

# Towards a more Inclusive Form of Education

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## *Bachelor thesis in Philosophy of Sociology*

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*I would like to thank my mother, grandmother and sister for all of their support during my childhood. Without them, I am not sure if I would have ever have managed to leave the inter-societal exile in the way that I did. For that I am eternally grateful, and I have made it my task to bear the responsibility of enabling other students to do the same.*

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## ***Introduction: Why the ideal of an inclusive education?***

In this thesis, the mission statement is to expand on the vision of what exactly is meant with the term 'inclusive education' and how it is possible to make the transition towards such a form of education. Therefore, this thesis aims to conceptualize an educational form which transcends the binary boundaries of either regular or special education. This thesis is written from the personal perspective of a student who started in special education, before studying Philosophy and Sociology at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam. As such, this thesis also aims to cover the lived experience of someone who has been shaped through their transition from special education towards higher academia. Concerning the concept of special education, this thesis will specifically situate it's context on the accessibility of the Erasmus University for students who come from the Mytylschool. Both the Mytylschool and the Erasmus University are educational institutions which are located in Rotterdam. The Mytylschool is a school institution which is specifically adjusted for students with a physical disability (Mytylschool de Brug, 2024).

In order to obtain a better understanding of this accessibility, the process of how exactly contemporary society restricts the access of higher academia from disabled students will be analyzed. To analyze this process, it has become important to identify multiple aspects which are ingrained in the concept of both disability and the educational system itself. Due to the fact that the educational system itself is a broad institution, this thesis will specifically look at the ideal effects which education is supposed to have towards a positive societal impact; as education has been called "*The Great Equalizer.*" Education as the great equalizer finds its origin in the writings of American educational reformer Horace Mann (1796-1859), who was a pioneer of public schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He famously referred to education as "*The great equalizer of the conditions of man*" (Duncan 2018, 730). However in this thesis, the aim is to illustrate that education does not make man equal; instead the educational system itself has many aspects which renders the concept of inclusive education difficult to actualize.

To illustrate the mechanisms which block an inclusive education from being actualized, this thesis will place its focus on the schooling system and demonstrate how the binary boundaries between special education and normative education situate the students that are placed within special education in a different lifeworld. Special education itself

consists of a different pedagogical system which situates its students in an environment with differing norms and values, an environment that is separated from the rest of society. By placing these students in a different educational system where special care is given to them and exceptions are made as to how their education is handled, this different lifeworld has diverse sociological implications and consequences which will be analyzed further in this text. This different lifeworld will be referred to through the concept of an inter-societal exile. The inter-societal exile refers to a process in which marginalized people are exiled from the collective society, towards an stigmatized intersociety in which people are exclusively treated on the basis of certain characteristics.

In order for the educational system to give equal chances to all students irrespectively of their physical abilities, it has become necessary to consider how an inclusive education can be approached as a form of education which exists beyond the binary categories of a regular or a special education. This makes the ideal of an inclusive education an antithesis of the contemporary educational system which bases its existence on a bureaucratic platform of calculated risk. Developing an educational form based on principles such as Universal Design for Learning would be the start of conceptualizing a new form of education that accommodates the next generation as both students and humans.

## Chapter 1: The equalizing power of education

*Education, then, beyond all other divides of human origin, is a great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery.* Horace Mann (Education and Social inequity, 1848)

Horace Mann has been described for nearly a century to be the father of the American public school system (Borrowman 1973, 1). Mann perceived education to carry forth a great equalizing power in society since education brings together children of all classes which enables students to have a unified learning experience. Therefore Mann envisioned a school that would be available and equal for all, to be for the rich and for the poor alike (Grove and Montgomery 2003, 23). However, problems of this ideology are already found at the basis. This ideology of an equal education does not overlap with the calculated thinking as embedded in our contemporary educational system. This becomes apparent when we look at the transition of students that are placed in an inter-societal exile.

Therefore a deeper analysis behind this societal transition and a philosophical reflection on the role of education as a whole is needed. Since this societal transition will center itself in the field of disability studies concerning education, the form of writing as used in the series *Reflective teaching and the Social Conditions of Schooling* will be utilized. This series encourages teachers to be thoughtful practitioners who evaluate multiple complex situations on a daily basis by exploring diverse options for the future of education and weighing them against each other, in order to ultimately make informed choices as professionals (Connor 2018, 366). Titles in this series adhere typically to one formula, namely after the background of an issue is discussed, the reader is asked to consider the issue with three different perspectives; one being a traditional conservative stance, the other being a centrist stance and finally, a radical innovative stance. For this, the philosophies of Dewey, Arendt and Haraway will be used respectively.

Dewey defined education as a process in which experiences are rebuilt, this gives education a social value through teaching individuals how to be more effective citizens in a safe and controlled environment. (Chambliss 2003, 2). Arendt instead defined education as having the power to prepare the next generation for the task of renewing a common world (Arendt 1961, 14). Another stance towards education finds itself in the work of Haraway, through the use of Haraway's work one can see that knowledge is located and relies on

partial perspectives. This allows for the inclusion of lived material social realities and feelings that shape our educational experiences (Fairchild et al, 2021). However, this inclusion is limited, which stems from the inequalities that the educational system perpetuates among the students. If the educational system as a whole is unequal, then this prompts a reconsideration of the status which education holds as being a great equalizer.

The status of education being a great equalizer can already be scrutinized when one takes a look at the division of higher and lower education within the national educational system of the Netherlands. For the general Dutch populace, we can already see that a division begins to form at the end of elementary school period. It is at the end of the elementary school period that students get dispersed to a different high school on the base of how well they perform on the final exam of the year (Rijksoverheid, 2024). This distinction already forms a hierarchal split among the students by putting them into separate groups of communication and societal prestige. Aside from only measuring the intelligence, the physical capability of the students is also evaluated. From this process, a marginalized group of students is created that fall under the label of special needs and are therefore transferred to special education

Due to this inter-societal exile, students are placed within the fringes that fall outside of the regular framework of society. It is within these fringes that students become accustomed to different social methods and become excluded from the regular societal discourse. Within special education the classes are of a smaller scale, the teachers are more oriented towards what makes the student special and work towards accommodating the needs of their students. The academic staff within special education thus provides specialized care to their students. However a difficult societal transition occurs when these students attempt to ingrain with the normative society after their studies.

If students that are placed within the special education system attempt to gain equal chances after their studies, they are expected to reintegrate in a society that places value on people based on what they contribute to a capitalistic system. In such a society, having a disability only becomes seen as a potential hindrance for employers and institutions since it requires adjustments to be made for this marginalized group. For students at special education institutions such as the Mytyschool, it can therefore be difficult to exit this inter-societal exile. In higher education, the burden is on the student and not the school to find the appropriate services and navigate through higher education (Newman et al, 2009 13).

At the Mytylschool, the school material only covers up towards a specific level in terms of difficulty, a level which is lower than at regular high schools. Thus, the learning potential for students is placed at a lower capacity, despite the fact that the Mytylschool is only for students with a physical impairment. Due to this barrier, it is a requirement that a student from special education always has to go to a community college (HBO) for a year, in order to get the necessary credits for the European Credit and Transfer System so that they can attend higher academia. Hereby, another obstacle is placed within the resources and the accommodations that are provided to students with a functional impairment which aim to study at an university. Once a subset of these students eventually manages to enter the university, they first get labelled with a student number for administrative purposes. By labeling students as a number, the university immediately differentiates themselves from the accessibility and care that was offered within their high school experience.

While the student number is mostly a differentiation at the symbolic level, we can see unequal access towards obtaining a university degree for students from special education due to systematic oversights. For this, one only needs to look at the most recent Plan of Approach from the Students With a Functional Impairment team (SMF) at the Erasmus University. In *this Plan of Approach* towards the accessibility of the university for students with a functional impairment, it is stated that the Erasmus University received a negative evaluation on all dimensions of their current policy (Schut 2023, 2). *The Plan of Approach* (2023) shows negative evaluation results on aspects such as the distribution of tasks among central units, communications towards students with an impairment, and even the architecture of the university. *The Plan of Approach* also gives the information that three out of ten students are indicated to have some sort of either mental or physical impairment (Schut 2023, 3). This number covers a wide array of students, ranging from students with depression to students who are physically restricted.

In the report it is estimated that nearly 4000 students at the Erasmus University experience a greater level of difficulty than other students during their studies because of their impairments (Schut 2023, 3). This statistic puts the status of education as being a great equalizer under a high degree of doubt. Among these 4000 students, there thus exists a student population for which the supposed equalizing power of education becomes negated because of their physical impairment, however the SMF team still has to determine exactly how many students at the University have a functional impairment. However, the

evaluation has indicated that even the architecture of the university was negatively evaluated (Schut 2023, 7). Therefore, a philosophical inquiry into the accessibility of the university is necessary. A philosophical analysis of the theories and visions which Dewey, Arendt and Haraway have developed around the topic of education could bring forth further understanding as to how the educational system and the concept of an inter-societal exile is failing a large percentage of students from achieving their full potential.

After these philosophies are discussed, the focus will be placed on special education in practice through the book *Contemplating Dis/Ability in Schools and Society: A Life in Education* by David J Connor, an academic with more than thirty years of experience in working with special education. Finally, this thesis will expand on possible pathways towards an inclusive education such as Nussbaum's Capability Approach, Universal Design Learning principles and methods of working within the system through recent student initiatives at the Erasmus University, the aim being to illustrate the current crisis in education concerning the concept of inter-societal exile, as well as contemplating a way forward. In doing so, the importance of an inclusive education will be emphasized. The model of an inclusive education is conceptualized as a form of education that embraces the different abilities of students, thereby elevating their learning abilities.

## Chapter 2, Rethinking pathways towards an inclusive education with Dewey

*Beings who are born not only unaware of but quite indifferent to the aims and habits of the social group have to be rendered cognizant of them and actively interested in them. Education, and education alone, spans the gap.* John Dewey (*Democracy and Education*, 1916)

John Dewey's importance as a philosopher and educational reformer carries within itself an overriding theme. In both of these fields, Dewey demonstrated the deep faith that he had in the principles of democracy (Festenstein 1997, 37). In his book *Democracy and Education* (1916) Dewey stated that education in the broadest sense occupies itself with the social continuity of life. For Dewey, the concept of life itself covers customs, institutions, beliefs, victories and defeats, occupations and recreations. A deeper analysis of the importance that Dewey placed in education shows that according to Dewey education is important since through it the societal order is continuously renewed (Dewey 1916, 7). Today's youth will become the general population over the next 40 years. And that is why a proper education is vital.

Dewey's philosophical stance towards education becomes especially interesting when we relate it to special education and the concept of the inter-societal exile. In the first chapter of *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey defines the contrast between the immaturity of the new-born members of the group, the next generation who will be the representatives for our future society, and the maturity of the adult members which possess the knowledge and customs of the current society (Dewey 1916, 7). The purpose of these adult members is to educate the new-born members about the customs and the traditions of their society. It is especially important to consider this in light of the inter-societal exile. Students that have a physical impairment are placed into a small-scale society, it is in this intersociety that the customs and traditions of the adult members become substituted with special treatment of these students. Due to this different treatment, these students are not trained to take citizenship in the society at large after their education. Dewey states that without the transmission of ideals, hopes, expectations and standards, social life could not survive (Dewey 1916, 8).

When one analyzes *Democracy and Education* through Dewey's description of democratic schooling and brings this into contrast with special education, one can gain a unique perspective and understanding of how embedded dichotomous thinking about

education not only practices but also maintains a normalizing system of general versus special education (Stone 2016, 79). It is especially this perspective that we need to dispossess if we aim to envision an inclusive education. Since the environment of education itself has become specifically situated through this mode of dichotomous thinking, it is therefore beneficial to analyze how Dewey himself defined the notion of environment.

When Dewey talks about the social environment in *Democracy and Education*, he mentions a being whose activities are associated with others and that the individual depends on the expectations, demands, approvals and condemnations of the others in their environment (Dewey 1916, 16). The social environment forms the mental and emotional disposition of behavior in individuals by engaging them in activities which arouse and strengthen certain impulses (Dewey 1916, 21). In the perspective of Dewey, the school or the educational system itself is already a special environment, an environment which has the explicit purpose to teach its students how to understand the nature of interaction. The function of education according to Dewey is three-fold (Dewey 1916, 24). The first function of education is to make it easier for the new generation to adopt a role in an already complex society. The second function of education is to eliminate the unworthy existing features of the environment from influence by selecting the best material which is taught to the students. The third function is to provide each individual an escape from the limitations of their social group.

This three-fold function of education is incompatible with the inter-societal exile and thus with how education is currently situated in the contemporary society. While these functions are meant to be ideals of how the educational is supposed to work, these ideals do not take into account that the inter-societal exile displaces students from the mainstream society and reduces the capacity of these students. Due to that students are placed in an inter-societal exile where the function of education is shifted. Within the societal-exile, education becomes a place where the students are meant to be placed apart from the students in the regular education model. Students which are placed in special education are also limited in the chances which they gain to take over as the new societal representatives. Since these students are placed in a special environment, they are firmly confined to their social group and are not properly assisted to make the transition towards the workforce or higher academia.

Therefore, it is important to consider the democratic status of education. If education intends to be democratic, then education also needs to be opened towards a plurality of voices. Dewey himself was an advocate for seeing the school, as a place of natural diversity. Throughout *Democracy and education*, Dewey strongly suggested that no part of the community or society should be ignored in the educational system (Stone et al 2016, 9). Dewey even critiqued the consequences of an inter-societal exile, in his philosophy an alert and expanding mental life depends on an enlarging range of contact with the sphere of social contacts (Dewey 1916, 93).

### *Chapter 2.1: Calculated thinking and educational inequality*

Dewey's philosophy aims to provide an equal educational platform in which students can learn how to assume citizenship of their society. However, if we aim to situate Dewey's framework of education towards the current education system, one can see that the logic behind the university now instead consists of calculated thinking. With calculated thinking it is meant that a university has their own administrative goals which they seek to meet in each academic year. The importance of a university is measured by the prestige which it holds in the academic world. This prestige is measured among other things by the ranking which a university receives from various publications such as the *Shanghai Ranking* and *Times Higher Education*. These institutions measure a university on aspect such as teaching, research environment, research quality and the international outlook (Maastricht University, 2024).

That calculated thinking is important for a university is evident, a university is only able to accept a certain amount of students and the students which an university accepts also need to be able to graduate within a certain amount of time. It is therefore logical to select students who have previously demonstrated the potential to study at the level which the university expects. However this calculated thinking is exactly the thinking that justifies the process of an inter-societal exile. Since raising the diversity among students is not necessary for the prestige which a university has, the ideal of an meritocracy therefore goes alongside with this individualistic approach of education (Clycq et al 2013, 798). The ideology of calculated thinking suggests that pupils, parents and teachers are primarily influenced by their immediate social environment, thus overlooking the inequalities within the educational system.

### Chapter 3: Arendt's lens, Rethinking education's place in society

*Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and, by the same token, save it from that ruin, which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable, and education too is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices.* Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (1961)

When we move past Dewey to analyze the framework of calculated thinking, it becomes important to analyze how education is placed in our contemporary society. For this we can engage Hannah Arendt and her essay *The Crisis in Education* (1954). While this essay was obscure for quite some time, it has made a resurgence in the last few years (Kloeg 2022, 197). Within *The Crisis in Education*, Arendt reflects on the necessary connection between education and the world of cultural institutions that are shared and maintained by human beings. Arendt starts her essay by stating that there is a general crisis which has overtaken the modern world and that this crisis manifests itself differently in each country (Arendt 1954, 1). For America this crisis manifests itself within the educational system. Arendt states that the American educational system has become its separate entity, a sort of mini-world with its own rules, a notion that becomes especially interesting when taking the concept of inter-societal exile into consideration.

According to both the concept of the inter-societal exile and Arendt's diagnosis of the crisis within education, one can identify that the educational system creates its own separate lifeworld with different norms and values that are instilled to students depending on whether they are placed into the regular or special education system. To obtain a further understanding of this phenomenon, one should identify where the essence of education itself is placed. For Arendt the essence of education lays within the concept of natality. This concept of natality has been recognized as being one of the most important notions in the works of Arendt (Totschnig, 2017). Arendt defines the concept of natality as the fact that each human life begins with birth. (Arendt 1954, 13). Thus the concept of natality places its focus on a renewal of the societal order through the birth of each new generation.

It is for each new generation that education plays a pivotal role in how members of a new generation develop and mature into becoming responsible citizens which are ready to carry forth and improve on the work of the generation that came before. For Arendt this

renewal is necessary since our interactions with the world are created and shaped by mortals, in order for the earth to serve as a home for a limited time (Kloeg, 2022 1999). For the philosophies of Dewey and Arendt, education therefore serves an important role in developing the new generation. However Arendt specifically looks at America, a country that Arendt defines as a country of immigrants. Due to this status, education can never fully merge the diverse ethnic groups (Arendt 1954, 2). Therefore education has to perform an important societal function such as teaching the culture and the language.

Arendt states that the role of education in all political utopias shows how natural it seems to start a world with those who are by nature new (Arendt 1954, 2). She further elaborates on this point regarding the role that education has played in Europe. In Europe, the idea that one must begin with the children in order to produce a new way of living with and for the world has remained the monopoly of revolutionary movements. These revolutionary movements used education to instill new values and norms for the next generation. However in our mass society, the role of education has changed. Although public education is seemingly accessible for all, this is not actually the case. The educational system works on the basis of a system embedded within segregation in which students are divided towards different educational forms based not only their learning ability but also on their physical condition.

This principle of the educational system being meritocratic is embedded in the system of calculated thinking. Within *The Crisis in Education*, Arendt describes meritocracy as: *Meritocracy contradicts the principle of equality, of an equalitarian democracy no less than any other oligarchy* (Arendt 1954, 4). While Arendt does not explicitly cover the topic of special education within *The Crisis in Education* what one can see is that Arendt does cover the topic of meritocracy and how education has become its own mini-world, thereby providing crucial steps for the concept of an inter-societal exile to be established. Therefore, it makes sense to expand the vision on the crisis that is placed within education towards the system of special education. Since special education has a significant impact on how children that are placed within the inter-societal exile can establish themselves as members of the new generation.

According to Arendt, modern education attempts to establish a world for its students which is separate from the surrounding mass society. However, special education segregates the students even further through placing them in a even more isolated world which stands in a stark contrast when compared to the mainstream society. In order to analyze education as it's own mini-world, Arendt has stated that education is the institution interposed between the private domain of the home and the domain of the world at large (Arendt 1954, 9). Education is supposed to introduce the student to the world, however with the inter-societal exile and the segregation that comes with a system of calculated thinking, education now only introduces the student to a particular segment of the world.

The system of meritocracy that Arendt mentions, becomes evident when reflecting on that the process of calculated thinking is embedded in the educational system. An overview of the public and the private sphere can help with understanding how education has become situated in our contemporary society. According to Arendt, every individual is entangled in the web of human relationships, this web consists of the manifold network of interpersonal relationships (Totschnig 2017, 342). These interpersonal relations are relations of affection, friendship, cooperation, authority and obligation. Every person who is new in this web of relationships, induces changes in it. The parents of the child form relations with the child and as the child grows up, the relations in which the child finds themselves only continue to extend and widen. This process will continue until the child enters the public sphere as an adult.

However it is exactly these social relations that are formative for the student since in interacting with a wide array of different people, the student gains a broad perspective on the world and the people that inhabit it. However since the value within education has become meritocratic and the focus is solely placed on the achievements of the student, it can be seen that students are segregated based on their cognitive ability. Furthermore, it is not only the cognitive ability that a student is evaluated on. Students are also judged based on their physical ability, which is a factor that stands completely separate from how well a student is able use their critical and creative thinking skills. Students that differ in their physical abilities when compared to the normative student are then placed in special education.

If we follow the philosophy of Arendt, this leads to a deeper reflection on the notion of the inter-societal exile. Since it is exactly the factor of education becoming its own mini-world which is based on meritocratic principles, that lead to the inevitable outcome of an inter-societal exile. From this inter-societal exile, it then becomes difficult for students that are placed within it to reintegrate with the wider society. It is therefore necessary to place the aim of education on becoming an inclusive form of education in which the segregation between the students would be limited. It is important that students through their education are exposed to a wider society in which they can interact with diverse people in order to enhance their knowledge and positionality towards the world. Therefore, a form of education should be established that places itself above the arbitrary need of evaluation and examination.

By reimagining the vocabulary that we use to express special education, we can form a pathway towards an model of inclusive education. In this model of inclusive education, students are enabled to position themselves vis-à-vis the world at large. Therefore education should enable students to learn a new form of understanding, namely Enlarged Thought (Korsgaard 2015, 941). Enlarged Thought is the ability of students to understand the perspectives of others, independent of one's own self-interest. Finding a path out of the inter-societal exile does not only benefit marginalized groups, instead it can also strengthen the contemporary society by bringing forth a new mode of mutual understanding. For Arendt, the ability to think independently through engaging in a form of personal dialogue allows one to consider an issue from the standpoint of a multitude of people. This enables one to acquire the ability of representative thinking (Wood et al 2023, 257) and it is this representative thinking that can bring forth a shared cause towards working for a better world.

#### **Chapter 4: Haraway and education beyond its corporeal boundaries**

*The consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic.* Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985)

When advocating for an inclusive education, we begin to consider the possibility of shared worldliness. To consider this framework further, it can be useful to reflect on our human condition through the work of Donna Haraway. Haraway focuses her philosophical work on the themes of sustainability and feminism, for these important causes she has written two manifestoes namely; *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) and *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003). Within *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway develops an understanding on the implosions of contemporary life in technoscience. Through a feminist lens Haraway defined the concept of cyborgs as cybernetic organisms, these being a hybrid of the machine and organism and a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction

Within *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway tries to advocate an argument towards pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in constructing these boundaries. Haraway defines the cyborg as being resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity. The cyborg is oppositional, utopian and completely without innocence. Therefore the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations (Haraway 1985, 1). However, what is notable about Haraway's cyborg is that while the cyborg is supposedly about transgressed boundaries and potent fusions, the notion of disabled cyborgs are largely absent in Haraway's philosophical concept. Instead, throughout the entirety of *A Cyborg Manifesto* Haraway strictly looks at the cyborg through a feminist perspective. (Reeve 2012, 93). As Haraway only discusses able-bodied woman in this manifesto, her concept of a cyborg therefore becomes entangled with the fully functioning human and fully functioning machine.

If we thus aim to understand the concept of Haraway's cyborg in the context of special education, it requires us to see what this concept of the cyborg can offer in furthering the pathway towards a new mode of an inclusive education. While a cyborg theory does not explicitly refer to special education or a disabled populace, the relevance of it being used in this chapter comes from it being an examination of the dissemination of boundaries. If a new model of an inclusive education is to be considered, then it becomes

crucial that we can see beyond these very same boundaries which have confined us. Since it is through these boundaries that stigma's get attached to models of education as being perceived to be a lesser form of education. As a result, special education becomes labeled by society as a form of education without a clear indication towards an academic or even societal future for its students.

Haraway's concept of the cyborg is relevant because it can be found within the transgression of the human-machine boundary. In the context of disability, this brings to mind people with wheelchairs or prosthetic limbs. (Reeve 2012, 94). For people with impairments, the hybridization of machine/human or animal/human is often synonymous with lived experience, particularly for those with physical or sensory impairments (Reeve 2012, 94) Thus what we can see is that Haraway's concept of the cyborg is particularly relevant when we take people with special needs into consideration. By extension, we can view special education as a place in which the cyborg manifestation is the most visible among the new societal order. And it is especially with this visibility, that the stigmatization towards special education increases. Despite this clear connection, discussions between the connection of the cyborg and the disabled are rarely made (Reeve 2012, 95). While Haraway argues that the model of the cyborg can offer a vision of a more inclusive or equitable future, we can see that society treats the special educational system differently and stigmatizes the disabled through its process of inter-societal exile.

Thus while Haraway in her manifesto advocates for this living as a cyborg, even ending her title with stating that she rather lives as a cyborg than as a goddess (Haraway 1985, 88), what we can see in practice is what Reeve refers to as disablism. Thus by stating that living as a cyborg is beneficial, this statement is actually erasing the actual struggles which many disabled people face (Reeve 2012, 96). People who actually live like cyborgs through the process of the inter-societal exile are not given any special rights. Instead they are removed from the regular society and placed within a system which is catered to people with a disability. It is within this system that the people with a disability have a difficult time in getting access to the same level of education as the people who have less visible symptoms. What we can see in disability studies is that viewing people with a disability as a contemporary cyborg only serves to reinforce the differences between people with an impairment compared to the dominant population (Reeve 2012, 96).

Donna Haraway has posed the question as to why our bodies should end merely at the skin (Shildrick 2015, 13) however we can see that when we extend our skin through the use of artefacts that this is closely followed with being labeled as the stigmatized Other. This however is not to say that we can't find a way forward in Haraway's philosophy but that we should look further than *A Cyborg Manifesto*. What should be considered in more detail is her later work namely *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003). If we put the model of the cyborg aside and instead focus on our being in the world, this allows us to consider other beings which are situated in our contemporary society. While Haraway mostly places *The Companion Species Manifesto* in an environmental context, we can also relate it to the educational system and explore the possibilities in how it can help us to advance towards an inclusive education. If we overlook the use of artefacts and appearances, this allows us to reframe the question as; *why our bodies should merely end at the skin and be limited to our physical ability?*

It is within *The Companion Species Manifesto* that Haraway indicates her previous work as a biologist, by outlining a way in which all species are related to each other through being worldly actors. For this, she uses the concept of significant otherness. In a way, this work can be seen as a sequel of sorts to the framework which Haraway has outlined in *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Nearly twenty years later, Haraway states that she has come to see cyborgs as junior siblings in a much bigger family of companion species (Haraway 2003, 4). In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Haraway mostly emphasizes that all sorts of different species are connected through their being in the world. With this, an overarching theme can be retrieved from Haraway's manifestoes and this is a theme that directly addresses the question; *How can we move towards an model of inclusive education?*

In order to formulate an answer towards this question, we can further examine the field of critical disability studies. Within this field we can see that for many people with a disability, a rehabilitation to normative practice or a normative appearance is no longer the point. What we can see instead is that the lived experience of disability with its own embodied absences, displacements and prosthetic additions generates its own specific possibilities which both limit and extend the performativity of the self (Shildrick 2015, 14). Thus, while we are exploring pathways towards an inclusive education, it is exactly looking at the boundary of our physical bodies that requires us to be critical of an inclusive education in the first place.

If we simply aim to go towards a reconciliation of disability studies and incorporate this discipline into the classical model of education, we are still limiting the potentiality of human bodies. Instead we should reconsider possibilities of an educational future in which a new innovative model of education is to be explored. In this model of inclusive education, a fundamental hybridity could be developed that allows student bodies to come together into a different mode. The point is not that we are all alike but instead that we are all differently situated and that conventional categories such as special and regular education are simply just a convenient way of simplifying the irreducible complexity of corporeal forms (Shildrick 2015, 23).

It is only when we consider this, that a new model of education becomes possible to be conceived. This new model of education should no longer be occupied with the corporeal form of education. If we aim to break free from the notion of an inter-societal exile, one can see that Haraway's philosophy provides us with an call to take responsibility for how humans have produced these alarming natural-cultural conditions and how this has been done based purely on biological bodies (Fairchild et al, 2021). If we aim to analyze these conditions and relate them to the topic of special education, it becomes relevant to analyze the field of special education in practice.

## Chapter 5: Connor, special education in practice

*A thought that always helped me: Yes, this can be difficult work, but there's a reason behind it, and it involves creating equitable opportunities for kids who have been marginalized.* David J Connor, *Contemplating Disability in Schools and Society: A life in Education* (2018)

Since we have stayed with classically known philosophers for the majority of this thesis, we have restricted our analysis of education through the philosophical lens of conceptualization and diverse ideologies on education. To fully consider what the future of education can look like and how we can work towards an model of an inclusive education it is now vital to analyze the field of special education in practice. In order to understand the practical workings of any field, it is important to take into consideration the experiences of people who have worked in it. Therefore in this chapter, an examination will be given of David J Connor's *Dis/Ability in Schools and Society: A life in education* (2018). David J Connor is a professor and former chairperson of the department of special education at Hunter College, who defines himself as a critical special educator (Connor 2018, 557). Connor has spent his entire career in education and specializes in educating teachers on how they can create a more inclusive classroom environment.

Through a long and diverse career which has now spanned over 30 years of education, Connor has the unique position of giving the reader a wide variety of viewpoints. Connor started off as a classroom teacher, and later worked for a period of time as the chairperson on the special education department at Hunter College. Throughout his career, Connor has developed an analytical and critical stance towards the concept and methodology of special education. This makes his work important to consider when we are looking at ways in which education can advance towards or even beyond the concept of an inclusive education. As a classroom teacher, David Connor already noticed patterns unique to special education, such as the well documented fact that children and youth which are placed in special education have frequently identified as rejects from general education, and that youths which are placed in this inter-societal exile thus often feel anger and the desire to act out (Connor 2008, 130).

This 'us and them' mentality is not only found among the students themselves, since this mentality has become so embedded that many professionals are unable to see beyond the structures of special and general education (Connor 2018, 135). In fact the rigidity of the two segregated systems and the presumed inferiority of all things which are categorized under special education creates feelings of inferiority and unworthiness among the academic staff in special education, as Connor saw himself as being merely an special education teacher. As we analyze the inter-societal exile, it is important to note that this embedded inferiority of special education also has consequences for how teachers are treated. An example of this is that at the Dutch national level, teachers in higher special education receive the same salary as elementary school teachers, instead of the regular salary for high school teachers (Kersten, 2018).

Systems can internalize an institutional title such as special education (Connor 2018, 136). In consequence, this institutional title then becomes constantly reinforced through local and national culture, thereby creating an embedded and systematic division between regular and special education. If we aim to work towards a model of a inclusive education, it thus requires a cultural shift in which the system of special education is given the value that it deserves. Since working in special education entails working in a marginalized system in which the teachers get less respect and a lower salary than in regular education, this means that as of this moment it becomes difficult to find good teachers for special education. If we aim to work towards an inclusive education then we should analyze how the division between special and regular education becomes manifested in society.

In analyzing how this division manifests itself, it becomes possible to obtain a better understanding of how the inter-societal exile within society allows itself to remain doing its work without being interrupted. In fact during his career, Connor noticed that when anything about special education was directly provided to school principals it was generally forwarded directly to assistant principals or supervisors of special education (Connor 2018, 152). Furthermore, these administrators became the focal point for all things which were related to special education. What Connor saw in special education was that it became more industrial than scientific, it was filled with workers who assembled papers and managed procedures that only resulted in maintaining the status quo (Connor 2018, 164).

The status quo of the inter-societal exile however is not completely without any hope, in fact there are people who are willing to work towards a comprehensive reform of

the educational system. This willingness can be seen at an academic level where disability studies as a field have gotten more prominence during the last thirty years. This field is now working on forming an organized critique towards the constricted and inaccurate conceptualizations of disability that have dominated academic inquiry in order to challenge the notion that disability is primarily a medical category (Connor 2018, 239). But we can also see this willingness on a political level. As David Connor illustrates (Connor 2018, 176), Bloomberg, when active as the mayor of New York, made the statement in 2003 that we need to have a comprehensive reform in the special education system. Bloomberg stated: *we will no longer tolerate a largely segregated and largely failing system that unmercifully ravages the lives and future of our children* (Connor 2012, 1).

However if the status quo and the silence around the status of the inter-societal exile has any chance of being broken, then it becomes crucial to contemplate further on the educational system as a whole and on how we can move towards a system in which we open up more chances for this societal shift. As Haraway's philosophy has illustrated, we need to acknowledge that we are all part of mankind and nature, which makes each of us uniquely positioned. From the years which David Connor has been active in special education he has stated that for him it has stood out that when he contemplated how children understand societal structures in relation to their disability, special education has been one of the many social structures which helps students to shape their sense of self. It is through special education that it's students are taught how to negotiate the world at large, thus helping the students understand their place in society (Connor 2018, 242).

In changing the focus from disabilities as something which are conditions to be fixed or to be endured and instead acknowledging that society itself should accept these different capabilities and accommodate students with specific needs, it becomes apparent that a cultural shift towards education is necessary if our society wants to make any attempt at escaping from this intersocietal exile. However making this cultural shift requires understanding the concept of a disability through a sociocultural lens (Connor 2018, 284). If we aim to acquire this sociocultural lens, one needs to understand that education is not just fixed statistic and that instead we should further consider Dewey's approach to education namely that education in the broadest sense, is occupied with the social continuity of life (Dewey 1916, 2). Seeing how education is occupied with the social continuity of life, it thus needs to be acknowledged that education is an inherently social activity.

Connor states that the ideal form of learning would involve heterogeneous groups which enable students to grow into new sets of behavior. As Connor states, learning should become an exchange of knowledge which is acquired through relationships between teacher and learner. This should be a relationship in which both parties have the agency and ability to change the discourse (Connor 2018, 285). This holistic framework of thinking is also apparent in the work of Haraway. While Haraway never explicitly discussed the framework of special education it is apt to say that Haraway argues for a human condition in which we recognize the other as their own human being. Through this holistic approach, we are enabled to look further than just our own skin.

Education within a sociocultural lens is grounded in a student-centered view in which learning occurs constantly within a specific context. It is therefore important to consider the context in which education becomes placed, especially if education becomes its own mini-world as we have seen in the philosophy of Arendt. However a philosophical investigation towards the role of education, leads to a new way in which education can be defined. In this new definition, teaching leads to a development with students in which the teacher or professor is constantly negotiating with the students to determine the next level or zone of the proximal development (Connor 2018, 283). Thus in this mode of inclusive education, education would implement a discourse between the student and the teacher. With this, it would also be possible to see where the cognitive abilities of the student are placed independently of the student's physical condition.

## Chapter 6: A way forward

*Education is the silver bullet. Education is everything. We don't need little changes; we need gigantic, monumental changes. Schools should be palaces. Competition for the best teachers should be fierce; they should be making six-figure salaries. Schools should be incredibly expensive for the government and absolutely free to its citizens, just like national defense.* Sam Seaborn, *The West Wing* (Aaron Sorkin, 2000)

As has been stated throughout this thesis, it is exactly the inter-societal exile within special education that has proven to be an obstacle in ensuring that all members of this new societal order have equal access to the opportunities which society provides. Therefore, it has become essential to figure out what exactly the future of education and progress towards an inclusive education would entail. In order to analyze this, this chapter will first look at what social justice in education can mean according to The Capability Approach of Martha Nussbaum. Afterwards, the focus will be placed on the potential benefits which the methodology of Universal Design Learning as promoted by David Connor can offer. Finally, an examination will be given as to how advances towards an inclusive form of education can be realized in the current educational system.

The Capability Approach of Nussbaum has the aim to provide the philosophical underpinning for an account of basic constitutional principles that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations. These notions serve as a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires (Nussbaum 1999, 5). Nussbaum argues that the best approach to this idea of a basic social minimum is provided by an approach that focuses on human capabilities, that is what people are actually able to do and to be informed by an intuitive idea of a life that is worthy of the dignity of the human being (Nussbaum 1999, 5). This philosophical underpinning is what lays at the foundation of an form of education that sees the potentiality of the next generation as both humans and as students.

When looking for the future of education, and the role that the Capability Approach can play, It must be recognized that Nussbaum has worked along the same lines as Connor while developing her view on education. Nussbaum's approach is trying to understand how we can embrace difference and inclusion in society if the political infrastructure, public others and the education have not made similar strides towards being inclusive. Therefore it is important to overcome this us and them mentality which Connor has outlined and look

past the rigidity between the systems of special and general education (Connor 2018, 135).

It has been illustrated through this process of the inter-societal exile, that a large percentage of students get alienated and eventually excluded from a meaningful learning process. As a result of these exclusionary tactics, vast numbers of students with disabilities thus become further marginalized (Rogers 2012, 989). Nussbaum states that a just society would attempt to support a participatory inclusion in all areas of life. Therefore institutions including educational establishments must not only be sustained by the good will of the citizen, they should also embody and teach what it means to be a good and reasonable citizen (Rogers 2012, 991). Therefore, a just society would enable the populace to participate in the regular model of education. However, instead of simply adhering to the classical educational format, this thesis promotes the form of an inclusive model of education.

When working towards the ideal of an inclusive education, David Connor brings forth the system of a Universal Design for Learning (UDL). In Connor's view, if the educational system was rethought and based more upon this system, then the emphasis on accommodations and modifications within the educational system could embed inclusive practices (Connor 2018, 387). In the Universal Design for Learning approach, the beginning assumption takes into account how everyone is to be included within the educational system (Connor 2018, 182). Universal Design Learning looks at the limited accessibility within the educational system and how UDL techniques can be used in order to effectively implement possible transitions. Thus it is a framework for instruction which values the diversity within the classroom while making the demand that a curriculum is accessible to all learners including gifted students, special needs learners and students with behavioral challenges (Barteux 2014, 50).

In order to gain a better understanding of Universal Design Learning techniques, one can make a case study out of how assessments are being held in the current educational format. For an assessment to be accurate, students must not be impeded by factors which are irrelevant to a particular learning goal. Many assessments have been developed under the assumption that the student population is relatively homogeneous and that therefore the expected outcomes for all students are relatively similar (Dolan 2000, 47). Students who have a harder time with writing or typing due to their physical impairments are currently still expected to adjust towards the homogenous structure of education. While it is true that some universities offer small forms of assistance such as giving some students an extra hour

to do their exam, when we use Universal Design Learning techniques this enables students to work in a classroom where they can work at their utmost capacity. It is important that steps are to make the educational system more equal

The critical difficulty is that for any particular problem such as the assessments, there is an optimal level of engagement. The solution therefore lies in providing a flexible test administration that provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and skills according to the particular learning goals which are associated with the assessment. In a universally designed curriculum, there are multiple means of representation and engagement possible as a normal part of every learning environment and assessment (Dolan 2000, 50). This shows the three principles of the Universal Design Learning methodology namely to provide multiple means of *representation, expression and engagement* (Barteux 2014, 51).

Universal Design Learning requires the use of different modes of representation by giving students a variety of opportunities to physically acquire information through the affective networks. Through providing multiple means of expression, students are enabled to obtain strategies in using tools that can overcome previous barriers of learning. Finally, when educators provide multiple means of engagement, students are more likely to enjoy the material which they are being taught (Barteux 2014, 51). The use of Universal Design Learning principles provides students with a low-barrier entry towards the mainstream education and therefore enables them to transition out of the current inter-societal exile in which they are placed.

While both The Capability Approach and Universal Design Learning principles aim to pave a way towards an society in which everybody regardless of their physical condition has more equal chances, these principles don't implement themselves. The transition out of the current inter-societal exile which has become embedded in education might seem daunting and the task of crossing this divide herculean, it is however possible for a foundation to be made. This becomes apparent when we look at recent initiatives which are being held, an example of which we will turn to now. Important for any initiative concerning itself with special education that new modes of communication will be opened for both special education and higher academia.

Establishing these new modes of communication is important because many external parties are not aware what special education entails. Currently it is still seen that many

people who hold high positions in the government or at universities all come from a regular educational background and therefore base their perception on the stigma that is placed on special education. It is therefore important to break the stigma that is placed on special education. This can be achieved by placing the focus on how it is possible to make the transition from special to regular education. A movement can therefore be made in which special education no longer isolates students from the society at large, instead the focus can be placed on how we can integrate these students back into society.

A recent project at the Erasmus University is attempting to open this channel of communication. From the first edition of this project, several insightful results already became evident. Such as that the students of the Mytylschool are aware about the restricted chances that they have within society due to this perceived inter-societal exile. Many students were indeed aware of this phenomenon but had no way of communicating their perspective. This project, while just a pilot, has the potential to develop further and work towards a new way of how special education becomes situated in our contemporary society. It is important to note that this project should be spearheaded by someone who stems from the special education system and is now also acquainted with the world of academic education (Radstake, 2024). It is important that communication about the topic of special education does not just concern itself with talking about special education, instead an focus should also be placed on talking with students and teachers that are active in the field of special education. By enabling this dialogue between regular and special education, it becomes possible to work towards the ideal of an inclusive education.

## **Conclusion: From special education towards an inclusive education**

As has been stated in the introduction, this thesis aimed to expand on the vision of why our contemporary society needs a form of inclusive education. The concept of education was analyzed through the philosophies of three diverse philosophers. To determine these philosophers, the choice was made to adhere to the principles of the journal *Reflective Teaching and the Social Conditions of Schooling*. This journal works to provide new perspectives towards the topic of education and to provide ideas on how we can work towards an inclusive form of education. Articles in this journal typically use the format of considering an issue from a traditional conservative stance, a centrist stance and finally a radical innovative stance. Within the field of philosophy, the choice was made to look at the philosophies of Dewey, Arendt and Haraway.

Dewey perceived the role of education as providing equal chances among the masses and preparing the next generation to take care of society. Arendt's philosophy was used to investigate where education is situated in our contemporary society and what this means for the role of education. After this, Haraway's philosophy was utilized to better understand the concept of physical disabilities concerning the topic of special education and the inter-societal exile. Furthermore this thesis analyzed the strengths that each of these scholars has in conceptualizing the topic of education while also identifying the limits of these conceptualizations. After these philosophical stances were discussed, the role of special education in practice was examined through the work of Connor. With this it became possible to make an attempt towards fully conceptualizing the role of special education and the inter-societal exile.

After the conceptualization of education and analyzing how segregation has become deeply embedded within education itself, it was possible to relate education with the inter-societal exile that students face when they are placed in the type of schooling identified as special education due to a physical impairment. After analyzing this process, attempts were made to look at philosophical underpinnings that can work towards an inclusive form of education. For this concepts were utilized such as The Capability Approach of Nussbaum and the principles of Universal Design for Learning.

Finally, this thesis also discussed projects and initiatives which are being organized to ensure that potential pathways towards effective societal transitions for students in special

education are being implemented. With this, I can only state my hope that that this thesis will provide new grounds to further the field of disability studies. And that the pattern of the inter-societal exile will someday be broken.

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