

Research and Practice of the Construction of an Online Education Community in Higher Education for Disabled Individuals [†]

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Abstract: Since the establishment of ‘Careers for the Disabled’, China has been committed to promoting the program. Special higher education for the disabled is regarded as important for the protection of the rights of the disabled and for the achievement of equity and promotion of the development of special higher education. Currently, many colleges and universities in China provide higher education for the disabled. However, special higher education has problems such as a lack of capable teachers, which requires active inter-school cooperation. Thus, we propose the construction of an online education community for the disabled to overcome the existing problems and propose a method of promoting the development of special higher education to a higher standard.

Keywords: special higher education; construction of the community; online learning platform

1. Introduction

China has promoted the development of careers and emphasized the level of special higher education for the disabled. In 1985, Binzhou Medical University established a medical department for the disabled. This was the beginning of higher education for the disabled in China [1]. In 1987, the Special Education College of Changchun University accepted disabled students for the first time as a higher education institution [2]. In 1991, the Technical College for the Deaf of Tianjin University of Technology enrolled students and became the first engineering college of special higher education for the disabled in China [3]. Higher education for the disabled has developed from scratch and is now comprehensive, requiring refinement. The healthy development of special higher education cannot be achieved without relevant laws and regulations, as special higher education for the disabled can be guaranteed through these policies, such as “Several Opinions on the Development of Special Education” and “Regulations on Education for Individuals with Disabilities” [4]. Currently, special higher education in China is facing problems and challenges in accelerating innovative developments and improving quality, including the poor quality of education for students with hearing impairments, the lack of capable teachers, the lag of teaching methods and models, and the paucity of teaching resources and auxiliary teaching equipment. These problems hinder colleges and universities engaged in special higher education in China.

At the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward “a community of shared future for mankind”, “a community of shared interests”, “a community of cooperation”, and “a community of shared future in cyberspace”. As a concept of holistic development, “community” has become deeply rooted in the hearts of people [5]. The concept of “community” implies the integration of the high-quality resources of all members in that community with mutual support and integration, as well as common development by solving the community’s problems and



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promoting common interests. In special higher education, the common goal is to pursue education equity and improve education levels. Wisdom along with brainstorming among people allows for better results with less effort in solving practical problems. Thus, the construction of an online education community for the disabled is required in special higher education.

2. Goal of Community in Special Higher Education

2.1. Basic Connotation

The construction of an online education community in higher education for the disabled (Figure 1) is not only necessary for the development of an online learning platform for the disabled but also for the innovation and reform of teaching methods in special higher education. The online education community for higher education of the disabled aims to improve the teaching level and quality. In the construction process, modern information technology is used to provide advantages in regard to the existing educational resources, such as notable teaching resources. The members of the community find teaching resources, information, and technology to secure “perfect offline teaching equipment and rich online teaching resources”. The integration of such elements enriches special higher education by improving the level of teaching.

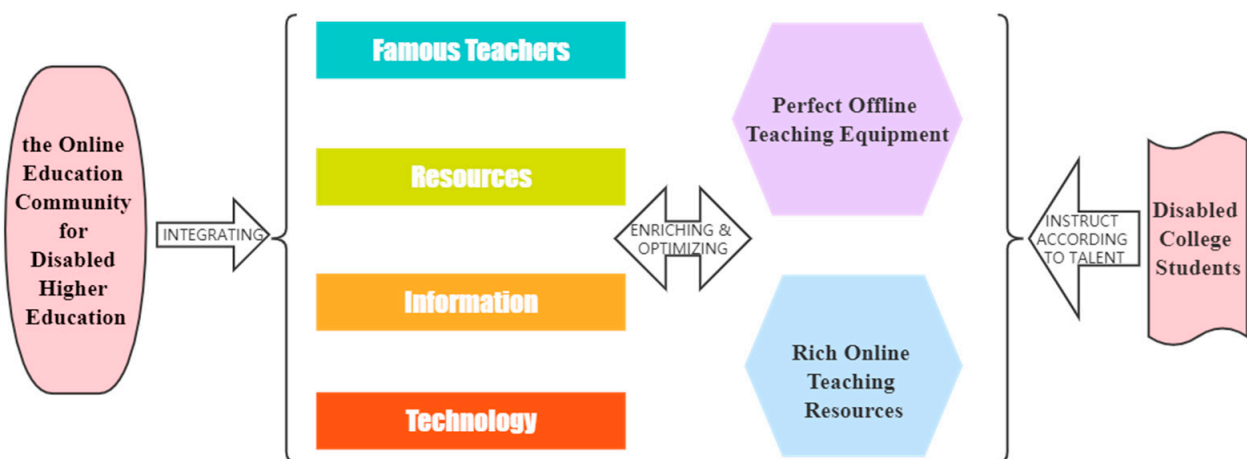


Figure 1. The construction of an online education community for higher education.

2.2. Co-Constructed Goal

Capable teachers help to build a training community for special higher education. With their help, the community innovates teaching methods and researches various activities to promote teachers’ abilities, share teaching resources, improve education for the disabled, and help the disabled to enjoy high-quality education. This helps to realize the humanization of education, the ubiquity of educational resources, and the universality of educational models, eliminating regional differences in special higher education. The community can set the following goals for this realization (Figure 2):

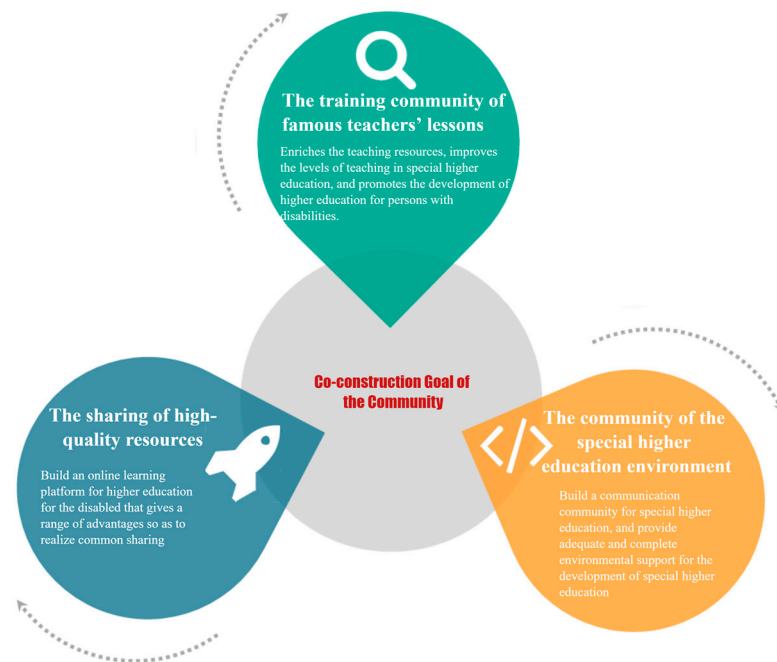


Figure 2. Co-constructed goal of the community in special higher education.

2.2.1. Training Community

Special higher education requires dedicated educational teams which do not rely on special education alone. To avoid the isolation of teaching in special higher education, teachers in general higher education need to engage in special higher education. The community in special higher education can then learn teaching experience and methods used in general higher education, and under the guidance of experienced teachers, appropriate training can be provided for “backbone leadership, discipline linkage, team cooperation, and overall improvement”. In addition, the community forms student groups for effective teaching with enriched teaching resources.

2.2.2. Sharing High-Quality Resources

The community integrates various teaching resources from high-quality professional courses and online courses. Advanced teaching devices and technologies and platforms also need to be shared to build an online learning platform for special higher education through sharing, common use, and common maintenance.

2.2.3. Special Higher Education Environment

The community members need to cooperate to build a rich and humanistic environment for the development of special higher education. In addition to building a “friendly and inclusive” humanistic environment, the community needs to have a top-level design for education in order to cultivate professional teams and develop relevant systems in special higher education. Community members need to be active in online exchanges and offline visits to cooperate closely in special higher education and provide an adequate and complete environment for disabled students.

3. Motivation and Experience of Teachers and Members

Most experienced teachers at all education levels have more than 20 years of experience in education. They may have their own habits and traditional concepts and prefer offline classroom teaching. In offline classroom teaching, teachers play a dominant role in teaching, but they understand the teaching process and efficiently conduct their teaching with students face-to-face. In online teaching, the status of teachers and students tends to be equal. Teachers cannot communicate with students effectively in real time. The lack of

interaction makes it difficult to receive feedback from students and to satisfy their teaching needs. In addition to preparing teaching content, teachers also need to master relevant technological skills, which takes time and energy [6]. This reduces the enthusiasm and motivation of teachers. Thus, the community needs to encourage the full participation of experienced teachers so that they can use and share their teaching experience for the education of disabled students, as such students may have difficulties in understanding the key points effectively and accurately and achieving their goals in special higher education.

Although the community establishes a cooperating mechanism, it relies on emotional and cognitive identity without a superior–subordinate relationship between members [7]. Therefore, all members focus on achieving their goals with integrity and communication. Feedback from each other results in the common progress of members.

Traditional special education is segregated from special higher education, which also segregates disabled students and general students. The members of the special higher education community actively invite teachers and students of general higher education.

4. Solving Problems

4.1. Online Teaching

The advent of the information age, coupled with the impact of COVID-19, has forced the need for informational reform in education. Teaching information technology has become an important part of educational reform, with an important role. The community can conduct online teaching seminars to motivate teachers and demonstrate the necessity and inevitability of special higher education for the disabled. Teaching models of experienced teachers can also be shared to promote an information-based teaching environment. In addition, the community can organize support groups to strengthen ties within the community and with other communities.

4.2. Sharing Experience

To improve the teaching level of special higher education and enhance the relevance of this education and teaching, it is necessary to investigate the situation of special education student groups and summarize the characteristics of the students to determine if the physical defects or impairments of students make them less able to acquire information and less capable of interpersonal communication and being sensitive to others' thoughts and feelings. They may be prone to unhealthy attitudes such as loneliness, inferiority, suspicion, and dependence. Moreover, they may have poor learning ability, initiative taking, creativity, abstraction, and logical thinking skills. Therefore, the community needs to establish a team of experienced teachers who engage in special higher education and general higher education to gain teaching experience and student communication experience and learn educational methods. Then, the syllabus and program of special education can be prepared effectively for online courses. Figure 3 shows a diagram of the online education system for disabled college students.

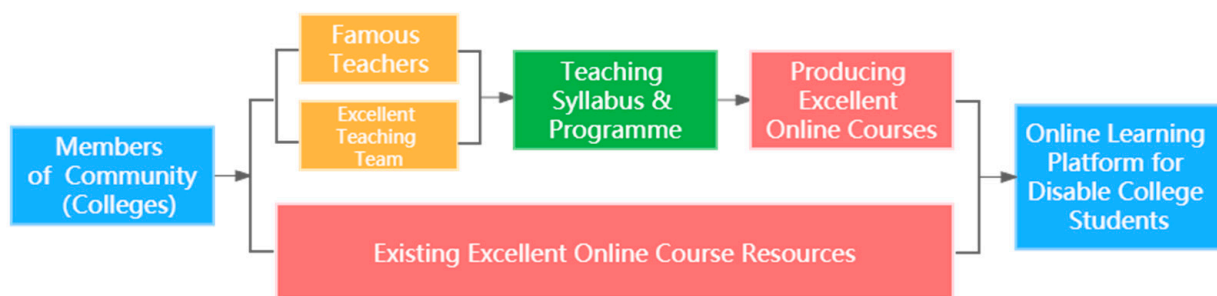


Figure 3. Diagram of an online education system for disabled college students.

The construction of the curriculum aims to improve special higher education for the continuous development of the community. In addition to coordinating and deliberating on the structure of the community, multiple communication channels, including WeChat groups, Tencent video conferences, and online community platforms, can be used to communicate, extend the scope of communications, and discuss core ideas. The community needs to actively build a friendly and inclusive humanistic environment for learning. On the social level, the construction of the community is supported by the Education and Employment Department of the China Disabled Persons' Federation under the framework of the Special Education Research Branch of the China Higher Education Society. On the school level, functional departments are responsible for the coordination and management of special education. On the institutional level, the management of "whole school participation, joint training, and special integration", with the concept of "co-prosperity and sharing", is required. In the training system, evaluation methods and quality management with the concept of inclusive education are in demand. On the teacher level, full-time teachers and counselors work for inclusive education. On the student level, a peer support system needs to be established to encourage students to volunteer to support hearing-impaired students. For example, "Chinese Sign Language" can be offered for general students as an elective, and sign language clubs and lounges are encouraged to form and to enhance communication and acceptance among students. Then, all students can learn together and help each other. This creates a friendly, tolerant, mutually helpful environment on campus.

5. Conclusions

The construction of a community for special higher education has started in China. However, it faces problems and challenges. The community requires the cooperation of colleges and universities. In the future, the development of special higher education will require the participation of the government and enterprises, with universities playing a leading role.

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