
INCLUSIVE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AS A PRACTICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Article 24 in the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) instructs state signatories to ensure inclusive education systems at all levels enable Canadians with disabilities to access lifelong learning opportunities that foster personal growth, development of their skills and abilities and that enable full participation in a free society.

Inclusive education emerged in the context of mandatory k-12 education systems where segregated special education has been the norm. The shift from traditional segregated education towards inclusive schooling has been a contentious point in the field of education. Educational systems have focused primarily on the redistribution of funding to general education classrooms and changes to enrollment policies that provide students with disabilities access to the regular classroom. This bureaucratic, step-wise, approach fails to take into account the cultural politics of disablement (Slee, 2001) that created segregated special education in the first place.

In order to realize full inclusion, many scholars suggest that learning communities need to acknowledge this cultural politics of disablement and how it shapes our understanding of disability (Goodley, 2007; Slee, 2001; Uditsky & Hughson, 2012). Education, psychology and medicine define developmental disability in terms of deficits, lacking intellect and a disconnectedness from those without disabilities. These understandings are reproduced by special education systems built on assessment, intervention and skills based educational opportunities (Kleiwer *et al.*, 2015; Goodley, 2007; Slee, 2001). Within this educational context, people with developmental disabilities are thought to be unable to engage with regular education successfully. From this starting point, inclusive education seems unlikely to be realized.

Emerging, emancipatory definitions of disability are calling for mainstream educators to unlearn these assumptions and to view students with developmental disabilities as competent learners (Kleiwer *et al.*, 2017; Goodley, 2007; Slee, 2001). From this starting point, the realization of inclusive education becomes a moral imperative.

Inclusive post-secondary education (IPSE) is a movement to create inclusive education at the post-secondary level. IPSE supports students and entire campus communities to create opportunities for students with developmental disabilities to study within the mainstream of academics and to be included in the social life of campuses in ways that are typical for their peers without disabilities. Admission to post-secondary through an IPSE initiative is based on the applicants desire to learn and to pursue an authentic student experience as a pathway to adulthood and a rich meaningful life. Student selection does not take into account educational assessments of academic ability or indicators of academic readiness. Instead of designing the educational context based on assessments of deficits, student with developmental disabilities are assumed to be competent learners and are welcomed into the mainstream of academic learning.

The implementation of IPSE in Western Canada is unprecedented both in breadth and scale. There are currently 18 IPSE initiatives in Alberta and six in BC. This model has seen success at Universities, colleges and technical institutes, public and private post-secondary institutions and faith based as well as secular campuses. The

success of these initiatives, that provide full inclusion for students with developmental disabilities, and support professors and campus communities to see student as competent learners, provides strong support for the possibilities of full inclusion at the post-secondary education level.

By providing opportunities for students with developmental disabilities to learn in an inclusive learning context, IPSE has also created opportunities for educators at the post-secondary level to engage with students outside of the framework of special education. This is in stark contrast to the experience of educator in the k-12 systems described above. These opportunities undoubtedly shape the way instructors understand the students with developmental disabilities and are experiences that can challenge the cultural politics of disablement.

With the support of the Simon Fraser University Teaching + Learning Development Grant we held conversations with faculty and other teaching personnel to explore how professors engage with students in their courses who have developmental disabilities and how this experience has informed their understanding of pedagogy. IPSE is understood as a social justice movement and the professors who include students in their class are engaging with this movement and creating space for new possibilities for themselves as professors and for their students. Our conversations with profs were designed to get a better understanding of this process for professors.

Overall, we found that professors worked creatively to make adjustments to their courses to increase student engagement. Faculty described that this approach was more about integration than accommodation and that it encouraged them to think about the needs of all students in the class. Through our conversations it became clear that the opportunity to engage with a student who had a developmental disability, outside of a special education or service provision framework, brought out the instructor's social justice orientation and offered a new way to understand students with developmental disabilities. Professors recognized the importance of including students with developmental disabilities in the mainstream academics and social life and recognized how this opportunity has the potential to impact their life after university in positive ways. They also shared that they were concerned about how students with developmental disabilities would be embraced by their peers, however their experiences showed an openness and ability of all the students to support one another. Overall, professors shared that they saw students as competent learners and described the opportunity to include a student as significantly positive.

The themes that have emerged through our interview suggest that IPSE at SFU provides professors with an opportunity to engage with social justice and that these experiences have impact on their understanding of pedagogy more generally.

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