies that build conditions for learner engagement within community ecosystems. As an interdisciplinary scholar, her research interests move across disciplinary boundaries while honoring the traditions and contexts that are relevant to the involved disciplines. Through her doctoral research and dissertation, she reframed the skills gap between

graduate competencies and employer expectations as a systems problem. This provided an opportunity for creating a student-at-centre lens with a redesign of an undergraduate final capstone course with the support of two instructors and the students within those two course sections. The realizations of teacher education, support, and guidance needs were important insights from this work. Currently, she is involved with research projects that explore the alignment of needs and supports for educators in work-integrated learning course designs, the structure of mentorship and leadership for educators in co-designed learning spaces, and developing scholarly activity infrastructure with faculty in high-teaching load environments that wish to do research.

[Poster Presentation](#)



***Adam Kaszuba, PhD***

### **Communities of practice for the empowerment of future French second language teachers: A critical complexity-informed perspective**

Dr. Adam Kaszuba is a part-time professor at the University of Ottawa. His research interests include policies, programs, and practices related to language teacher education, with a specific focus on professional learning, neoliberalism, communities of practice, and French second language (FSL). He has experience teaching FSL in international contexts.

[Poster Presentation](#)



***Michelle Maan, MEd***

### **Science Teachers' Culturally Responsive Practices in the Context of Distance Education: A Qualitative Study**

Michelle (she/her) recently completed her Master of Education in Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning Studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Before entering the teaching profession, she earned a Bachelor of Science and a diploma in Veterinary Technology. As a registered veterinary technician in British Columbia, Michelle was actively involved in union initiatives, including teaching the *Young Workers Alive After 5* program through the BCFED Health and Safety Centre. This experience ignited her passion for education and ultimately inspired her to pursue a degree in teaching.

After completing her Bachelor of Education, Michelle taught both in-person and through distance education in various urban and rural communities across Newfoundland and Labrador. Her combined interests in science, education, and Newfoundland and Labrador culture led her to explore Culturally Responsive Science Teaching (CRST) as a way to bridge the gap between classrooms and the communities they serve. Michelle's research focuses on the unique challenges of implementing CRST in remote areas, particularly when students from different communities come together in synchronous online learning environments.

[Poster Presentation](#)



**Sarah McGinnis, PhD.**

### **Educational Accountability: A Case Study of the Creation, Implementation and Cancellation of the Math Proficiency Test in Ontario, Canada**

Dr. Sarah McGinnis is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Bishop's University. Her research is centered on evaluation and assessment, with a particular focus on educational accountability related to teachers' qualification requirements. Sarah's teaching background includes experience in Montessori classrooms in Australia and New Zealand, substitute teaching in a U.S. public middle school, and roles as an instructor and teaching assistant at the University of Ottawa. In 2024, Sarah earned her PhD in Leadership, Evaluation, Curriculum, and Policy Studies from the University of Ottawa. Her doctoral research investigated the Math Proficiency Test, a teacher certification examination in Ontario, Canada. Utilizing a case study approach, she analyzed the intricate relationships among seven educational accountabilities. This comprehensive study contributes significantly to understanding the complexities surrounding the implementation of large-scale teacher certification exams. It sheds light on the inherent conflicts and intersections within educational accountabilities, offering valuable insights for educational policymakers and practitioners alike.

[Poster Presentation](#)



**Mitchell Miller, EdD**

## **From Bureaucracy to Belonging: An Equity-Oriented Cultural Shift in Pre-service Teacher Placements**

Mitchell Miller (he/him) recently completed his EdD in Educational Leadership at Western University. His dissertation focuses on the inter-organizational and operational process of placing preservice teachers in the field, reimagining this work as a meaningful site for equity, identity formation, and culture-building. Drawing on leadership, organizational, and change theory, his research offers an applied and actionable framework for building more just and responsive placement systems, with attention to how such change can be envisioned, communicated, and sustained. A proud practitioner-scholar, Mitchell approaches his work in education, across teaching, research, and leadership, as an ongoing opportunity for inquiry, reflection, and collaborative change. He is currently a faculty member in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University, where he also serves as a Program Director and the Associate Chair.

[Poster Presentation](#)



**Safra Najeemudeen, PhD.**

## **Unveiling Voices: Engaging Syrian Refugee Children and Educators Through a Digital Storytelling Project**

Dr. Fathima Safra Najeemudeen is an educator, researcher, and community organizer committed to equity and justice in early childhood education. She holds a PhD in Language, Culture, and Teaching from York University. Her dissertation, *Unveiling Voices: Engaging Syrian Refugee Children and Educators Through a Digital Storytelling Project*, offers an innovative model for using participatory and multimodal methodologies to center refugee

children's lived experiences. By engaging both children and early childhood educators in digital storytelling, her research amplifies marginalized voices and fosters relational, transformative learning. Grounded in the new sociology of childhood, sociocultural theory, and critical pedagogy, Safra's work challenges deficit-based narratives and reimagines inclusive pedagogies. Her findings have significant implications for preservice and in-service teacher education, demonstrating how storytelling can deepen cultural competence, empathy, and reflective practice. As an organizer with the Early Years Liberation Collective, she continues to build spaces for critical dialogue and social change in education.

[Poster Presentation](#)



**Jennifer Pirosko, PhD.**

### **Community Connected Experiential Learning: Change in the K-12 Classroom**

Jennifer Pirosko is a recent PhD graduate in Education, specializing in Policy and Leadership, at Brock University, Ontario. She serves as an Instructor in the Faculty of Education at the same institution and holds the position of Secondary Vice Principal in the Niagara Catholic District School Board. Dr. Pirosko has over 20 years' experience in education, including ten years as a K-12 Consultant and Student Success Coordinator. Her research interests include experiential learning, community partnerships, student transitions and pathways, leadership and change, school and program administration, and policy development. Dr. Pirosko is committed to cultivating rich, authentic, engaging learning opportunities for students by advancing the understanding of experiential implementation within teacher pedagogy, practice, and leadership.

[Poster Presentation](#)



**Monica Shank Lauwo**

## **Multilingualism, Antiracism, and Raciolinguicized Subjectivities in Teacher Education**

Monica Shank Lauwo is a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. As an educator, teacher educator, and researcher, she is centrally interested in ways in which language and literacies can be mobilized to disrupt inequitable systems of power, and to support antiracist, decolonial struggles. Her work in diverse contexts in Canada, Tanzania, and Kenya has addressed multilingualism and antiracism in teacher education, translanguaging and children's multilingual, multimodal authorship, and multilingual lifeworlds and decolonial imaginaries of four generations of Tanzanian women. Her doctoral work examined possibilities for centring multilingualism, antiracism, and equity across language and literacies courses in teacher education, using arts-based and identity-responsive approaches.

Monica's current postdoctoral work involves collaborating with Tanzanian girls and boys as authors, artists, and agents of change to imagine and enact decolonial educational possibilities. Her passion for the social justice dimensions of multilingual education, children's creative writing, and participatory arts-based practices fuels her collaborations with teachers, children, and grassroots communities.



**Leslie Shayer, PhD.**

### **Mathematics anxiety and contemplative pedagogy at the post-secondary level**

Shortly after obtaining her master's in mathematics in 1998, Leslie began teaching math at various post-secondary institutions, in both English and French, in Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia. She began teaching full-time at Okanagan College in 2006 and returned to graduate studies in 2018 at UBC Okanagan, with the intention of supporting students struggling with math. After successfully defending her second master's thesis, she was inspired to continue her research and enrolled in a doctoral program. Leslie has since defended her dissertation and continues to be involved in research. This research incorporates contemplative pedagogy (that is, including breathing, self-reflection, mindful discussions, and meditative practices in her courses) to support post-secondary students of all stripes with math anxiety and to build community in the math classroom.



**Dima Zaik-Kilani, PhD.**

**Resilience and Persistence: Unveiling the Journey of Arabic-Speaking Female Muslim Teachers in Adult ESL Education.**

Dr. Dima Zaid-Kilani is a scholar and educator with a PhD in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies from Carleton University. Her research critically examines teacher identity, agency, and attrition among Arabic-speaking female Muslim (ASFM) ESL educators in Canada, highlighting the systemic barriers these teachers face in TESL practicum and workplace contexts. Grounded in narrative case study, her work introduces the RRAAV model and the concept of h-discourses to analyze institutional exclusion and professional legitimacy. Dr. Zaid-Kilani has taught in teacher education and TESL programs, as well as ESL and communication courses at the postsecondary level. She has also held leadership roles in national associations supporting teacher education. Committed to fostering inclusive practices in language teacher education, she advances policy advocacy, mentorship, and decolonial research methodologies. Her work has been recognized at national conferences, and she continues to mentor graduate students and marginalized educators.

**Nikita Melisa Stapleton**

**Anti-Oppressive Science Teaching: An Investigation of Intermediate and Secondary Science Teachers' Views and Practices**