Chapter 9
Beyond Educational Strategies in Promoting Inclusion for Autistic Individuals:
An Overarching Framework and the Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present chapter is to argue that educational strategies are not adequate on their own to promote inclusion for autistic individuals, because this holds only the individual responsible for their inclusion with no onus on the settings or other people involved; as a result, autistic individuals are facing challenges at school and in society throughout their lifespan. Therefore, for inclusion to be enacted, a change of attitudes, perceptions, and stereotypes about the education and development of autistic individuals considering a biopsychosocial bioecological model of disability is deemed critical. This chapter aims to discuss current conceptualization of autism,

traditional models of disability in relation to autism and present an overarching framework that sheds light on overcoming existing tensions and challenges in the inclusion of autistic individuals as well as make suggestions for moving forward in promoting inclusion in the autism field.

INTRODUCTION

Autism has been understood and viewed from different perspectives since its identification as a discrete disability. These views have been formalized into specific models such as the medical model, social model, or critical autism studies model, to explain their distinct differences in conceptualization of autism. This chapter will focus on these various theoretical models to argue for a need to use a biopsychosocial bioecological model of disability. This model acknowledges that while current perspectives are all valid, none of them provide a comprehensive view that accounts for the individual experiences of autistic individuals, and how these are formed by the social attitude and perceptions, as well as structural barriers. This chapter argues that when inclusive education does not consider this comprehensive picture, then strategies put in place may not necessarily achieve inclusion.

CURRENT CONCEPTUALIZATION OF AUTISM

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects how individuals perceive the world and interact with other people. Autistic individuals have persistent difficulties in social communication and social interaction including those who have language abilities. They may also have restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviors, activities or interests and sensory sensitivities including over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity to sounds, light, colors etc. (APA, 2022). Some autistic individuals also have intellectual disabilities, mental health issues and high support needs contributing to autism being widely accepted as a heterogeneous condition (Masi et al., 2017). The heterogeneity seen in autistic individuals is reflected in the use of the term autism spectrum and the medical term autism spectrum disorder as introduced by the American Psychiatric Association in DSM V (APA, 2013).

According to recent reports, autism has been increasing dramatically in recent years with reports as high as 1 in 36 (2.8%) 8-year-old children (CDC, 2023). These trends have resulted in the widening of heterogeneity in autism and the investigation of the phenomenon through new dimensions by introducing the concept of chronogeny. Chronogeny has been informed as a concept by long-term studies and clinical experience, which show that autistic individuals present a different developmental

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