Chapter 21
Taking an (Inter)cultural View of Students with Disabilities to Promote Inclusive Practices Within the TESOL Field

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ABSTRACT

Considering the TESOL field's global presence, much more can be done to prepare TESOL practitioners to teach inclusively, particularly with regard for students with disabilities, and in line with international policy. This chapter begins by conceptualizing disability and inclusive education before providing an overview of concerns related to TESOL teacher training for inclusive practices. Complicating cognitive and affective factors commonly experienced by students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) are briefly outlined. The author then advocates for adopting a social justice definition of culture to be adopted within the field and provides three sets of discussion/reflection questions to help TESOL practitioners connect their understanding of existing models of cultural competence and language acquisition with an understanding of how students with disabilities may experience language learning. The chapter concludes by contemplating some impending challenges and potential solutions for securing inclusive education as a human right within and across the field.

INTRODUCTION

Disability and Inclusive Education

How we choose to talk about disability reflects how we relate to and position students with different abilities in our classrooms, schools, and societies. If the field of TESOL is to secure inclusive education as a human right, it must first and foremost make careful and conscious decisions about the language it uses to talk about and around disability. In this chapter, the term *disability* itself will be used as it is

evoked in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) held in 2006. This document does not explicitly define disability, instead noting that it is an evolving concept that "results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (United Nations, n.d.a, p. 1).

The CRPD, which was ratified by 181 countries with 163 as signatories, was a watershed moment in setting a universal standard for inclusive education; in the CRPD, *inclusive education* is expressed as a basic human right for all people (Hunt, 2019). This standard was further solidified on the global stage with the adoption of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. SDG4 is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, n.d.b).

Inclusive education now exists as an international concept with an exceptionally broad remit, but this present understanding was reached only after the occurrence of localized developments in special education and disability rights movements in individual contexts and countries (Hunt, 2019). In the United Kingdom, for instance, inclusive education emerged in the 1980s as an alternative to special education (Kozleski & Yu, 2018). In the United States, Shogren and Wehmeyer (2014) describe the development of inclusive education in three generations, beginning with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act enacted in 1975. The first generation focused on *where* students with disabilities learn, for example, by posing the question as to whether students with disabilities learn better in segregated or integrated classrooms. The second generation focused on *how* students with disabilities learn, and ushered in new educational frameworks such as differentiated instruction and individual education plans. The third generation focused on *what* students learn, for instance curricular content. However, a more detailed reading of Shogren and Wehmeyer's taxonomy reveals this wave had as much if not more concern for an expanded consideration of how students learn, or more pointedly, how teachers should teach students with disabilities. The third generation also saw more conscious connections to a worldwide community of practice, as well as ushered in the use of individualized support over label-specific support. These developments heightened concerns for how to conceptualize and discuss disability in educational contexts around the globe. Still, depending on where and how teachers receive training, they may learn different sets of principles that may all be referred to inclusive practice. Therefore, in the present chapter, the pluralized *inclusive practices* will be used to refer to any principles and/or procedures that allow teachers to respond to individual difference(s) between learners, but that circumvent possible marginalization resulting from students being treated differently than each other (Florian & Beaton, 2018).

The definitions provided thus far all accord with the *interactionist model of disability*, a social model which holds that "students' ability to function in an environment is an interaction of the environment, the person, and the person's impairment" (Evans et al., 2017, p. 77). This dynamic view empowers practitioners to design learning environments that are more accommodating to an array of individuals and impairments. It is important to note that the term disability is often associated with *medical models of disability*, which frame impairments as defects that can be treated or cured (Evans et al., 2017). This view encourages labeling and confining impairments to specific diagnoses. In reality, many learning disabilities overlap and lack clear distinction from a cognitive perspective (Kormos, 2017). Therefore, this chapter will use the term *specific learning difficulty* (SpLD) to refer to impairments that have a more direct relationship with learning and processing information. SpLDs include dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia, ASD, ADHD, and social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. This term also accords with the interactionist model of disability.

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