

Exclusion of students with down syndrome in mainstream education: A critical review of the literature and avenues for future research."

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"The measure of a civilization is how it treats its weakest members".

Mahatma Gandhi

Keywords

Down syndrome, education, literature review, future research

Abstract

This universal truth as suggested by Gandhi highlights the significance and the necessity of modern and developed countries to provide all people with the same equal opportunities in any aspect of their life e.g. access to health system, equal work opportunities and of course access and equal opportunities to education. Without doubt, students with special needs are charismatic and highly talented. This also applies of course to students with Down's syndrome.

A review of the literature reveals that the key strengths of students with Down syndrome are as follows: a) they are visual learners, b) their visual processing and visual memory skills are more developed compared to other skills, c) they learn sign language, d) they develop in a satisfactory level their social understanding, e) they have increased interactive skills, g) they learn self-care and the rules of conduct, h) they are supported by tangible incentives and positive reinforcement (Buckley, 2000). On the other hand, their less "strong points" can be summarised in the following characteristics: a) low development of their motor skills (fine and coarse mobility), b) severe difficulties in speech, and c) difficulties in reading and writing (Buckley, 2000). According to Buckley, Bird, Sacks, Archer (2006) it is expected that students with Down syndrome at the end of their studies in the primary school: a) can be able to choose their clothes, b) be washed, c) to answer the phone, d) some of them will be able to read, write and use numbers, e) understand the time, g) listen and have fun with music and participate in such activities and finally h) they learn to behave socially. Nonetheless, despite the growing number of studies suggesting that the vast majority of individuals with Down syndrome can be educated (see e.g. Dara, 2014; Bochner, Outhred and Pieterse, 2001; Rynders, Abery, Spiker, Olive, Sheran and Zajac, 1997, Steingass et al. 2011; Haldeman-Englert et al. 2012) there is empirical evidence that students with Down syndrome are excluded from mainstream education settings, without being given access even to the primary education.

This paper conducts a thorough review of the international literature and by identifying the sources of students' exclusion; it offers suggestions and provides an agenda for future research.

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