

# chapter 6

Disability Studies in Inclusive Education

## **Enabling inclusive education: Global policies and local enactment**

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## Chapter learning outcomes

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

- ✓ Review selected global policies and frameworks for inclusive education in terms of Disability Studies in Education (DSE).
- ✓ Identify national policy guidelines that support inclusive education in South Africa.
- ✓ Apply screening, identification, assessment and support processes within a multidisciplinary practice.

## Preparatory activities



### ACTIVITY

**Estimated time:** 45 minutes

This activity will help you generate a scenario that is relevant to your context which you can use to assess how policy might be applied.

Prepare a two-page “story” (in narrative form) about a child with a disability or who experiences barriers to learning based on someone that you know, are working with or have worked with in the past.

## Introduction

In the [previous chapter](#), we explored in some depth how and why we choose to apply a DSE approach to inclusive education. We talked about this in a fairly theoretical way, but in this chapter, we are going to ask: What does this look like in the real world? Firstly, we will look at significant policies and guidelines through a DSE lens and then we will examine a specific process that seeks to operationalise these goals in the South African context; namely, the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) ([DBE, 2014](#)).



## Review of selected global policies and frameworks

To recap our discussion in **Chapter 5**, the social model of disability underpins the whole idea of inclusive education, as we have seen in the DSE approach. We remind ourselves that exclusion arises because of the way that society constructs disability as deficit and imposes barriers to participation. Inclusive education arose from a concern about who is included and who is excluded. It was also a political act, in that it questioned social values, priorities and institutions that are ableist and exclude people with disabilities.



### GLOSSARY: Ableism

“Ableism” refers to discrimination against people with disabilities on the basis of a set of prejudices. The term is similar to “sexism”, “racism”, “ageism” and other “isms”. Ableism refers to the tendency in society to value and promote certain abilities over others. Central to this concept is the idea being “normal”. If a person deviates from the ideal of bodily “wholeness”, that difference is seen as being a deficit, a deviance or something lacking that needs to be fixed, or isolated. This often leads to a response that is discriminatory (such as exclusion or segregation) and is often disempowering, as the person with a disability is seen to be incapable of addressing their own needs (**Wolbring, 2008**).

An inclusive approach celebrates diversity as something that we should value. People are all different – whether it be on the basis of race, gender, class or disability, there is a huge amount of variation in the human race which we need to celebrate and cater for. Looking at inclusive education against this background as a political movement, we can think of it as being similar to feminist and anti-racist movements, but with a specific focus on people who have bodily impairments.

There is a wealth of information and policy documentation on inclusive education, but for the purposes of our work we are going to focus only on five important guiding documents. These are:



1. The Salamanca Statement (**UNESCO, 1994**)
2. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (**United Nations, 2006**)
3. The Sustainable Development Goals in 2016 (**United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016**)
4. The General Comment No. 4 on Article 24 by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (**United Nations, 2016**)
5. The Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all (**UNESCO, 2020**)

### The Salamanca Statement (1994)

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) held a conference in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994 on what was termed “special needs” at that time. The conference recommended that schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other status. This should include children who are disabled or gifted, living on the street and working, from remote or nomadic populations, from linguistic ethnic or cultural minorities, and other disadvantaged or marginalised identities. Thus, right from the beginning, the idea of inclusive education was not only focused on children with disabilities, but also children who are excluded from education for many other reasons. **The Salamanca Statement** and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (**UNESCO, 1994**), which arose out of the conference, provided a basis for much of the subsequent inclusive education policy development.

The Statement points out that “regular schools with an inclusive orientation, are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education, moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children, and improve the efficiency and ultimately, the cost effectiveness of the entire education system”.

This provides three critical arguments for inclusive education: (1) to stop discrimination against people with disabilities and other forms of diversity; (2) to provide an effective education for those who were currently excluded; and (3) as a cost-effective way of providing education for all. On this basis, the Salamanca Statement adopted three principles: (1) every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve; (2) every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs; and (3) education systems should take into account the wide range of these characteristics. Ultimately, this is about recognising that all children are different, all children have the right to education, and education systems must adapt to meet their needs. In this approach, it is not the child who needs to change, but rather the education system itself.



## Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was developed at the United Nations with the participation and strong voice of people with disabilities. Article 24 of this convention is particularly focused on inclusive education, stating that countries who sign the Convention shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning. Thus, it is not only about the school level, but also early childhood development and higher education as well as adult education and ongoing professional development.

The countries that have signed this convention must ensure that persons with disabilities receive the support required within the general education system to facilitate quality education. They should receive effective individualised support measures that are provided in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion. This means that real inclusion only happens when the right support is provided in the mainstream.

There are additional specific provisions within Article 24, which focus specifically on the needs of children with disabilities. We need to bear in mind that the Salamanca Statement and the Sustainable Development Goals (elaborated upon below) are both clear that inclusion is not only about children with disabilities, but at this point we are focusing on children with disabilities. These specific requirements include facilitating learning braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes of communication, facilitating the learning of sign language, and promoting the linguistic identity of the deaf community.

Article 24 emphasises that education of persons who are blind, deaf or deaf-blind must be delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes of means of communication. The UNCRPD notes that when these special provisions are made, it should be done in an inclusive environment, so that the person with a disability has access to the same services as everyone else, as well as the additional support or “reasonable accommodation” that they require. Therefore, they should not only get the “special” services – they should get both the services provided for all other children as well as the additional services.

A final important point from the Convention that is relevant for a consideration of special schools is the common practice of removing children from their families in order to access services. The Convention promotes the right of children to live with their families and, therefore, attend local neighbourhood schools where their siblings would be enrolled.



### GLOSSARY: Reasonable accommodation

The term “reasonable accommodation” refers to: “necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms” (**United Nations, 2006: Article 2**). “Reasonableness” refers to an analysis of the need for the accommodation in light of the expected goal of countering discrimination, balanced with the availability of resources and financial burden. In terms of education, it is understood as an individualised process that needs to happen in addition to the overall accessibility or inclusivity of the learning environment. There is a common misperception that all students should be treated equally and that it is not “fair” to make accommodations on account of their disability. However, this is an important way of levelling the playing fields and equalising opportunity for all students to achieve.

## The Sustainable Development Goals (2016)

We now move on to the very big global picture, which is not only about disability and not only about education in discussing the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs). These goals, which were implemented in 2016, aim to guide the development agenda of the whole planet and represent a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. There are 17 SDGs that balance the three dimensions of sustainable development; that is, the economic, the social and the environmental.

The SDGs resulted from an inclusive process of consultation in the United Nations. In terms of inclusive education, the one that we focus on is **SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**. The inclusive element is central, but education also needs to be equitable; that is, it should be fair for everybody and everybody should have access. There is recognition that fair access is not enough, but that education also needs to be of good quality and should be accessible across one’s lifespan, rather than only being about schooling. An additional requirement of SDG 4 is that learning should be relevant to the lives of the children or adults who are being educated. SDG 4 recognises that education is a fundamental right that enables other rights. For example, the right to employment is dependent on the right to education. If you have not had a decent basic education, it’s hard to find decent employment.



SDG 4 is broken down into **10 targets**, against which its implementation is monitored. Within these targets, disability is seen as an issue that needs special intervention, just as children who have chronic illnesses might need it, or children who are migrants, orphans and have other forms of vulnerability. The thrust of the SDGs is that no-one should be left behind, and the needs of those who are the most excluded need to be accorded the highest priority.

## General Comment No. 4 on Article 24 (UNCRC) – the right to inclusive education (2016)

**General Comment No. 4** of the UNCRC was released in 2016 – 10 years after the Convention was ratified in 2006. The document notes that despite the progress achieved in the Convention, there remain profound challenges to education for children with disabilities. In 2016, many millions of persons with disabilities continued to be denied the right to education, and for others education was available only in isolation from their non-disabled peers, often being of an inferior quality. The Comment questions why this is still happening and what needs to be done about it. One of the helpful aspects of the document is its clear statement on how inclusive education is envisaged for people with disabilities.



### GLOSSARY: Inclusion

Ensuring the right to inclusive education entails a transformation in culture, policy and practice in all formal and informal educational environments to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to removing the barriers that impede that possibility. It involves strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It focuses on the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance and achievement of all students, especially those who, for different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalised. Inclusion involves access to and progress in high quality formal and informal education without discrimination. It seeks to enable communities, systems and structures to combat discrimination (including harmful stereotypes), recognise diversity, promote participation and overcome barriers to learning and participation for all by focusing on the well-being and success of students with disabilities. It requires an in-depth transformation of education systems in legislation, policy and the mechanisms for financing, administering, designing, delivering and monitoring education.” (United Nations, 2016)



According to the Comment, inclusive education needs to be:

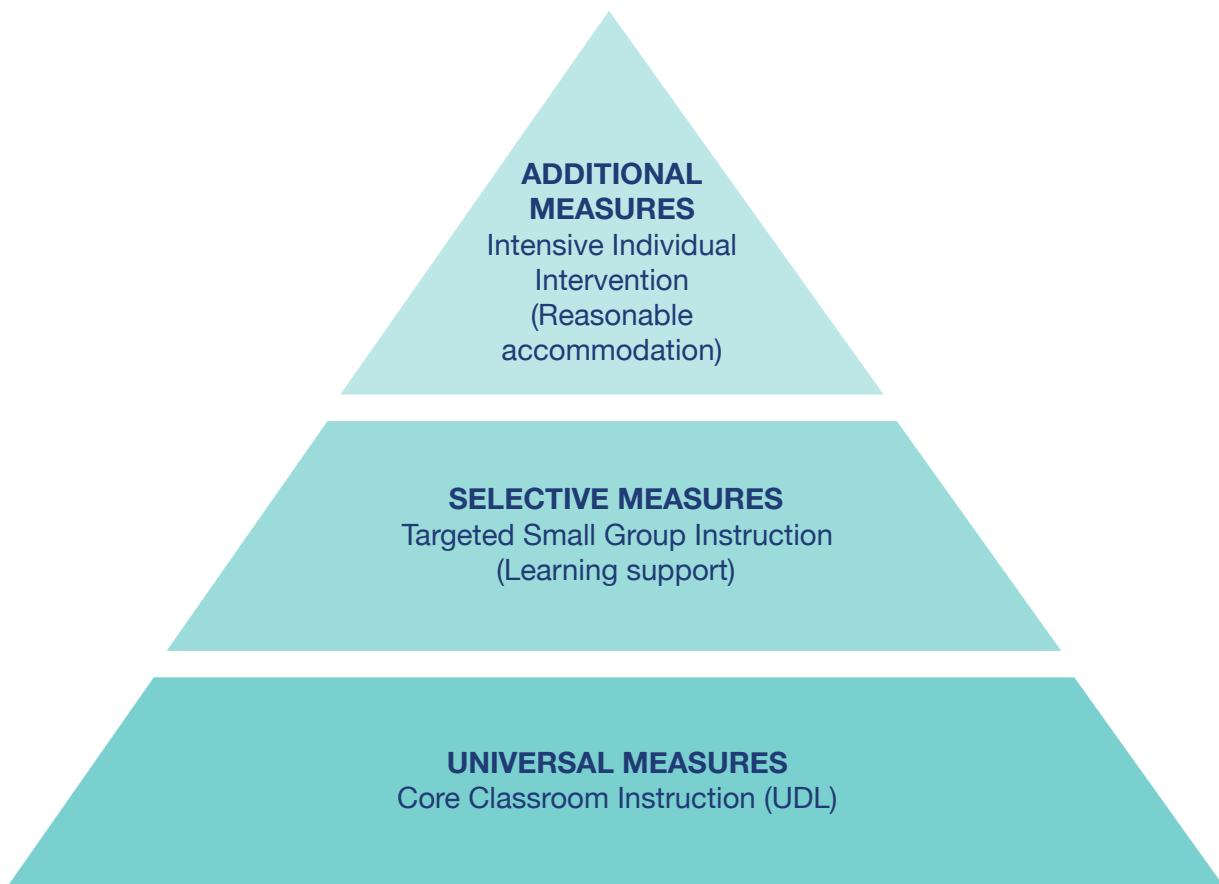
1. **Available:** There should be educational places available for people with disabilities.
2. **Accessible:** “The entire education system must be accessible, including buildings, information and communications tools, the curriculum, educational materials, teaching methods, assessments and language and support services” (United Nations, 2016, p. 7). Access to the learning environment needs to take into account the principles of Universal Design, including the provision of assistive technology and reasonable accommodation. Importantly, the need for accessible learning and teaching materials is highlighted with an emphasis on braille and digital formats, as well as sign language. In considering accessibility, care should be taken that any reasonable accommodation does not result in additional costs for the person with disabilities or their families.
3. **Acceptable:** Inclusive education needs to take into account the perspectives and needs of people with disabilities
4. **Adaptable:** Countries are encouraged to adopt the UDL approach to create flexible learning environments for students at all levels. In this respect, it echoes the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report (described in more detail below) and places UDL at the heart of an engaging learning environment that provides multiple, flexible pathways to learning success. There is an important distinction made between the general accessibility that is made possible through UDL for all learners and the need for reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities. The pyramid diagram in Figure 1 illustrates this point.



### GLOSSARY: Universal Design

“Universal Design” is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. An environment (or any building, product, or service in that environment) should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is not a special requirement for the benefit of a minority of the population. It is a fundamental condition of good design. If an environment is accessible, usable, convenient and a pleasure to use, everyone benefits. By considering the diverse needs and abilities of all throughout the design process, Universal Design creates products, services and environments that meet people’s needs. Simply put, Universal Design is good design. You can read more about Universal Design [here](#).





**Figure 1:** Pyramid of support measures in inclusive education

## Global Education Monitoring Report – Inclusion and Education: All means all (2020)

The **Global Education Monitoring Report** (GEM) is issued on a regular basis by UNESCO to monitor the implementation of SDG 4. Every year, the monitoring committee adopts a different theme for the report related to SDG 4 targets. In 2020, the theme was inclusion and education, with the sub-theme “All means all”, emphasising the commitment to the “leave no-one behind” principle. The UNESCO monitoring committee recognised that there are many challenges that exist, but that the commitment to full inclusion can no longer be debated – in much the same way that one would not debate the benefits of abolition of slavery, or indeed, of apartheid. This report emphasises that inclusion is a human right and a moral imperative. However, there is also an acknowledgement that inclusion in education is a process and not only a desired end point. Thus, while we can accept that inclusion is a human right, it remains a process or a journey that leads toward the ultimate goals of education for all.



In line with SDG 4, inclusive education is not only concerned with learners with disabilities, but also those who are excluded through discriminatory mechanisms on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, cultural biases, health status and other identities. Furthermore, it extends education beyond academic achievement, taking into account areas that contribute to quality education, such as social and emotional development, self-esteem and peer acceptance. Thus, there is a move away from that idea of inclusion about just being there and being seen in the classroom, towards achieving academically as well as being included and supported socially. Education is about much more than access – it is also about participation and success. In order to achieve this, the GEM report advocates for schools that are well resourced and well supported to adapt curricula with suitably trained teachers, as well as adequate and relevant teaching and learning materials. Similarly, to the Article 24 General Comment, the GEM report promotes UDL as an effective way to put inclusion into action in classrooms.

The global policy frameworks discussed above set ambitious goals for the education of people with disabilities. When reading them, you might think that these ideas are very inspiring, but how does one actually make them a reality? We are now going to discuss a particular policy in a particular context to see how policy-makers and education departments have made efforts to enact some of these policy goals.

## South African Department of Basic Education Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support

In this section, we will deal with understanding the **Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support** process in South Africa, which you will often hear referred to by its acronym: SIAS. The process is a multidisciplinary one, because although teachers start the process, it involves a range of role-players in different stages, which we will discuss further below. First, we want to look at how the policy intends to support the kind of transformation we discussed in **Chapter 3** and in the global policies that were covered in the first part of this chapter.



### READ: Policy on screening, identification, assessment and support

**Author:** Department of Basic Education

**Year:** 2014

**Estimated reading time:** 30 minutes

**File size:** 2 MB

Focus on chapters 1–4, which introduce the policy, articulate the rationale and principles of the policy, and level and nature of support required.



### READ: Care and support for teaching and learning

**Author:** MIET Africa

**Year:** 2015

**Estimated reading time:** 30 minutes

**File size:** 4.1 MB

The most important part of this document is on pages 16–27. Take note of the ecological systems approach because this is very important for understanding learner support from a DSE perspective.

SIAS was designed by the DBE in a consultative process as a means to realise the goals set out in the South African Departments of Education's (2001) **Education White Paper 6** (EWP6) and it adopts a social model of disability, in moving from impairment category towards identifying support needs at low, moderate or high levels. One of the intentions of this is to be more deliberate and considered about referrals to special schools which were previously made solely on the basis of the presence or absence of a disability and without consideration of learners' needs or their learning context.

As a result, many learners were placed in special schools without needing the levels of support that were offered there, while also losing out on the benefits of a more inclusive learning environment. At the same time, there were children in mainstream schools who needed support, but were not getting it as support was located in the special school. Referral processes between the mainstream and special schools and learning support services were somewhat haphazard and ad hoc. SIAS was developed to standardise the process and improve access to quality education, manage and support teaching and learning processes, and work toward the aim of EWP6 to establish a seamless system of early identification for children who need extra support.



While the global policies that we have discussed above do not provide guidance for special schools, inclusive education policy in South Africa retains special schools, intending to repurpose them to provide high levels of support as well as acting as a resource to mainstream schools that are becoming more inclusive of disability but need support in the process. The SIAS process is critical to this effort and, practically speaking, is widely used in determining placement and referral options for children with disabilities. Ideally, the child with high support needs should only be in special school for as long as they need that level of support. This implies some level of fluidity and maybe being able to move from a special school to a full-service school which is resourced with additional support or even an ordinary school that has access to additional support. SIAS aims to identify the barriers to learning and the support programme that needs to be in place to reduce the impact of the barrier.

Furthermore, the data collected through SIAS directs the system on how to plan budget and programme support at all levels. It is envisaged by the DBE as a key procedure to ensure the transformation of the education system towards an inclusive education system in line with EWP6 and the UNCRPD. Thus, it is not just about including children with disabilities, but about transforming the whole education system so that each child will be valued equally and every child will matter.

These are the principles of the policy:

1. Acknowledging that children have a right to a basic, quality education in their own communities.
2. Ensuring that support or reasonable accommodation will be available to more learners in mainstream settings, reducing the need for referring them for alternative placement.
3. Involving parents and teachers in decision-making about the support to be provided and viewing a child within their own context.
4. Ensuring that admission to special schools will be restricted to learners who have high-level support needs that cannot be met in other settings.
5. Aligning screening and assessment processes to those in health and social development.

SIAS aims to identify support needs for full access to the curriculum along a continuum of intensity, ranging from low to moderate to high. Not all learners who are diagnosed with a disability have the same level of support needs just because they have the same medical diagnosis. In addition, support needs do not have to be site-restricted – ideally the support can follow the learner in whichever school best suits their needs, taking the support to the learner rather than the learner to the support.



Five specific support provision areas are identified:

1. Specialist support staff.
2. Assistive devices, specialised equipment and teaching and learning support materials.
3. Curriculum differentiation to meet the individual needs of learners.
4. Initial and ongoing training, orientation, mentorship and guidance.
5. Environmental access (once-off and not necessarily ongoing).

Low-rated support is mostly preventative and proactive and covers generally applicable departmental programmes and policies. Moderate-rated support concerns provisions in addition to the general provision of education and can usually be accommodated in an ordinary school. High-level support provision requires specialised intervention and facilities; although usually located within special schools, these accommodations could also be provided in mainstream schools.

## Stages of SIAS

The SIAS process has different stages, each of which is recorded in a purpose-developed template which serves to record, collate and monitor children's progress.

### Stage 1: Initial screening

The teacher must screen all children at admission as well as in the beginning of each phase and record their findings in the Learner Profile (LP), which is included in the policy as an annexure.

### Stage 2: Identifying and addressing barriers at a school level

When a learner has been identified through the initial screening as being vulnerable or at risk (as pointed out in their LP), the teacher needs to initiate a process to drive the necessary support for the child. The teacher completes the Support Needs Assessment 1 (SNA1) form in consultation with the caregiver and finds out if there has been intervention to address the issue. The strengths and needs of the child are identified and an individual support plan is drawn up to address the identified areas of support.

Should the teacher reach the stage where everything possible has been done in the class and there is insufficient progress, the teacher can refer to the school-based support team (SBST) for a case discussion through completing the SNA2 form, which outlines the barriers identified and the interventions that have been attempted. The SBST then develops a plan of action to strengthen support, drawing on resources already available to the school and their network of



service providers. If there are clear concerns, the SBST might want to refer for extra learning support, or perhaps even engage with the national Department of Health.

### Stage 3: Identifying and addressing barriers at the district level

If the interventions implemented at Stage 2 do not result in the desired improvement, the school can refer to the circuit or district-based support team (C/DBST). The C/DBST puts a further plan of action together for the learner and or school based on the information available.

The plan will spell out a suitable support approach and include:

1. Planning and budgeting for additional support programmes determined in SNA3.
2. Resource and support-service allocation to school and learner.
3. Training, counselling and mentoring of teachers and parents/legal caregivers.
4. Monitoring support provision.

#### AUTHOR REFLECTION

*Sometimes the district-based support team alerts us to a general issue, for example, that there are many children at grade four level who are not learning to read, or not reading at the level expected in grade four. That is not just an individual learner problem. That is probably a system problem. So, my response could be to raise such issues at provincial meetings or when I go to national meetings. So perhaps there are too many tasks in grade four. Or perhaps we all are rushing through the curriculum which is set and we're not making sure that the learners are mastering the basics of literacy and numeracy in the foundation phase. So, a higher level intervention or system intervention may need to take place.*

*Sometimes you also find that at the classroom level, we have a few learners that are referred for a similar problem. So, you're not going to do an individual support plan for each and every one of them. We think that it's useful to group learners who have similar problems. We speak about group support plans. When we do this properly, what we expect is that 80% of the learners can manage with the right support in their classrooms and perhaps 15% of the learners need some additional support. And they can usually be helped by the Learning Support teacher or be given advice from the circuit/district support teams or the special school outreach teams. And then it's really only 5% who need high level support. (Berenice Daniels, 2022)*



## Conclusion

In this chapter, we looked at how inclusive education is supported by global policies and declarations. We have also taken this a step further in asking what this looks like when it comes to enacting these policies in a specific country context. We have used the example of the SIAS strategy as the South African response to providing support for all learners across the system. This gives an idea of how support might actually work, but it is not necessarily the only or the best strategy. If you work in South Africa, you might want to think about it critically to see where the policy is strong and where there might be difficulties. If you are from another country, you might want to see what is being done to support inclusion in policy implementation.



### ACTIVITY

**Estimated time:** 15 minutes

Based on the story that you have written and your analysis of how this relates to global policy, fill in as much as you are able to on the SIAS SNA 1 form. Also write a short critical reflection on the ways that you think SIAS enables inclusive education and how it could be further developed for this purpose.

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