Chapter 22
Empowering the Inclusion Dialogue:
The Essential Role of Teachers With Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Society embraces diversity and inclusion in education, recognizing the importance of acknowledging student differences for a nurturing learning environment. This extends to empowering teachers with disabilities in American classrooms, promoting inclusion alongside peers. This chapter examines their crucial role, unique contributions, and the need for enhanced recruitment and support systems. The family and culture-based (FCB) framework guides discussions on effectively accommodating and supporting these educators.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter delves into the multifaceted realities that teachers with disabilities, whether pre-service or in-service, navigate in their careers. The term "pre-service" refers to teachers still pursuing their education. They are typically enrolled in a teacher preparation program and have yet to begin teaching. On the other hand, "in-service" pertains to those who have completed their studies and started working as educators.

Despite various obstacles, many educators with disabilities flourish professionally, presenting inspiring examples for their students and peers. By investigating their lived experiences, we gain a holistic understanding of their contributions, affirming the importance of incorporating such individuals into teacher training programs. This inclusion diversifies the educator workforce and fosters more accessible and inclusive educational settings for all students.

This chapter delves deep, exploring the ripple effects of a growing diverse student population on general education teachers. Central to our discussion is the Family and Culture Based (FCB) framework—a lens through which we will examine methodologies enabling teachers to meet diverse learning needs, from language and cultural nuances to unique behaviors and learning styles.

Finally, we will highlight strategies underpinned by current research and various perspectives educators can adopt to cater to the culturally diverse student populations they teach. The aim is to equip educators with the necessary skills to accommodate language barriers, cultural differences, divergent behavioral patterns, and diverse learning styles, thereby creating a more inclusive and diverse educational environment.

INCLUSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

In schools globally, students and teachers with disabilities comprise a small but significant portion of the student population. The term 'disability' in this context refers to "physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder an individual's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006).

Global Perspectives on Disability in Schools

Studies suggest that 10-15% of students in international schools have identified disabilities, with rates varying regionally (Powell, 2018). Different regions report varying prevalent disabilities, such as ADHD in Europe (Liasidou & Symeou, 2016) and autism spectrum disorders in Shanghai (Dolson, 2015). In British international schools, autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, and speech/language impairments are prevalent (Jules & Kutnick, 1997). A global trend shows a steady increase in enrollment of students with disabilities in international schools, particularly in North America, Europe, China, and India (Rose, 2021). However, many of these students have historically faced challenges like marginalization and limited access to resources (Rose, 2021).

Evolution of Inclusive Education

Over time, however, inclusive education has proved transformative in shaping international school environments into more equitable and empowering spaces for all learners. The push for inclusive education in international schools worldwide gained momentum following the ratification of the UNCRPD in 2006. This convention marked a paradigm shift in attitudes toward disability rights, emphasizing full societal inclusion for individuals with disabilities (United Nations, 2022). The UNCRPD's foundational principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunity have shaped the evolution of inclusive education globally, including in international schools (Walker, 2016).

U.S. Perspective on Inclusive Education

In the United States public school system, students with disabilities comprise a small but significant portion of the student population. According to recent National Center for Education Statistics (2021) statistics,

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