



Disability Studies in Education: A framework for designing inclusive curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices¹

Why does it matter?

New Zealand is recognised as having one of the most inclusive education systems in the world. Yet despite this, students with special education needs, their families, teachers, and educational leaders suggest that more can be done to improve their experiences within the educational system. While traditional assessment of learners with special education needs has primarily been for diagnostic or funding reasons, this often reinforces deficits within individuals. To challenge this, Morton et al. (2021) present an alternative approach to assessment, known as narrative assessment, to focus on students' strengths and interests to build the capacity of educators and, ultimately, to make the New Zealand Curriculum relevant and inclusive for all learners.

Inclusion acknowledges the contributions that education systems and schools make to a socially cohesive, civil society, and to effective citizenship. Referred to as education for an apprenticeship in democracy and humanity, there is a commitment at every level of the education system to equity and excellence for all students so that no student is left behind (Rutherford, 2016). If we want an inclusive world, we must teach inclusively, and in this regard, Slee (2018, p. 9) poses the following questions that are integral to the transformation of education systems towards inclusion:

- What kind of world do we want our children and young people to live in?
- What kind of schools and classrooms are required to achieve that world?
- When we look at our schools – who is in, who is out, who decides and what are we going to do about it? (Morton et al., 2021, p. 1)

In unpacking these questions, Morton et al. (2021) draw on theoretical frameworks in Disability Studies in Education to (re)design curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices. Such

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frameworks enable educators to utilise theory and research to design inquiry into their own practices to consider more inclusive approaches that recognise and resist exclusion.



Professor Missy Morton is a Professor of Disability Studies and Inclusive Education at The University of Auckland. She has conducted a number of Ministry of Education projects focussed on supporting teachers and schools to build their confidence and competence in ensuring all learners are welcomed, they are learning and achieving, and have a real sense of belonging. These projects include the research and development of the *Curriculum Exemplars for Learners with Special Education Needs* and the *Narrative Assessment: A Guide for Teachers*. These projects reviewed international literature on individual education plans and special education assessment practices that in turn, supported the development of the guide *Collaboration for Success: Individual Education Plans* and most recently, the research, development and evaluation of the online resources *Teachers and Teachers' Aides Working Together*. More details available [here](#).

What can the research tell us?

In this seminar, Professor Missy Morton will position her research in Disability Studies in Education as a framework to identify gaps in theory, practices and the spaces in between. Drawing on findings from her project, *Using Narrative Assessment to Support Secondary School Teachers' Inclusive Practices*, Professor Morton will highlight how researchers and teachers in a New Zealand secondary school collaborated to develop narrative assessment approaches that documented learning for students whose needs did not necessarily align with the school curriculum.

Professor Morton will argue that Disability Studies in Education can be a framework used to identify gaps in theory and practice, providing an opportunity to reframe theory and practice across classrooms, schools and policy in more inclusive ways. As Morton et al. (2021, p.3) argue, the social construction of disability and competence can be challenged through sociocultural approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment that acknowledge the importance of context for understanding how young people learn and engage in and with education.

Further reading

Morton, M. (2019). Guest editorial: Thinking about what is normal has changed over time and place. *Ako: The Journal for Educational Professionals*. Available [here](#).

Morton, M., McIlroy, A-M., MacArthur, J. & Olsen, P. (2021). Disability studies in and for inclusive teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1882059>

Morton, M., McIlroy, A-M. & Guerin, A. (2019). Sociocultural perspectives on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Implications for participation, belonging and building inclusive schools and classrooms. In M.J. Schuelka, C.J. Johnstone, G. Thomas & A.J. Artiles (eds.), *The SAGE handbook on inclusion and diversity in education* (pp 89-102). London: SAGE. Available [here](#).

Slee, R., Corcoran, T. & Best, M. (2019). Disability studies in education - building platforms to reclaim disability and recognise disablement. *Journal of Disability Studies in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25888803-00101002>

The Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion

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education and quality of education is profound. The Centre for Educational and Social Inclusion undertakes research to advance an understanding of the barriers and enablers to successful educational inclusion. For further information please see the CRESI [website](#).