

Institutionen för pedagogik och specialpedagogik

Autism-in-context
An investigation of schooling of children
with a diagnosis of autism in urban India

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Abstract

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Informed by the significance given to context in the postcolonial critique of disability in the South, the overall aim of this thesis is to develop a contextual understanding of the schooling of children diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum in mainstream schools in urban India. This is particularly valid at a time where there is an increased focus on bringing children with disabilities into the mainstream classroom. The school, socio-familial, cultural and institutional contexts are foregrounded in the study. Using an ethnographic mode of enquiry, stakeholders' perceptions and practices are explored within an interpretive framework. The data consists of observations in classrooms, interviews with stakeholders and government policy documents.

The thesis is comprised of four articles and a mantle text. The first article examines how inclusive education is conceptualised in government policies and in practice. The second article, describes school staff's awareness of autism and stakeholders' perspectives on children with autism. In article three, factors influencing teachers' practices and responses towards children with autism are investigated. The fourth article explores parents' views on, and experiences of, schooling for their child with autism. Each of the articles provides a nuanced picture of the complexities of the phenomenon in context. The results from the articles are discussed using the metaphor of space, where autism is conceptualized as a space within which the medical, political, social and educational play out.

Apart from offering implications for policy making and practice, this study's main contribution is to the theoretical debates on schooling of children with disabilities. Despite developments in policy, growth in scholarship as well as media, the collective findings from this study show that negotiating access to a school still remains a concern. Even more significantly who is responsible for the learning of children with disabilities continues to be a contested area.