

Chapter 10

21st Century Education for Special Needs Students: A Teacher's View and an Instructional Approach

Harpreet Kaur Dhir

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6347-5586>

Hacienda La Puente Unified School District, USA

ABSTRACT

Education is a human right—including students who have conditions requiring special education services. The purpose of this chapter is to promote inclusive education for students with learning disabilities due to diagnoses such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, and more. A literature review includes a discussion pertaining to the elements of appropriate teaching methods compatible with developing 21st-century competencies for general education and special education students within the same classroom setting. Relative to employing strategies of differentiation and scaffolding while increasing cognition through experience-based lessons, this chapter provides examples from the author's classroom instructional plans. The content through action (CTA) method is presented as an ideal approach conducive to integrating 21st-century competencies through experiential lessons to teach the required content to students of various abilities. The chapter ends with recommendations on creating systemic change through building a support system at an organizational level.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDG), educational rights equate to human rights leading to practicing cultural, social, political, and civil rights (Crosco, 2013). One of the eight goals of MDG is the goal of promoting primary education for all students at various levels of ability. The focus on advocating for education is included in six Education for All (EFA) goals which were established by

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1500 participants from across the international borders. The EFA goals contain the emphasis on improving the quality of education ranging from early childhood to adulthood (Hinzen, 2013).

The global south did not meet the EFA goals which were due to be achieved by 2015. Educating the marginalized communities, including the students with learning disabilities, is a global issue (Mukherjee, 2017). The intergovernmental agencies as well as the non-profit groups have taken a lead to eliminate discriminatory practices around the globe, but exclusion continues to persist. According to Sider (2014), international collaboration to create educational equity required authenticity and trust, the recognition of diversity in creating educational programs, and economic development. Current technological advances might bridge the gaps in education by creating cross-cultural communication among the students and help understand the diversity existing in each community and organization such as a school.

BACKGROUND: LITERATURE REVIEW

India is one of the countries situated in the global south which did not meet the EFA goals. Due to religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, fully including special needs students in a general education setting has faced challenges. Mukherjee (2017) illustrated the background concerning the issues of exclusion and inclusion in a context such as India. According to the author, exclusionary practices were caused by the creation of nation-states in the colonial era on the ethnic and cultural lines creating an issue of majority culture imposing its values on the minority groups. Children from certain castes, tribes, gender, religion, and socio-economic class were excluded from their right to educational equity. The idea of inclusion as a global construct, influenced by the countries with developed economies such as the United States of America, has been associated with social justice, equity, and human rights. Inclusion is a complex issue in a country like India where a vast variety of subgroups could make educational equity difficult to monitor.

In the context of Indian diversity, Tagore's philosophy of education provided direction and inspiration to promote education for all. Tagore built an experiment school at Shantiniketen where progressive vision included the practice of democratic ideals, environmental sustainability, and inclusive learning for all (Pridmore, 2009). Implementing a model of human-centered teaching, embedded with diverse learning methods, Tagore encouraged students to experience education rather than to acquire information.

At Shantiniketen, arts played a role of making curriculum come to life through experiential learning. Tagore believed education led an individual to self-determination and freedom; freedom of mind, heart, and will (Lesar, 2015). The core beliefs of Tagore, concerning experiential learning, related to the theory of Constructivism. The theory of Constructivism is relevant to teaching the learning-disabled students in the inclusive setting of mainstream classrooms where experiential learning can lead to cognitive development (Dewey & Jackson, 1990).

The Theory of Constructivism

To understand the relevance of the theory of Constructivism in promoting inclusivity, learning about the foundations of the theory is important. The Social Development Theory of Lev Vygotsky formed the basis of constructivist thinking (Clark, 2018). Vygotsky, in Clark (2018), described the process of learning initiating with social interactions followed by cognitive development. Dewey and Jackson (1990) believed the development of mind was possible through social experiences and considered the human-mind to

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