

Online Reader:

Special Educational Needs

This online reader on Special Educational Needs was developed as part of teff's *Inclusion and Diversity* series. It is intended to facilitate the introduction to the topic and offers initial helpful information on special needs education.

The online reader provides a foundation for the lecture, online seminar and learning module on Special Educational Needs.

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Why an online reader?

The reader serves to introduce the subject, outlines some of the key issues and questions, covers key terms and concepts, and points you to further reading if you are interested.

How should you use the reader?

The reader is not a must but will help you get more out of the lecture and/or online seminar and/or learning module that follows. It invites you to critically reflect on what you already know and on what you may want to explore further. It helps you finetune your questions. The more you put into what is offered the more you get out of it.

Can I share feedback?

Of course - we welcome suggestions - please get in touch with us if you want to include additional things.

Special Educational Needs: General Consideration

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN 2008), all people have the right to active participation in all areas of social life. Inclusion in the general sense is a "[...] universally valid human rights principle with the aim of enabling all people to lead a self-determined life on the basis of equal rights" (Wansing 2015: 53).

Inclusion, broadly understood, takes into account all dimensions of heterogeneity and the diversity of pupils in a learning group who learn together. This includes the different abilities and skills, the respective age, the social background, their language(s), culture and religion, their potential migration experience, their interests, gender and sexual orientation. The view thus goes far beyond the understanding of inclusion as the joint teaching of children and young people with and without special educational needs (Grosche 2015). The term *special needs* is a short form of *special education needs* and refers to students with disabilities, in which their learning may be altered or delayed compared to other students. The term *special needs* in the education setting comes into play whenever a child's education program is officially altered from what would normally be provided to students through an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which is sometimes referred to as an Individual Program Plan (IPP). Special education aids the students' learning environment to create a uniform system for all pupils, from primary to high school.

The impression is that in many countries, educational policy ideas and initiatives are still 'stumbling' over the exclusionary school framework conditions. Questions regarding content and didactics are being asked in many places and with increasing clarity.

Building on the international policy imperative, researchers rightly ask to what extent the development of inclusive teaching is evidence-based (cf. Lindsay 2007: 2). Lindsay emphasizes that support for inclusion is based on two pillars: "[...] that children have a right to inclusion within mainstream schools and that inclusive education is more effective." (ibid.: 15) - and is effective for all learners (see Universal Design for Learning: <https://ecio.nl/en/universal-design-for-learning/>).

However, to fulfil the second pillar, there seems to be, still, a lack of general experience and, above all, careful and systematic reflection, the evaluation of reliable findings from research and practice and their transfer to everyday school life – even though joint teaching of children with and without special educational needs has already been in place for years at many primary, comprehensive and secondary schools all over Europe. "Human rights have always been an important argument for this development (shift towards inclusive education), but the effects on students should be an important factor when designing policies." (Ruijs & Peetsma 2009: 67).

In this context, it is important that emotions and ideological ideas are separated from what can or could be realized or what cannot be realized within the framework conditions of school reality or what the framework conditions do not allow. Commitment and enthusiasm for the realization of a diverse society are important and worthy of support. However, to take the wind out of the sails of the charged discussion about the opportunities and risks of 'inclusion classes', tangible results are needed that objectively show what works and what does not.

According to Amrhein and Bongartz (2014: 37), this can be done by reviewing relevant research results, supplemented by accumulating findings. Kahlert and Heimlich (2014) state that the educational ideas of

teachers - based on their pedagogical knowledge and conscience - must be concretised with regard to both subject-specific curricular content and development-oriented support options (ibid: 160). The linking of both aspects and the actual implementation in the classroom are central to this. "Inclusive teaching must [...] not only focus on language and thinking but rather faces the task of utilising all of the pupils' learning and development opportunities." (ibid.: 174). From the perspective of special needs education, the various areas of development (cognitive, communicative, sensorimotor, social and emotional) should always be taken into account when designing content and methods (cf. ibid.).

Invitation to pause briefly & reflect for a moment

(I) What are your personal experiences with inclusion and the joint teaching of pupils with and without special educational needs in one classroom?

(II) Do you feel well prepared to teach pupils with very different needs in a classroom? What is your impression of your colleagues and your school: are they prepared?

Special Educational Needs: a few further thoughts

Providing educational support to meet the needs of students with special educational needs is complicated. Mostly a (medical) diagnosis or

standardised indication is required. Diagnosis seems to allow for adjustments of the curriculum and teaching practices, to meet the pupils' learning goals and account for the notion when standardized educational goals are not met.

Studies reveal that even pupils with the same support needs are not a homogeneous group and that the development of the respective pupils can vary due to their personal circumstances, such as family background and school setting. A diagnosed need for support does not mean that all pupils with the same diagnosis require the same support measures. At the same time, not having an official diagnosis does not mean that pupils do not have difficulties participating successfully in individual subjects. Overall, studies show that many pupils can make positive learning progress in inclusive learning arrangements, with and without special educational needs (e.g. Springob 2017).

In England, the SEND Code of Practice (2015) highlights four broad areas which can be used as a basis to understand and support a child's individual needs. These areas are communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and health difficulties and sensory and/or physical needs. The Code of Practice (2015) warns that practitioners should not aim to fit the child into the categories, but understand the whole child and use the parts of the different areas that are relevant.

Many pupils with, for example, special educational needs for learning and emotional and social development require more in-depth and specialised individual support in order to be able to successfully participate in lessons in a shared learning class due to their 'special characteristics'.

Pupils with special educational needs for learning have severe, persistent and extensive difficulties in coping with intellectual performance

requirements (Grünke & Grosche 2014), which, in terms of subject-related content learning, manifests itself primarily in attention problems, hyperactivity and impulsivity, problems in organising and attributing meaning to visual and auditory information and a lack of motivation to learn (Lange 2016). Many of these pupils find it difficult to grasp and retain what they have learnt; appropriate application in subsequent lessons is often not possible. They therefore need a different form of support at certain points than pupils with special educational needs for emotional and social development, for example, for whom attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and challenging behavioural problems are among the most common behavioural challenges. Attention disorders can be seen, among other things, in the premature cancellation of tasks, failure to complete them, especially in cognitive activities, and an inability to wait and postpone needs. Pupils tend to follow impulses to act and start an activity without a sufficient explanation. Excessive restlessness often occurs in structured and organised situations (Döpfner & Banaschewski 2013). However, particularly in the case of pupils with emotional and social development needs, it is important to look closely at whether positive development in the various areas can be realised (Stein & Ellinger 2014). For many pupils with these support needs, lessons in larger groups often pose a major challenge.

Sensory Needs

Sensory processing consists of the organisation and interpretation of sensory information emanating from the external and internal environment,

including the body. This is a very important element of the growth of a child because it enables him or her to understand the environment and his or her body and respond adequately to different forms of sensory stimuli (Ayres 1979). Sensory processing, more commonly known as sensory integration, is an essential element in the cognitive and physical growth of children. Young children begin to process enriching and rewarding movements, such as complex eye-hand coordination, increasingly well (Dunn 2001). Most children by the preschool age are able to process most sensations effectively: vision, smell, taste, proprioception and interception as their central nervous system matures (Miller et al. 2007). As the neural connections are formed and matured, there is an ability to make sense of the input they receive from the senses.

This is considered a multisensory integration function where children put together pieces of information coming from all the senses and link them to themselves and the environment they are in.

A point that should be emphasised is that every person has some form of variation in the way they process the parts of the body that deal with the senses (Kranowitz 2005). Such individual aspects may include increased sensitivity to certain stimuli, trouble with motor control in the direction to suppress inappropriate stimuli or drive for some sensory more than others. These variations are usually accepted as normative and are not a cause for concern as long as they do not significantly hinder one's from performing day-to-day tasks (Dunn 2001). In cases where sensory processing differences do impact a child's functioning, they may be identified as a sensory processing disorder or sensory integration dysfunction (Tomchek & Dunn 2007). These can lead to challenges in areas such as social relations, emotion, motor skills, or learning. Some children may need more help, such

as from an occupational therapist, to enhance their functioning when they have sensory processing disorders. Sensory processing is a fundamental aspect of child development, allowing children to make sense of their environment and respond appropriately to various sensory stimuli.

Communication and Language Needs

Effective communication is fundamental to social interaction, learning, and overall personal development. Speech, Language, and Communication Needs (SLCN) refer to a diverse range of difficulties that some children may experience in understanding and using language, impacting their ability to communicate effectively (Bishop et al. 2016). SLCN can affect expressive language, which is the ability to convey thoughts and feelings, and receptive language, which is the ability to understand what others are saying. Children with SLCN may face challenges in their academic performance, social interactions, and emotional well-being due to their communication difficulties (Law et al. 2017). SLCN encompasses various conditions, ranging from specific language impairment (SLI), where children experience difficulties with language that are not attributable to any other developmental disorder, to broader communication disorders, which may involve difficulties with speech clarity or fluency (ASHA 2020). Combined, these issues can lead to significant barriers in learning environments where effective communication is essential.

SLCN can be categorised into several types, including Expressive Language Disorders, these can make it challenging for children to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings clearly through spoken or written language (Cohen et al. 2018). Receptive Language Disorders occur when students have difficulty understanding and processing language, leading to challenges

in following instructions and grasping the meaning of conversations (Bishop et al. 2016). Articulation Disorders involve difficulties with the physical ability to produce specific speech sounds, which can affect speech clarity (ASHA 2020). Lastly, Fluency Disorders such as stuttering fall under this category, where the flow of speech is disrupted, leading to difficulties in smooth communication (Yaruss & Quesal 2010).

The significance of SLCN for a child should always be considered. Children with such SLCN have social interaction difficulties due to the fact that they cannot communicate with ease, which is essential when making friendships with other children as well as adults (Law et al. 2017). Furthermore, these challenges can hinder academic achievements, as language skills are foundational for learning across all subjects. Children with SLCN may also experience feelings of frustration and low self-esteem, particularly if their needs are not acknowledged or supported in school and home settings (Cohen et al. 2018).

Supporting children with SLCN requires a multi-faceted approach that involves parents, educators, and speech-language therapists working together. Early identification and intervention are key to helping children overcome these challenges (Bishop et al. 2016). Strategies may include:

- Speech and Language Therapy: Regular sessions with a qualified speech-language pathologist can significantly improve a child's communication skills by providing targeted exercises and strategies.
- Inclusive Practices: Educators can implement inclusive classroom practices that support diverse communication styles, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to engage and learn effectively (Law et al. 2017).

Speech, Language, and Communication Needs (SLCN) are significant issues that can affect various aspects of a child's life. Understanding these needs

and implementing appropriate support strategies can lead to improved communication skills, enhanced social interactions, and better academic outcomes. As awareness about SLCN grows, so does the potential for children to thrive in environments that recognise and address their communication needs.

Physical Needs

A physical disability is a "limitation on a person's physical functioning, mobility, dexterity, or stamina." It has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on a person's ability to do daily activities. (Equality Act, 2010). Every child or young person with a physical disability is unique.

Physical needs can vary widely depending on the nature of their condition. Addressing the physical needs of children with special needs is essential for promoting their overall development, ensuring their health, and enhancing their quality of life. Students with possible diagnoses of Cerebral Palsy, Dyspraxia, autism, ADHD may be affected by the level of their physical skills. Engaging in physical activity is beneficial for all children, but it can present unique challenges for those with special needs. Many children with disabilities may have limited mobility or may experience difficulty participating in traditional sports or recreational activities (Fleming et al. 2016). However, incorporating adapted physical activity and tailored exercise programs can help these children develop strength, coordination, and general physical fitness. The discussion over specific (additional) physical needs needs to focus on the inclusion of children within the mainstream and special settings. In England, there are a number of initiatives supporting students' physical needs, including MATP (n.d), which focuses on the development of certain skills such as mobility (gross motor

skills), dexterity (fine motor skills), striking (upper body) and kicking (lower body) in an 8-12 weeks programme specifically designed to include athletes and for their level of achievements to be celebrated and recognised. The MOVE Programme focuses on enabling students who need to develop their sitting, standing, walking and transition skills, MOVE (n.d)

Creating a safe and supportive environment is essential for children with special needs. This includes not only physical safety, such as ensuring accessible pathways and modifications to physical spaces for mobility aids, but also emotional safety (Holt et al. 2015). Children with special needs may require specialised care to ensure their safety during play and daily activities, and supportive environments can foster their confidence and independence. Ensuring that children are in settings that recognise and accommodate their needs can enhance their social interactions and overall engagement in various activities.

"For a long time, the impression was conveyed that the success of inclusion in schools was primarily a question of the (right) attitude and mindset" (Musenberg & Riegert 2015: 16). However, school inclusion is much more than the appreciation of a diverse student body; in everyday life, it is also and above all about very specific (subject) didactic issues (cf. Amrhein & Dziak-Mahler 2014: 11f.), e.g., foreign language education. It needs to be clarified how exactly pupils receiving differentiated support can engage with a subject (cf. Musenberg & Riegert 2015: 17).

In this context, Kahlert and Heimlich state that the educational ideas of teachers - based on their pedagogical knowledge and conscience - must be concretised with regard to both subject-specific curricular content and

development-oriented support options (cf. Kahlert & Heimlich 2014: 160), as well as assessment.

Invitation to pause briefly & reflect for a moment:

(I) What are the practices at your institution/school?

(II) Do students require an official diagnosis before receiving educational changes, what is your opinion?

Considerations from Neurodiversity translated into classroom teaching

There is a growing population of children who enter the school mainstream system that displays Complex Learning Disabilities and Difficulties (CLDD). This group is a distinctive group of learners requiring educators to make personalised professional responses to their profile of learning needs (Carpenter 2011). Teaching professionals need to be provided with skills and knowledge to “offer high-quality education to these young people to prevent their disenfranchisement from the school system. We need to remodel our pedagogy and generate teaching strategies which will embrace

them as learners” (Carpenter 2011; A Neuro-affirming model). Neurodiverse children and young people present with a range of issues and a combination of layered needs – e.g., mental health, relationships, behavioural, physical, medical, sensory, communication and cognitive. (Carpenter 2011).

Neurodiverse students need informed, specific support and strategies which may include transdisciplinary input to engage effectively in the learning process and to participate actively in classroom activities and the wider community. A variety of approaches exist to support these children, e.g., the Golden Equation (Beardon 2021), Attention Autism (Davies n.d), Lego Therapy (LeGoff 2014), the use of visuals (Tissot 2003), Zones of Regulations (Kuypers 2011), SCERTS model (Prizant 2006), the MOVE programme as examples of meaningful participation and learning.

Would you like to explore more?

<https://positiveeye.co.uk>

<https://zonesofregulation.com>

<https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/routes-for-learning>

<https://www.thesensoryprojects.co.uk/>

<https://moveeurope.org.uk/>

<https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/sports/motor-activity-trainin>

<https://attentionautism.co.uk/about-us/>

<https://www.makaton.org/>

<https://pecsusa.com/pecs/?srsltid=AfmBOoqxJor8JOKHvIZtwZzml3kyT8-0C9gZ0Xh4XpMxlRfFgZq4Y5J0>

<https://scerts.com/>

Invitation to pause briefly & reflect for a moment:

(I) Did you experience working with an individual whose needs are complex?

(II) What were the issues that you experienced when working with this person and what skills and knowledge you would need to support this individual?

Special needs and (Second) Language Teaching & Learning

Foreign language learners also differ in terms of their linguistic abilities and skills in their first language, their multilingual experience and language history, their level of motivation, their willingness to communicate, the support they have experienced at home and at school and their previous experience of self-efficacy at school in general and in English lessons in particular. People learn (a language) in very different ways and bring different prerequisites with them. From the perspective of foreign language acquisition research, nothing speaks in favour of excluding individual children and young people from foreign language lessons (Springob 2017).

Age plays a role in learning a foreign language in a school context, as the amount of input provided is crucial for successful acquisition. Despite a child's potential difficulties due to a possible need for support, this speaks for an early start when learning a foreign language. For people who require learning support or learning difficulties, it can be assumed that an earlier start and thus more extensive contact with the foreign language is an essential prerequisite and motivating factor for the acquisition of this language. According to Krashen's input hypothesis, the input must be interesting, relevant, comprehensible and available in sufficient quantities and therefore cannot be prepared in the same form for all people.

Interaction, the exchange with other language users, is elementary here. For pupils, learning and using a foreign language should be primarily about communicative competence and comprehensibility and not about achieving a native-like level. Current studies indicate that the age factor should also be analysed in the context of social, personal and external variables (Pfenninger & Singleton 2016).

At the same time, it must be clear that an early start does not guarantee a successful foreign language learning process. "[...] early starters who were in primary schools with less-than-optimal learning conditions might not be able to profit from the extended learning period, as they might have, for instance, significantly less favourable future L2 self-state." (ibid.: 335).

The comments on the importance of **literacy in the first language** for the learning of all other languages make it clear how heterogeneous the pupils in a learning group can be simply due to their linguistic prerequisites, which are available to them at the start of foreign language lessons. Early language support is therefore important for the holistic language development of a child (Blackorby et al. 2003). The ability to read and write in the first language and the dominant language of education at school is essential for all children and young people to be able to learn other languages successfully, and it is not only pupils with special educational needs who may have difficulties in using the first and educational language. Multilingual pupils in particular - but not necessarily - face the challenge of utilising their bilingualism or multilingualism to their advantage even before they start school. Early (linguistic) support in all languages is also important for them and the basis for successful participation in foreign language lessons.

At the same time, **learning two languages** leads to the development of faster formative insights into language and its structure, which are essential for high-level language use and literacy (Bialystok 2015). The advantages mentioned in the context of bilingualism in the area of executive control and cognitive reserve are certainly not fully transferable to all pupils who learn a foreign language in a school context.

Nevertheless, the acquisition of another language seems to have the potential to positively change the cognitive system and meta-linguistic abilities in both languages at any age (cf. *ibid.*).

Attitude and motivation are seen in combination as crucial in all learning contexts, as they largely determine how actively pupils engage in the learning process (Singleton 2014). Here, too, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors must be taken into account, the interplay of which plays a role in pupils' learning success, especially in everyday school life (Zareian & Jodaei 2015). More recent approaches focus on the dynamic changeability of motivation depending on the circumstances and the (learning) environment. Teachers and the school context in particular play a decisive role here; the influence of teachers, the methods used and classmates should not be underestimated. Above all, teachers must be able to arouse the curiosity of the learners; teachers should encourage their pupils to ask questions, establish a connection to the pupils' real lives in the lessons, encourage them and offer them choices (Marshall 2002). Experience, self-efficacy in learning and using another language appear to be key conditions for success (Courtney et al. 2015).

Following **Pienemann's Teachability Hypothesis** (1998), the individual language acquisition stages cannot be skipped or omitted. Passing through the different stages is an individual process that is not completed at the same pace by all pupils. In this context, language errors can be seen, anticipated and categorised as indicators of the pupil's level of linguistic development (Weskamp 2007). Possible errors can be explained with the help of the acquisition levels and thus lose the explosiveness often attached to them.

Taking Vygotsky's basic idea of the zone of proximal development seriously, all pupils must be given tasks that focus on the next stage of development. It

is not beneficial for any learner to remain at one level in practice loops. As the levels and the support measures required differ from one pupil to the next, the tasks must be adapted to the needs of the pupils (see, e.g., Moll 1990).

Special educational needs may limit or hinder the ability of individual pupils to learn a foreign language. "Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are key modalities in a foreign language classroom. Since a learning disability may interfere with the study of language, instructors must be aware of how various learning disabilities may affect students' classroom performance." (Lazda-Cazers & Thorson 2008: 107). Students with special support needs in particular need tasks that they can master in order to perceive themselves as successful foreign language learners (cf. Nijakowska, Tsagari & Spanoudis 2018). The challenge for pupils and their teachers is to find the right learning environment and the right learning arrangement for the respective needs of all learners in a group; not all necessary conditions - e.g. an additional learning space - can always be realised (cf. Ganschow & Schneider 2006: 5). The learning performance and development of all pupils plays a decisive role: "With regard to the effective design of inclusive English lessons, it would be important to obtain information about pupils' learning performance." (Doert & Nold 2015: 34); consequently, this also includes social learning and the influences on motivation and attitudes (cf. *ibid.*).

In a review, Gerlach und Schmidt (2021) summarise foreign language teaching research in Germany from 2009 to 2020 in the field of inclusion. "While the potential of foreign language teaching for inclusive and participatory educational processes is often presented in a positivistic way

in theoretical works, the challenges of methodological design, (multi-)professional work of teachers and organisational constraints are often reported in empirical contributions to thwart effective implementations” (ibid., 11).

Interesting Projects to have a look at

SCALED- Supporting Content and Language Learning Across Diversity

<https://scaled.uw.edu.pl/>

DysTEFL 1 and 2: Dyslexia for teachers of English

<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/learning-languages-with-splds/files/2020/01/DysTEFL2-booklet.pdf>

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/dyslexia>

ENRICH

<http://enrichproject.eu/>

Invitation to pause briefly & reflect for a moment:

(I) What specific experiences - both positive and challenging - have you had so far in inclusive foreign language teaching?

(II) What worked well, what less so?

Learning & teaching in inclusive University schools

This lecture presents the concept and implementation of an inclusive university school. The university schools in Birmingham and Cologne serve as concrete examples. It will be about how exactly the more intensive and comprehensive cooperation between school and university works and what the special features of university schools are in comparison to other schools in England and Germany. Both the perspective of the accompanying university researchers and that of the practising teachers will have their say here.

The University of Birmingham School draws pupils from across the city of Birmingham and from different socioeconomic backgrounds. On its website the University of Birmingham School outlines how their partnership with the University of Birmingham focuses on learning without limits, giving character development as much attention as academic success, and offers enhancement to all activities of the University's School of Education. Student teachers on the University's Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes make visits to lessons in state-of-the art laboratories and classrooms and practising teachers are engaged in continuing professional development activities. The School is a location for sharing and generation of research, linking practising teachers to the research of the School of Education.

Invitation to pause briefly & reflect for a moment:

(I) Do you know any examples of a university school?

(II) What did you think about the idea of a university school?

(III) Did you feel you could implement approaches for inclusion discussed by the schools?

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