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## Inclusive Education—A Sustainable Approach?

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### FULL AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION THROUGH LEARNING LIFE AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Full participation is one of the general principles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD) for enabling the enjoyment of human rights. This concept cuts across all issues in the Convention, and is a specific obligation of states/parties that have ratified the Convention document. Other general principles relevant to the education of deaf persons are respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for their right to preserve their identities. The latter is related to the linguistic and cultural identity of the deaf community stated in Articles 24(2)(b) and 30(4). Both principles are essential to full enjoyment of human rights by deaf students in educational contexts.

According to Article 24, on education, learning life and social development skills facilitates full and equal participation of persons with disabilities.

With respect to deaf students, facilitating the learning of a sign language, promoting the linguistic identity of the deaf community, and ensuring that education is delivered in the most appropriate lan-

guages are the measures adopted by the ratified states to enable full and equal participation. The states must also take appropriate measures to employ teachers who are qualified, at least in the use of a sign language.

These measures reflect culture-sensitive approaches to guiding students in learning skills that match their personalities, needs, and ways to live as deaf persons. This is part of the CRPD's recognition of the diversity of persons with disabilities and that these individuals can and do contribute to human, social, and economic development.

Using and learning sign language with and from proficient teachers provides a foundation for balanced personal, academic, and social development. Enabling deaf students to participate fully in all learning processes and respecting their linguistic and cultural identities require that educators and professionals examine possible factors in successful inclusive education based on needs of deaf students.

### DEAF PEOPLE: A LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL GROUP

Article 24 is connected to Article 2 regarding definitions of the language and communication used in the CRPD. It is the first treaty to consider sign languages as equal to spoken languages, and thus recognizes sign languages as languages in their own right. Another important link is to Article 9, on accessibility, where it is stated that states/parties shall take measures to provide professional sign language interpret-

ers. Article 21, on freedom of expression and opinion and access to information, includes recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages. Article 30, on participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport, includes the state's obligation to recognize and support the specific cultural and linguistic identity of persons with disabilities, including sign languages and deaf culture. A perspective on deaf people as a linguistic and cultural group is strengthened through these articles (CRPD, n.d.; Kauppinen & Jokinen, 2014). This perspective should be kept in mind when one develops programs for the education of deaf people that strengthen their educational rights.

There is a traditional position that only individual rights are recognized in international law, whereas linguistic rights have been perceived as having a more collective nature. For example, the development of legally binding treaties such as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has shown a shift toward acceptance in political and legal terms of the linguistic rights (of minorities) to education (de Varennes, cited in Phillipson, 2000). Further in-depth analysis of the minority and human rights status of deaf people from the linguistic and cultural rights perspective in relation to the CRPD and other treaties is needed to gain a better understanding of what the linguistic and cultural rights of deaf students mean in an educational context. The World Federation of the Deaf used the linguistic rights perspective and arguments during negotiations of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Convention. Thus, WFD did not advocate "special education."

The CRPD itself views deaf people from two angles: the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of deafness (disability) and deaf people as a linguistic and cultural group. The prohibition of discrimination

alone does not secure full human rights for deaf people. Therefore, through recognition and promotion of sign language, deaf culture, and linguistic and cultural identity, deaf people are able to enjoy full human rights.

## CRITERIA FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

According to the CRPD, to guarantee the right of persons with disabilities to have access to an education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, states should ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and for lifelong learning. But what is inclusive education? The Convention does not provide a definitive answer.

The Danish Institute for Human Rights asserts that, in general, inclusive education is opposed to a separate educational system for students with special needs (see <http://www.humanrights.dk/activities/our-work-denmark/disability/article-24-education/dihr-about-article-24>). The CRPD also does not mention or define special education, but this can be interpreted to mean that inclusive education is one education system to fit the needs of all students. This contradicts the situation in many countries, which have a dual system: general education and special education.

Traditionally, deaf students have been categorized as special education students, although organizations of deaf people have advocated education of deaf students based on linguistic and cultural aspects, that is, bilingual and bicultural education. During the negotiations of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Convention (2002–2006), there were many discussions about special education because representatives of the World Blind Union, the World Federation of the Deafblind, and the WFD were advocating for education within their respective groups. It was assumed by representatives

of other disability groups and governments that the WFD was demanding special education, but this was not the case. The WFD was aiming to include the idea of bilingual and bicultural deaf education in the article on education in different drafts of the Convention (see also Kauppinen & Jokinen, 2014).

After lengthy discussions by representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities and representatives of different states, the following statement in Article 24(3)(c) emerged: “Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development” (CRPD, n.d., p. 17). This was a compromise meaning that *education* can be provided to deaf, deaf-blind, and blind students in their own groups in learning environments that meet—and are based on—their needs. In fact, “environments which maximize academic and social development” means bilingual education for deaf students. The concept of bilingual education was considered too complicated to be put in a Convention document targeting only one group of students (see also Kauppinen & Jokinen, 2014).

Based on a few key articles and concepts used in the Convention document, one can form a picture of the criteria for full and equal inclusive education. This has been discussed and analyzed within the International Disability Alliance (IDA) and among its member organizations.

IDA asked me and former IDA chair Diane Richler (of Inclusion International) to offer suggestions for a policy on inclusive education. For this task, we analyzed the components of and proposed criteria for inclusive education (see also Jokinen,

2013; Jokinen & Richler, 2012, 2013; Muñoz, 2006, paragraph 40, on the relationship between special education and inclusive education).

Inclusion is likely to be obtainable and effective if the following factors are taken into account for each student: accessibility, universal design, nondiscriminatory practices, meeting students’ need, reasonable accommodations, and individual support. It is often mistakenly assumed that reasonable accommodations alone are the same as inclusive education. On the contrary, there is a need to consider other equally important factors to facilitate the full participation of a student in an accessible learning environment.

#### INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: ENSURING FULL, EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION

Accessibility, universal design, reasonable accommodations, and individual support facilitate an inclusive education system that meets the diverse needs of students and creates a nondiscriminatory learning environment. These factors are not conceptually clear-cut. They overlap and can be interpreted to mean different things depending on how we approach them.

Accessibility is one of the most important cross-cutting principles of the CRPD, covering physical environment, transportation, information, communication, and facilities and services provided to the public. It influences several elements of education, such as an accessible physical learning environment, an interactive learning process throughout the entire school, and accessible communication, making education fully participatory. During the Ad Hoc Committee negotiations, representatives of WFD emphasized that this concept should also include linguistic and cultural accessibility, which covers the following aspects:

- All communication is accessible.
- The learning process and teaching itself are culture- and language-sensitive.
- The curriculum includes elements of deaf community and sign language, nurturing the linguistic identity development of the deaf community—Article 24(3)(b)—as mentioned in the CRPD.
- The learning environment is visually and tactually accessible.
- The learning material is culture- and language-sensitive.

In a bilingual education approach, a country's sign language is used as a medium of instruction and is also taught as a mother tongue (i.e., one of the school subjects). In addition, the written form of the spoken language is taught as the second language. This approach ensures accessible communication, facilitation of learning, and access to learning materials. This means states need to provide an adequate number of teachers who use rich, preferably native-level sign language and have knowledge about deaf culture acquired through teacher education programs. This has to be supported by education legislation. Linguistically and culturally sensitive curricula and learning materials, as well as accessible schools, also need legislative support.

*Reasonable accommodations*, according to the CRPD, means “necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms” (CRPD, n.d., p. 4). Often, the learning environment is designed for other students (nondisabled) more than for a student with a disability, causing different kinds of barriers and hindering full participation. When a deaf student studies with hearing students, he or she needs an educa-

tional sign language interpreter. But this service is not needed if the learning environment is linguistically and culturally accessible to the deaf student. So, the provision of a sign language interpreting service alone does not make the learning environment fully accessible.

Other examples of reasonable accommodations may be adaptations of the curriculum and learning materials based on the needs of students with disabilities such that there would not be a separate *special* curriculum or *special* learning materials. These measures are often interpreted as possessing low expectations of learning. Assistive devices and different kinds of equipment, tools, and computer software are another subgroup of the concept of reasonable accommodations. The third group consists of adjustments of the learning environment resulting in the removal of barriers. Services, such as sign language interpreting and speech-to-text conversions, form the fourth group of reasonable accommodations.

Individualized support covers services such as teacher assistants, personal assistants, facilitators, human-readers, peer support, and mentoring. A range of tools, equipment, techniques, and software of assistive and adaptive technology promotes greater independence. Communication means, such as Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative, easy to read, written, and audio can also be considered supportive measures. But should these communication means, which act as modifications or adjustments of ways to communicate meaning, be considered tools of reasonable accommodations? This raises the question of whether individual supports can be seen as an independent group of measures facilitating inclusion of a student with a disability in the mainstream learning environment or whether it is only part of a mechanism of reasonable

accommodations. In any case, it is clear that accessibility is a strong principle and a measure for facilitating full and equal participation more than reasonable accommodations alone.

This discussion of different accessibility angles and reasonable accommodations can also be linked to the 4A principles (availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability) used by the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1999).

According to the CRPD, *universal design* refers to the design of products, environments, programs, and services to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible without adaptation. This does not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of individuals with disabilities. It is interesting to compare universal design with accessibility. One can increase accessibility through universal design, but there is still a need for individual solutions to make inclusion more effective. With universal design, it might be possible to design visually barrier-free learning environments to some extent; however, deaf students with additional disabilities, for example, still need reasonable accommodations and individualized support to make their learning as inclusive as possible. Again, universal design alone does not ensure full participation and inclusion of deaf students and other students with disabilities.

Collectively, accessibility, universal design, reasonable accommodations, and individual support make learning environments more inclusive. However, identity development (linguistic identity of the deaf community and cultural and linguistic identity, both mentioned in the CRPD) is a crucial factor. This empowers deaf students by facilitating their understanding that they are an important part of human diversity. Inclusion is likely to be successful if all the factors discussed here are taken into account for each student.

## IS BILINGUAL AND BIMODAL DEAF EDUCATION INCLUSIVE?

The Nordic deaf awareness movement made deaf people more aware of their language and culture and their linguistic and cultural rights. With the close cooperation of parents and their organizations, there was a shift from Total Communication to a bilingual approach in schools. Findings from linguistic research on Swedish Sign Language (Ahlgren & Bergman, 1980) encouraged this change. The goal was to guarantee deaf children's right to full personal and academic development. This required full participation and barrier-free communication with their teachers, who were also deaf and had studied to become professional teachers.

This resulted in the efforts of deaf people and their organizations to argue for changes in school-related legislation, curriculum design, teacher education, and learning materials to better match the needs of deaf students. The evolution of bilingual deaf education can be situated in the range of bilingual programs in place in different countries (see, e.g., Phillipson, 2000). Bilingual deaf education programs include deaf adult linguistic and cultural models, peer support, and curriculum content that includes deaf culture, deaf history, and the deaf community.

Many of these programs are organized in schools for deaf students within special education systems, although bilingual deaf education is not, by nature, special education. For example, bilingual education is used in "twin" schools, where one part of school consists of classes of deaf students with sign language-using teachers, as is the case in Norway. A bilingual approach can also be employed in classes of deaf students in mainstream schools. In Iceland, the bilingual program is part of a program in a public school where students learn to use

sign language and where interpreters are used in mixed classes. There is one school in Italy where hearing and deaf students study together using Italian Sign Language and learn with a teacher using that language.

Based on CRPD criteria, an inclusive bilingual education is accessible, enables full and equal participation, includes teachers qualified in sign language, supports the linguistic and cultural identity of the deaf community, maximizes academic and social development, and can include reasonable accommodations and individual support. With respect to remarks that there is not yet an inclusive education system in the world, I argue that bilingual education is, at its best, the closest possible scenario.

In Table 1, I provide a checklist for inclusive education: a list of factors to evaluate to determine whether the learning environment is inclusive. This is still a preliminary tool that needs to be tested and evaluated.

## SUSTAINABLE LEARNING

There are a few general principles of the CRPD that need to permeate the design, implementation, and evaluation of the education of deaf children and all other students with disabilities: respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity, respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities, and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

Deaf children are a natural part of human diversity; thus, they are not members of a certain *special* group. According to the CRPD, it is *normal* to be a deaf person. This is strengthened by respect for the evolving capacities of deaf children, allowing them to develop “their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental

and physical abilities, to their fullest potential,” as stated in Article 24 (n.d., p. 16).

Genuine respect for diversity based on deaf culture and the unique identities of deaf children ensures their full, equal participation in education. This respect is a crucial principle of sustainable and lifelong learning. The general principles of the CRPD described in the present chapter should be included in all spheres of the education of deaf children: school-related legislation, curriculum, learning materials, teacher education, school subjects, school/community practices, and family support.

Truly inclusive education also means a transition from mainstream needs-based teaching to student needs-based learning. Withdrawing from a perspective of a teaching-based curriculum and using a supportive pedagogical approach with a range of individual support mechanisms can facilitate the move to an approach guiding each student to learn curricular content based on his or her unique learning style and identity. This would be a much more sustainable way of leading students to “the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth” (CRPD, n.d., p. 16) than requiring them to carry on in ways that do not fit their personalities and unique identities.

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**Table 1.** Checklist of Inclusive Education: Factors to Evaluate to Determine Whether the Learning Environment Is Inclusive

	Full Participation	Accessibility	Universal Design	Reasonable Accommodations	Individual Support	Identity Development and Support
Needs of Students	<b>Learning Materials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• linguistically and culturally sensitive</li> <li>• which language and form of communication?</li> <li>• designed for needs of students</li> </ul>					
	<b>School Timetable</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hours for school subjects</li> <li>• time for needed activities</li> <li>• peer support activities</li> </ul>					
	<b>School Meal Arrangements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• space</li> <li>• furniture</li> <li>• utensils</li> <li>• assistance</li> <li>• diets</li> </ul>					
	<b>Student Support Team</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• experts</li> <li>• parents</li> <li>• representatives of DPO</li> <li>• representatives of student's linguistic and cultural community</li> </ul>					
	<b>Evaluation and Follow Up</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning outcomes measures</li> <li>• self-evaluation</li> <li>• evaluation with parents</li> <li>• evaluation with other experts, if needed</li> </ul>					

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