Inclusive School Practices Toolkit

Exploring Disability and Inclusion Tool 3:

Applying the Social Model of Disability to School Inclusion

This tool has been developed as part of the *Inclusive School Communities Project*, funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency. The project is led by JFA Purple Orange.

## Introduction

This tool is the third in a series of four, written by Dr Leanne Longfellow drawing on her experience in advocating for family members with disability, her research and 30-year teaching career.

Schools need quality teaching and learning tools that are informed by evidence-based approaches and practices to facilitate positive academic and social outcomes for all students. This tool provides an overview of three approaches that can support school staff (leaders, educators, teacher aides, office staff, and other site staff) to apply the social model of disability and implement inclusive school policies and practices: strengths-based approach[[1]](#footnote-1), growth mindset[[2]](#footnote-2), and social capital[[3]](#footnote-3)*.*

## Ideas

The key concepts of the social model of disability as outlined in the tool, ‘Exploring Disability and Inclusion Tool 2: The Models of Disability’ can be implemented through three pedagogical approaches: strengths-based approach, growth mindset, and social capital*.* These approaches facilitate inclusion by recognising and valuing the identities, perspectives and strengths of students living with disability and are aligned with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL)[[4]](#footnote-4) and social justice curricula[[5]](#footnote-5) introduced in the tool, ‘Exploring Disability and Inclusion Tool 1: Unpacking Definitions and Concepts to Build School Inclusion’. Application of these three approaches also support educators to meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, Standard 1.6 ‘Strategies to support full participation for students with disability’[[6]](#footnote-6).

## *Strengths-Based Approach*

A strengths-based approach, also referred to as ‘funds of knowledge’[[7]](#footnote-7) and ‘turn-around pedagogies’[[8]](#footnote-8), focuses on what the student can do, rather than what they cannot do by acknowledging that every student has potential and capabilities. This approach empowers students by incorporating self-advocacy, positive relationships and language into the curricula.

## *Growth Mindset*

Growth mindset, where intelligence is viewed as something that can be developed through persistence and good teaching rather than something that is fixed, is aligned with a strength-based approach and facilitates positive beliefs about ability[[9]](#footnote-9). This approach also builds self-advocacy.

## *Social Capital*

Social capital is a term utilised by a theorist named Bourdieu and refers to support networks, friendships and connections[[10]](#footnote-10). Within an educational context, social capital can be developed through the ‘circle of friends’ strategy, where peers support and include students living with disability alongside the guidance of an adult facilitator[[11]](#footnote-11). The tool, ‘Circles’ provides information about the circle of friends strategy in schools to building social capital in students living with disability. Social capital is also referred to in the Model of Citizenhood Support 2nd Edition (the Model)[[12]](#footnote-12) and explained in the tool, ‘Context of a Good Life – Personhood and Citizenhood’.

## Actions

The above approaches focus on individual or small group change rather than macro-level structural constraints to inclusion. For example, a strengths-based approach teaches skills that empower the individual, growth mindset focuses on internal motivation of the individual, and ‘circle of friends’ centres on small group change rather than addressing systemic barriers to inclusion. No amount of individual empowerment or internal motivation can overcome policies, procedures and practices that exclude students living with disability. Consequently, these approaches must be coupled with a social justice framework to facilitate self-reflection on the concepts of oppression, power and privilege.

Strengths-based, growth mindset and social capital approaches support inclusive practice when combined with UDL and social justice pedagogy. School staff are encouraged to reflect on and discuss the above approaches. This may be started through an open discussion at a staff meeting using these example questions:

1. What are your three core beliefs about students and their capacity at school?
2. What do you know about?
3. Strengths-based approach
4. Growth mindset
5. Social capital

In addition to starting the conversation about pedagogical approaches generally, all school staff require professional learning to understand strengths-based, growth mindset, and social capital approaches. In particular, educators need guidance from the school leaders to apply these pedagogies in their engagement and interaction with all students, including those living with disability.

Schools should consider incorporating these approaches into their quality teaching and learning framework ensuring they are embedded into policies and practices.

## More Information

Animated video explaining The Model of Citizenhood Support produced by JFA Purple Orange <https://vimeo.com/241128511>

Dr. Carol S. Dweck’s updated edition of the book showing how success in school, work, sports, the arts, and almost every area of human endeavor can be dramatically influenced by how we think about our talents and abilities ‘Mindset: The New Psychology of Success’

Dr. Carol S. Dweck discusses her research into “self-conceptions (or mindsets) people use to structure the self and guide their behavior”, and how you can apply a Growth Mindset at home, at school and in your career <https://youtu.be/-71zdXCMU6A>

Video recording of Jackie Hayes and her daughter, Hannah Beard speaking at the 2018 Imagine More National Inclusion Conference. They share their story about how they have built an inclusive life for Hannah in school and out of school activities and relationships such as through the Circle of Support initiative <https://youtu.be/hkgC4ZxP0xA>

Video with prominent people from the disability community talking about the social model of disability and why it’s important to them <https://youtu.be/0e24rfTZ2CQ>

## Acknowledgement

This tool was written by Dr Leanne Longfellow, Director of Inclusive Education Planning with editing by JFA Purple Orange.

Leanne presents researched based professional learning to support teachers, assistants, other professionals and parents on inclusive practice <https://inclusiveeducationplanning.com.au/>



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2. Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success.* New York: Random House. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bourdieu, P. (1997). The forms of capital. In A. H. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown & A. S. Wells (Eds). *Education: Culture, economy and society.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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5. Derman-Sparks, L. & Edwards, J. O. (2010). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves.* Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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