

chapter 4

Disability Studies in Inclusive Education

Overview: Critical examination of special and inclusive education and policies enabling inclusive education

Judith McKenzie





Section learning outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- ✓ Motivate for the theoretical framework of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) as a way to include a social model understanding of disability in an educational context.
- ✓ Argue for inclusive education as a means of promoting equity and social justice for learners with disabilities.
- ✓ Review selected global policies and frameworks for inclusive education in terms of DSE.
- ✓ Identify national policy guidelines that support inclusive education in South Africa.
- ✓ Apply screening, identification, assessment and support processes within a multidisciplinary practice.

Introduction

In this section, we begin to explore how inclusive education practices can be applied. We bring an understanding of Disability Studies to this practice, because we want to ensure a social justice approach to education that establishes and promotes the right to education for students with disabilities. In **Chapter 5**, we explore how applying the ideas of Disability Studies in an approach called Disability Studies in Education (DSE), can help us to understand ways that we can challenge ideas around disability that perpetuate exclusion and which then justify a segregated approach. At the same time, we can start to understand that inclusion is not just about lumping all children together but rather about acknowledging and celebrating differences, and understanding individual needs in the context of an environment that welcomes everybody. You will begin to understand that DSE is about applying the social model of disability in education, so that the focus becomes the learning environment, rather than the child's deficits or disabilities. When we accept that disability is not just about a medical condition, but rather is an interaction between the person with an impairment and their environment, then we can work toward establishing effective learning environments for all children.

Chapter 6 in this section deals with the hard part. How do we make these ideals a reality? It is all very well to be critical of how schools and education departments operate, but how does one translate the right to education into a reality for the children that it is supposed to serve? There are a number of global policies that give guidance to how education systems can and should approach this.



We mention several of them here because we can look to them for guidance in our practice and also to support our advocacy for the right to education. We then zone in on one particular process which is fairly well developed in the South African context and which shows the provision of support in a systemic approach. The focus is on the implementation of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) strategy of the South African systems and we will see how it can be applied. This is a specifically South African policy but the principles of allocating the necessary support to students can be seen in other countries as well.

We have chosen to start this section with the story of Jacqui and her son, Matt, and their journey toward establishing their right to inclusive education. We take this perspective because we want to put families and children with disabilities at the centre of our discussions in this text. What is very interesting about this story is seeing how inclusion is not just a once-off event, but rather a process that this family and their son's teachers are on together. You will also notice the emphasis on how the school environment needs to adapt for Matt (rather than trying to "fix" him so that he can be the same as the other children) so as to provide support for him to achieve his potential.

Insider view: Perspectives on education

In this transcript from a video interview in the "**Education for All: Disability, Diversity and Inclusion**" Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), Jacqui Tooke shares her experience of finding a school that includes her disabled son, Matt. Her experience is a good place to start in understanding how inclusive education is enacted from a family perspective.



WATCH: Education for all: Week 2 – Jacqui's story

Creator: Jacqui Tooke

Date: 2018

Duration: 11 minutes

My son Matt was born with a genetic syndrome. The language the doctors used to describe Matt's syndrome terrified us and shattered our dreams for his future. We did not know what his education would look like. Only once we began talking to people and reading about the available options did we feel hope; educational inclusion appealed to us. It was important to us to know that Matt could attend a mainstream government school and not be segregated to a special school; that he could be accepted for who he was and learn alongside children from the community. And so began our journey into exploring inclusive education for Matt.



Our friends and family would ask, “What does inclusion mean?” To us, inclusion means that Matt could be part of mainstream society and attend a mainstream school where he would have the school community’s support enabling him to thrive while remaining true to himself. People also ask us about his future. We take it one year at a time because we do not know. Though, three things remain important to us about the decisions we make regarding Matt: is he learning, participating, and is he happy? We want him to be included, growing, and excited about learning regardless of his pace compared to his peers. We want him to be an active member of any group he finds himself in – such as sports teams or in the classroom. We constantly check to see if inclusion is working, allowing him to be happy, confident and comfortable in himself.

Some friends and family believe that it is cruel to send Matt to a mainstream school because of his disability. They fear that he will be bullied. I acknowledge their fears and a part of me wishes to keep him safe at home, away from the world that has the potential to hurt him. Therefore, I understand the desire for parents to send their children to special schools. But we realised that if we do not want him to be segregated from mainstream society as an adult then we have to start now. We need to foster an environment where he learns the skills to connect with a variety of people. Matt’s inclusion journey has been successful because the school made an effort to get to know Matt before and in the early days of him joining the school.

We have experienced over the last couple of years that everyone benefits and grows from Matt’s inclusion. Other school parents have told me how their children are showing more compassion, empathy and consideration for others because of learning to engage with Matt. We passionately pursue Matt’s inclusion into mainstream society because he and the other children all benefit.



REFLECTION

What strikes or surprises you about Matt’s story from your perspective? If you are a teacher, have you thought of things in this way? What do you think this story tells us about how a social model of disability is being enacted in Matt’s case?



Copyright 2024 Judith McKenzie

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence

