

Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES) Information Brief February 2021

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PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: POLICIES AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Given the benefits of inclusive education on children with and without disabilities, the Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES) developed an Information Brief to acquaint our international community with effective global inclusive education practices, policies, and frameworks for engaging students with disabilities, while addressing common challenges and resource issues experienced by students and their educators. In our brief, we highlight specific strategies for promoting inclusive education underscored in the 2017 peer-reviewed report conducted by Anne M. Hayes and Jeanne Bulat, titled *Disabilities Inclusive Education Systems and Policies Guide for Low- and Middle-Income Countries*. The purpose of the Hayes and Bulat report was to inform and guide practice for currently practicing professionals, or professionals aspiring to work in low- and middle-income countries, as well as advance policies and practices for the successful implementation of effective inclusive education. Our brief summarizes and shares four of the key strategies offered by Hayes and Bulat in the following areas: International Policies and Frameworks Supporting Inclusive Education, Individualized Education Programs, Teacher Training, and Adaptable Learning Environments. The brief also offers additional resources that may be helpful to our global community.

INTERNATIONAL POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

We introduce our brief with a focus on policy because international policies and legal frameworks lay the foundation for educational practice and drive advocacy efforts for many people with and without disabilities in support of more inclusive education around the globe.

Some of the most significant international policies and legal frameworks identified by Hayes and Bulat (2017) include the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), World Declaration on Education for All, Salamanca Framework for Action, and the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). A short description of each of these policies/frameworks, listed by date, are provided below:

- **UN CRC:** A human rights treaty stating that children with disabilities should have access to and receive education in a “manner conducive to the child’s achieving the fullest possible social and individual development” (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989, Article 23 [3]).
- **World Declaration on Education for All:** A declaration, adopted by 155 countries in 1990, asking countries to commit to universal primary education, also stressing the need to provide access to education for all children with disabilities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1990).
- **Salamanca Framework for Action:** A framework urging governments, on an international scale, to endorse inclusive education as the best approach to educating children with disabilities (UNESCO, 1994).
- **The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD):** A human rights treaty, adopted in 2006, that provides the most comprehensive legal framework for all issues related to the lives of persons with disabilities and includes explicit language stating that children with disabilities have the right to receive education in an inclusive setting with the supports needed to succeed.

The authors promote these policies in their report and underscore their importance in the strategies and supports included in their guidelines for implementing inclusive education systems and reform.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEP)

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has also developed guidelines on ways for countries to enhance inclusion, including providing rights to students with disabilities for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). In the United States, an IEP is like a blueprint for the delivery of special education services. Developing a student's IEP is a process where the student, parents, educators, therapists, and other stakeholders collaborate to gain an understanding of a student's strengths and needs. Collaboratively, the IEP team uses data to develop an IEP that identifies goals and accommodations. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) in the United States facilitates inclusion by requiring students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment with students without disabilities as much as possible. In the United States, the IEP process and IEP document are legal, and parents have rights to participate as equal partners in due process. The CRPD IEP guidelines resemble those in the United States, including recommendations for parental due process rights.

Some countries do not have a standardized and uniform IEP process, creating inequities in the way that special education services are delivered. Other countries, such as Costa Rica, Malawi, Turkey, South Africa, and Uganda, have IEP processes that are being strengthened and are increasing services for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). Though progress has been made to create inclusive schools and societies, the CRPD recommends legislation to formalize and standardize the IEP process throughout every country. However, several barriers to widespread adoption of the CRPD IEP process guidelines remain, including the heterogeneity in the way countries and cultures define and view disability, which has a direct impact on the IEP process and special education services (Hayes & Bulat, 2017; World Health Organization, 2011). Despite these barriers, the influence of the CRPD guidelines on IEPs and leadership of countries with enacted legislation and formalized IEP processes cannot be understated. A continued and renewed effort to enact CRPD guidelines throughout the world is needed to support inclusive educational practices.

TEACHER TRAINING: HOW ARE WE PREPARING OUR EDUCATORS?

As suggested by Hayes and Bulat, another key strategy for supporting inclusive education is rooted in teacher preparation. In other words, one might wonder—How are

we preparing our educators, to support only students without disabilities, only students with disabilities, or both? In the past two decades, there has been an increase in teacher preparation programs that are dual certification programs, meaning that teacher candidates are increasingly being taught and certified to teach both general and special education. However, regardless of one's training, research indicates that teachers must consider themselves teachers for all children, those with and without disabilities, as well as for children who present other learning challenges (e.g., students learning the language taught in schools, students who live in poverty, etc.). While this may seem intuitive, it is a common understanding that separate bureaucracies promoting separate teacher training programs and segregated school placements for children perpetuate the myth that certain teachers should teach certain students exclusively. When looking at teacher training programs internationally, they can range from 1 month to 3 years, so it is apt to say that teachers enter classrooms with a wide range of knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). Hayes and Bulat (2017) provide five recommendations for preparing teachers to work with students with disabilities in inclusive settings: embed disability in all pre-service and in-service trainings, include all teachers—regardless of specialization—in teacher training, promote the diversification of skill sets, address potential attitudinal barriers, and provide follow-up and hands-on experiences.

ADAPTABLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Next, Hayes and Bulat suggest that universal design for learning (UDL) is an effective method for creating an adaptable learning environment, which in return, supports inclusive education according to the literature (e.g., Kurtts, 2006). The National Center on Universal Design for Learning (2016) defines UDL as a “set of principles for curriculum that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn.” There are three guidelines for effective UDL implementation, including providing multiple means of engagement (the “why” of learning), multiple means of representation (the “what” of learning), and multiple means of action and expression (the “how” of learning; CAST, 2018); examples of these guidelines can be found at UDL Guidelines.

In addition to following the three guidelines offered by CAST (2018), Hayes and Bulat reference several strategies for effective UDL implementation outlined by Rose and Meyer (2002):

- Use multiple strategies to present the content
- Use a variety of materials
- Provide cognitive supports
- Teach to a variety of learning styles
- Provide flexible opportunities for assessment

RESOURCES IN INTERNATIONAL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Finally, the resources listed below provide additional information on international inclusive education that may be helpful to our global community:

- **Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education** seeks to provide teacher training and resources to promote inclusive education. <http://www.csie.org.uk>
- **Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2020: Inclusion: All Means All. The United Nations UNESCO annual report on inclusion and education.** This report on inclusive special education focuses on education around the world. For 2020, the focus is on Latin America, the Caribbean, central and eastern Europe, and central Asia. <https://en.unesco.org/news/global-education-monitoring-gem-report-2020>
- **Journals of India** provide reports and information on many aspects of Indian life. This site provides online and in person training courses and research on inclusive education for children with special needs. <https://journalsofindia.com/inclusive-education-for-children-with-special-needs/wsn/>
- **Light for the World** strives for school systems with strong support for inclusive education. They state that 80% of all children with disabilities live in developing countries, and more than 35 million children with disabilities in developing countries are out of school. They support 20 inclusive educational programs in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Northeast India and Papua New Guinea. <https://www.light-for-the-world.org/inclusive-education>
- **RTI Press** has a collection of global disabilities inclusion papers. <https://www.rti.org/rti-press-collection/disabilities-inclusion-LMIC>

CONCLUSION

The intent of this Information Brief is to provide context for the educational reform needed to connect policy to practice and considerations for those leading or aspiring to lead systemic change efforts to address the needs of ALL students. Using Hayes and Bulat's report as a framework for our brief, we offer students and their educators a summary of several key strategies for improving the implementation of inclusive education efforts globally.

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