



Introduction To The Learner Integration Wheel (LIW) Theory Of Practice

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ABSTRACT

Learner integration wheel (LIW) theory of practice was developed in a PhD thesis by Theresia Joakim Kanyopa exploring the understanding and enhancement of learner integration in a selected ex-Model C school in South Africa. The LIW theory in this thesis was described as a social tool that can be used in the delivery of effective learner integration in a selected school. Practically, the LIW theory of practice intends to change the rudimentary practices and programs and peoples' attitudes in education settings towards the issue of learner integration. The lived experiences of the co-researchers in this PHD study were elicited through the use of multi-stakeholder meetings and the photo-voice visual method which were administered by the researcher. Thus, the current study establishes that the LIW theory of practice if utilised as a vehicle for disseminating the new implementation of learner integration will benefit not only learners but also teachers and the whole school community in schools. It can be conserved that the LIW theory of practice facilitates the implementation of learner integration in schools by bringing together the school, curriculum developers and school community to work hand in hand towards effective learner integration in schools. Therefore, this paper introduces the LIW theory as the theory of practice in addressing challenges in the implementation of learner integration in schools.

Keywords: ex-Model C schools, learner, learner integration, learner integration wheel theory, South Africa.

Theoretical framework

The learner integration wheel (LIW) theory of practice was developed during a doctoral research study that sought to understand and enhance learner integration in an ex-Model C school in South Africa. The theory offers a practical contribution that provides a critical structure for the dynamic strategies on how to enhance learner integration in schools. Furthermore, the main assumptions of the theory intend to transform school processes, programmes and practices to improve their overall administration. Therefore, the current study introduces the LIW theory of practice, as enlisted in Kanyopa (2022) and Kanyopa and Makgalwa (2024), as an effective theory for the implementation of learner integration in schools. The theory has three critical foundations, namely self-concept, democratic ethos and critical emancipatory research theory. With the concepts of inclusion, emancipation and transformation, the LIW theory of practice introduces a very constructive way towards effective learner integration in schools. This is done by providing relevant critical knowledge adopted from these foundations.

Foundations of the learner integration wheel theory of practice

The LIW theory of practice is based on three interconnecting foundations, discussed in this section. These foundations have been supported by several scholars for decades and they thus provide structure and substance to the LIW theory.

• Self-concept theory

Self-concept theory is the central idea that the individual has about who they are emotionally, physically, spiritually and socially (Cokley, 2000). It is a multi-dimensional concept that the individual forms and regulates as they grow up. Self-concept is also related to other self-constructs, such as self-image, self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-awareness (Kanyopa & Makgalwa, 2024). Self-concept theory provides the LIW theory with the foundation that the learner at school is a valuable being and it is therefore important for them to have a full understanding of who they are and how they fit into the school functionings. Self-concept is a multifaceted aspect that helps the learner to learn and hold full awareness about their existence at school.

• Democratic ethos

Democratic ethos is the set of practices that challenges an authoritarian in any organisation to maintain a free and fair stance towards the people in the organisation (Bond, 2019; Kanyopa, 2022). Democratic ethos is a theory that enhances positive conviction among the educational stakeholders for active participation and engagement in the system. The LIW theory reflects the democratic ethos through the deliberate involvement of educational stakeholders and an emphasis on the importance of shared responsibilities. The LIW theory of practice maintains that the democratic ethos influences the school programs to accommodate learning diversity fairly in the school context.

• Critical emancipatory research

Critical emancipatory research is a theory that emphasises the process of improving social exclusion, disintegration, alienation and injustice by allowing, respecting and listening to the people's views, voices and perceptions (Dube & Hlalele, 2018; Kanyopa, 2022). Thus, the LIW theory replicates the sense of empowerment by promoting the active involvement of educational stakeholders. The theory influences the interactive practices and activities to allow stakeholders to share knowledge and a range of skills and values among each other.

Analogy and practices of the learner integration wheel theory

Several scholars and researchers have worked together over several decades to develop an understanding of and enhancement strategies towards the issue of learner integration in schools. Acquiring a clear understanding of this issue and enhancing it has resulted in the development of the theory of practice named the LIW. Practically, the theory insists on the circular motion of implementing and observing learner integration in a school's context. The analogy of a *wheel* evokes the image of educational stakeholders running systematically in a circle working together while undertaking their self-reflections on their daily activities and practices to support the realisation of learner integration in schools. The term *integration* was chosen over the term *inclusion* for its special meaning. In educational contexts, the term integration means to coordinate diverse people, to blend them into a functioning unit and to form a whole in an educational setting (Kanyopa, 2022; Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021, 2023). Literally, integration means to unite and incorporate people in an educational environment into a larger unity (Baruah, 2020; Kanyopa & Makgalwa, 2024). This implies that separated people or things are brought together.

Implicit in defining learner integration is an ethical process involving continuous bringing learners into equal participation regardless their backgrounds in educational settings (Cerna, 2019). The LIW theory seeks to explain phenomena and provide a way to enhance educational settings through the active engagement of educational stakeholders (Kanyopa, 2022; Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2023). Its purpose is to address the challenges that cause ineffectiveness in its implementation within an educational setting and to make learners' lives more exciting. The theory also vows to create satisfying teaching and learning processes, while enriching the lived experiences of the learner at school.

Basic assumptions of the learner integration wheel theory of practice

Kanyopa (2022) and Kanyopa and Makgalwa (2024) mentioned four basic assumptions that help in understanding the LIW theory and employing it to mitigate the challenges of implementing effective learner integration:

1. The teaching and learning process should be cooperative and collaborative.
2. Stakeholders are valuable human resources, as they possess untapped potential in different ways.
3. Integration is an ongoing process and the product of it is making.
4. Learners' potential can be realised by the events and programs that are designed to integrate them into the school's system and functioning.

The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates the components of the LIW theory.

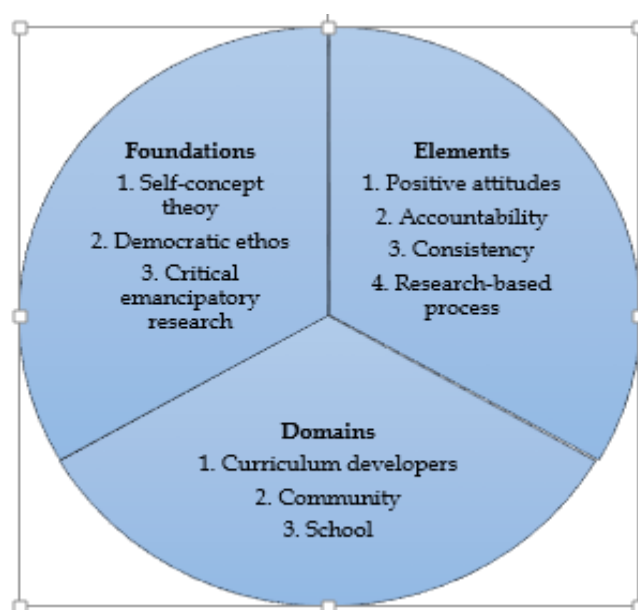


Figure 1: Illustration of the LIW theory components (adopted from Kanyopa and Makgalwa, 2024, p. 506)

Elements of the learner integration wheel theory of practice

The LIW theory has four basic elements that uphold the functioning of the theory, namely positive attitudes, accountability, consistency and research-based process. These four elements represent the outer edge of a wheel which holds up the theory. The circular movement of these elements evokes images of different contextual factors working together to support a larger idea (Kanyopa & Makgalwa, 2024). In this case, the larger idea is the LIW theory of practice. These elements are interdependent and support one another. This highlights the importance of the educational stakeholders considering and recognising these aspects in the creation and implementation of essential learner integration in the school environment. The diagram in Figure 2 illustrates the elements of the LIW theory of practice.

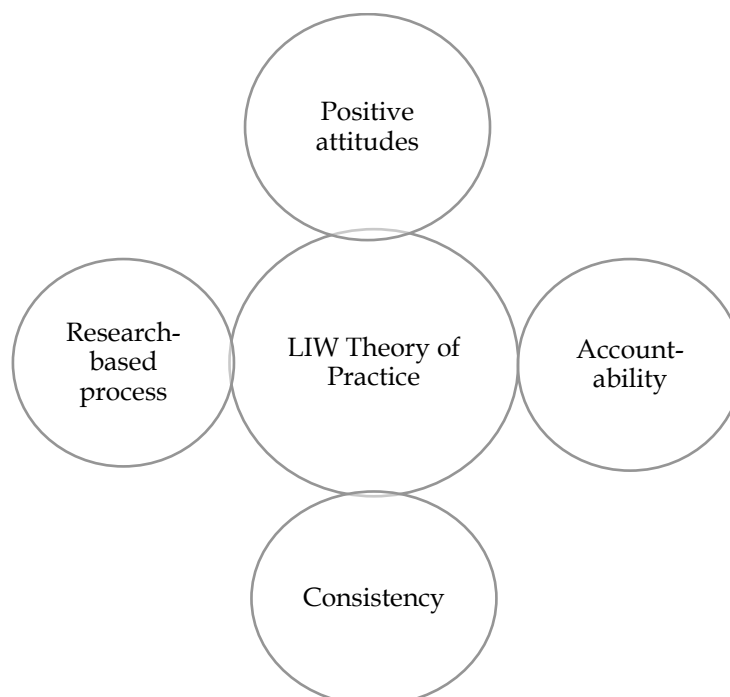


Figure 2: Illustration of the elements of the LIW theory of practice (adopted from Kanyopa & Makgalwa, 2024, p. 508)

• Positive attitudes

A positive attitude is central to the accomplishment of the LIW theory. Positive attitudes by stakeholders towards learner integration in the school allow and encourage practices that virtually guarantee its success in the school. While positive attitudes may do much in realising the enhancement and success of learner integration, negative attitudes will certainly ensure its failure.

• Accountability

Accountability ensures the perspective of oversight of personnel responsibility to ensure that personnel perform or behave in relation to the realisation of learner integration in the school environment. Conversely, even supportive school authorities will have difficulty enhancing learner integration in an environment with members who are not accountable. Therefore, this element is vital for supporting and moving towards the realisation of learner integration in a school, especially when the ability of stakeholders is questioned.

• Consistency

This element implies the harmonious uniformity regarding events taking place in the school towards the realisation of learner integration. The element suggests that stakeholders must remain dedicated to the goal of realising learner integration, staying focused on the things, events and activities that influence the enhancement of this matter in the school environment. In essence, learner integration is a process (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018). Therefore, long-term commitment by the stakeholder is required to ensure sustained efforts and consistency in repeatedly performing actions until the goal has been achieved.

• Research-based process

For learner integration to be truly successful, the entire school needs to be fully committed to realising and achieving it. When appropriate, teachers and other school staffs should encourage learners to learn about their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Also, for each program, event or policy, should be questioning such as *why they exist, how they impact integration, and who they involve and serve*. These questions should be asked regularly for often reforms to meet the educational, social, emotional and other needs of the learners at school.

The three domains of the learner integration wheel theory of practice

The LIW theory of practice focuses on three main domains that exist in every school, namely the school, curriculum developers and the school community. These domains are the key players towards successfully realising learner integration in any school environment. The theory insists that the school cannot do learner integration on its own and that it rather needs the Department of Education and the community that it serves to come together to work collaboratively towards the realisation of successful learner integration in the school (Kanyopa, 2022; Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2023). These domains are viewed as the *rim* when illustrating the reality of the wheel. The rim is deep in the centre and shallow at the outer edges, supporting the rotation and motion of the wheel. As mentioned earlier, the wheel in the LIW theory of practice represents a process of going forward towards the realisation of successful learner integration in the school environment. The diagram in Figure 3 presents the theory visually.

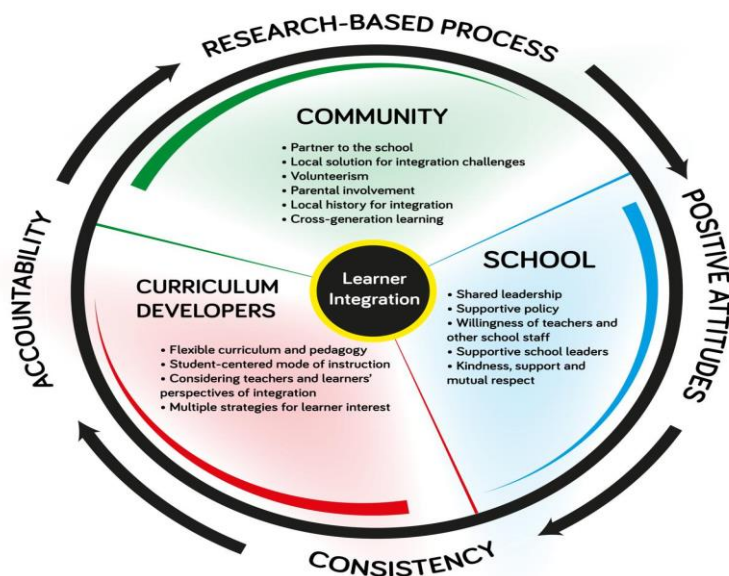


Figure 3: Illustration of the three domains of the LIW theory of practice (adopted from Kanyopa, 2022, p. 280)

The visual representation of the LIW theory of practice shows that for learner integration to be successful in schools, the Department of Education, through the curriculum developers, needs to work hand in hand with other educational stakeholders such as teachers, parents, learners and the school community. The theory suggests that the stakeholders need to work towards successful learner integration in the educational climate by establishing integrative programmes, practices and policies. In addition, all the stakeholders need to maintain positive attitudes towards learner integration in the school. Furthermore, both the school and classroom activities should be grounded in the research-based approach to present a big picture of every activity or event that takes place in the school and classrooms.

• Curriculum developers

Curriculum developers should note that to have successful learner integration in schools, the curriculum needs to be flexible, and all the contents should be grounded in both the classroom and learners' real-world contexts (Blignaut, 2020; Kanyopa, 2022). Curriculum modification and adaptation must take place for effective learner integration in schools. The LIW theory also contends that the process of modifying and adapting the curriculum to cater to learner integration issues should not be seen as a threat to the teachers and school authorities. Rather, it should be seen as a crucial strategy for promoting equality, democracy and social justice in schools.

• Community

The LIW theory confirms that the partnership between the school and the community will assist the school significantly in effectively operating to support the necessary roles towards successful learner integration. The theory also suggests that community involvement in the realisation of learner integration in schools will also promote effective parental involvement, which is a crucial element for the learners' academic achievement. As the old African proverb says: "it takes a village to raise a child" (De Raat, 2014, p. 60); therefore, the community is a crucial element in the success of learner integration in schools. The visual representation of this theory stipulates that volunteerism from the people of the school community is a means towards the successful implementation of learner integration in schools. Through cross-generational learning experiences, community leaders will be able to assist and share their experiences and skills on how to solve some learner integration challenges at school (Dei, 2016).

• The school

The LIW theory of practice shows the school as another domain for successful learner integration. The theory confirms the importance of the school in operating under the shared leadership model whereby the responsibilities are divided from the top level (school management) to the bottom level (learners, cleaners, etc.) in the school. Likewise, for successful learner integration, the school should have both a supportive policy and supportive leadership to work towards the implementation of learner integration.

Furthermore, for successful learner integration, the school needs to operate within a culture of mutual respect, care, kindness and support for everyone involved. The LIW theory views a positive attitude towards learner integration as the most important element for the successful implementation of learner integration in the school. A positive attitude towards learner integration will allow for and encourage practices, programmes and policies that will practically guarantee the success of learner integration.

Conclusion

This paper introduced the LIW theory of practice. It described its elements and domains in its functioning to encourage the realisation of successful learner integration in the school context. The LIW theory will gradually find its way into educational settings and communities, while carrying the basic message that learner integration is an essential factor that improves both the personal growth and development of the learner in the learning environment. Hence, the LIW theory offers concrete, practical and successful ways to accomplish its stated purposes.

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Notes

This article introduces the learner integration wheel (LIW) theory of practice that was developed in the doctoral thesis of Theresia Joakim Kanyopa. The thesis explored the understanding and enhancement of learner integration in a selected former Model C school in South Africa.

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