

# Development of an ICF-based eligibility procedure for education in Switzerland

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## Abstract

In Switzerland, since 2011, the eligibility for special education is determined by a multidisciplinary expert panel. This panel includes representatives from the medical, psychological, pedagogical, and social services. The panel's decision is based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) and the Swiss Federal Constitution. The panel's decision is also based on the Swiss Federal Constitution and the Swiss Federal Law on the Education of Children and Young People with Special Needs. The panel's decision is also based on the Swiss Federal Law on the Education of Children and Young People with Special Needs.



Autism” [20]. Other less fortunate groups may not benefit from such powerful representation.

The means and ends of education have been discussed for generations by philosophers, policy makers and educators. Still today it remains a much debated topic in policy and practice. Compulsory education was extended to children with disabilities about forty years ago and since then, special educational services have been developed to ensure that all children benefit from education. But increasingly so, special education has been suspected of mainly fulfilling the selection function in education systems as postulated by disability advocates.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requests and national legislations confirm that all children have a right to education. This right is explicitly extended to include children with disabilities as stated in many policy documents, most recently in the CRPD, Article 24. Within the broader framework of the general aims of education, the convention exemplifies the aims that are of special concern for children with disabilities (Article 24):

“(a) The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;

(b) The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;

(c) Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.”

Within the larger framework of a society and culture, education systems develop their own goals or student performance standards. Societies require the state to provide an education system and to implement processes that ensure these aims are met. Education systems are made up of policies, institutions and people operating at the national, intermediate and grass-roots level. All should contribute to establish and maintain processes that ensure that children with disabilities can make the best possible use of their right to education. As the Convention further demands, states should ensure that:

“(a) Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;

(b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive,

[25-30]. The ICF is able to represent multidimensional information and therefore holds the promise of a non-reductionist evaluation relevant for all types of services [10]. By focusing on functioning, information relevant to describe impairment and information relevant to describe participation in education can be bridged and considered in the same framework. Participation has been identified as the most important overall outcome for children and their families and its measurement should be further developed [31]. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that information not directly associated with an impairment or a syndrome may be most relevant to successful service provision in education [32]. Information used for eligibility purposes should therefore not only focus on functional characteristics that arise from a health problem.

To understand an “individual’s requirements” in a given educational setting, the situation of a child with disabilities needs to be linked to the participation prerequisites of education as a specific environment, a life area and an intervention setting. Diverse requirements

acknowledge the need for such conceptual changes in principle, it is far more difficult to change the practices and attitudes of the individuals involved. The involvement of practitioners, disability advocates and parents was therefore given high priority. The conceptual and empirical work was monitored both by a group of expert and a group of stakeholders. Conferences and workshops were held at the different stages of the work process to ensure feedback from the widest possible audience in all regions of Switzerland.

In a first stage of the project, former eligibility procedures were disaggregated conceptually using the ICF-CY extended model as introduced in the last chapter. This work was carried out on the premise that disability is a

for mapping existing information into the new framework. Discussions were held on assessment strategies that practitioners had developed around the former eligibility criteria. There was a broad consensus that “disability” was not just an input variable, but may be at least partially the outcome of educational processes. The child’s response to interventions therefore should be considered when substantiating eligibility [35].

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Based on these discussions, information components were classified into two parts, namely (a) information pertaining to functioning and disability as understood by the ICF-CY (basic assessment), and (b) information pertaining to requirements as conceptualised in the expanded ICF-CY model (assessment of requirements). The traditional approaches to eligibility tend to combine identification with treatment; the child is assigned to an intervention group. This leads to the dilemmas of difference described by Norwich [41] “The dilemmas of difference are found specifically in relation to core questions within education: i. whether to identify individual children as having SEN or a disability in the first place; ii. what children should learn – the curriculum; iii. where children should learn and with whom.” By detaching basic assessment information from considerations related to requirements and needs, the issues

[42]. Functioning and disability are umbrella terms to encompass the multiple continua of functioning described from the perspective of the body, the individual and the society [1]. With the help of the ICF-CY model and classification, an inclusive and coherent framework to conceptualise low-incidence disabilities, high-incidence disabilities, learning or behavioural difficulties due to social disadvantages, and “normal” functioning has been developed. Children with disabilities are not a pre-defined special group with pre-defined special needs. Considering overall human functioning, there is more “

