

Need for Inclusion

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In every society, the unequal status of individuals with disabilities causes enormous losses to the community. At any given time, people with special needs experience tremendous hindrances due to a variety of structural, psychological and socio-cultural barriers (Halder, 2008, 2009). These constraints are prevalent in developing nations as poverty, class structures, employment opportunities and social expectations impinge directly on the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families.

Attitudes, values and beliefs about the nature of disability vary around the globe and are largely determined and shaped by the society in which people live. In educational contexts an emergent understanding of inclusion relates to the notions of access and participation while a more developed understanding includes all aspects that are responsive to the needs of each individual and quality experiences for all (Barton & Armstrong, 2001). Such a stance will help gain insights into the quality and availability of services for the successful inclusion of people with disabilities around the globe (Rees, Spreen & Harnadek, 1991).

According to the World Report on Disability (2011), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Bank (2011) more than one billion people have a disability. The World Health Organization and World Bank argue that inclusion or 'a sense of belonging' is a Universal human right where the aim is to embrace, value and give equal access and participation to all individuals irrespective of any sort of differences (Minkowitz, 2006).

As a fundamental premise, inclusive practices value diversity (Kunc 1992) yet, progress towards an inclusive society cannot be es-

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established if a significant part of the population is treated unfairly and discriminated against due to disability. The global trend towards a raised awareness of disability issues, however, reveals significant inequalities across cultures (Barton and Armstrong 2001), ethnic groups, and nationalities (Crystal et al. 1999). There is evidence that individuals with a disability experience higher risks of discrimination, exploitation, violence and abuse (Ghai 2001; Halder 2009) particularly in developing world contexts.

Although various legislations and policies in every society aim to determine social expectations and practices that reduce discrimination, the unequal status of individuals with disabilities is a current and lived reality in many countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) describes barriers as being more than just physical obstacles including factors in a person's environment that, through their absence or presence, limits functioning and creates disability. These include aspects such as; a physical environment that is not accessible, lack of relevant assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices, negative attitudes of people towards disability, services, systems and policies that are either nonexistent or that hinder the involvement of all people with a health condition in all areas of life" (WHO, 2001).

In its broadest sense a socio-cultural system includes all interactions between society and culture to include culture, class, education, ethnicity and religious systems based on socio-cultural perspectives, we are joined in our common endeavor to learn about policies, practices and processes that improve the lot of people with disabilities so that the quality of the interactions between society and people with disabilities can be improved. Each will have unique perspectives on the cultural influences that impinge on a person with a disability yet, all countries are grappling with the basic issues of how to

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improve the quality of life and autonomy for persons with disabilities.

Various researchers have examined the influence of socio-cultural variables on the life experiences of people with disabilities (e.g. Barona 1993; Dalal and Pande 1999; Greenwell and Hough 2008; Ross-Gordo 2002). Barona and Faykus (2006) indicated that socio-cultural factors (ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family characteristics) made a significant influence on the population with special needs and suggested that legislative mandates have the capacity to influence socio-cultural factors in the determination of special education and the most inclusive practices they're in.

Challenges in Education

In many developing countries people with disabilities remain underprivileged and are unable to access or participate in mainstream education and development programs. There is a scarcity of needs-based support services available for the welfare of people with disabilities, and services remain beyond the reach of most people (Halder 2008, 2009). Yet, even in the more developed countries, the voice of people with disabilities is rarely heard in issues that relate to equality in education and employment or how services should be distributed or accessed.

Social exclusion is not only experienced by the person with the disability. In some contexts, teachers are unable to access expertise or advice to differentiate the curriculum or to keep students with disabilities safe and learning in a way that suits the student. The boundaries of inclusive education are often redefined when the student has challenging behaviors or is diagnosed with a disability.

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Parents are also challenged in the way they accept and address the complex needs of the whole family when there is a child with a disability. Balancing work and home duties becomes a balance of loyalties and resources as well as time management. According to one mother in Halder's (2009) research,

In a society dominated by negative misrepresentations or stereotypes of persons with a disability, the potential to lead a productive life may be reduced and social inclusion will be conditional on overcoming numerous barriers. Identity and dignity may be compromised as lowered expectations and a lack of support and understanding limit possibilities.

Discrimination against a woman on the grounds of gender, disability and poverty will claim her rights to belong to community and receive advantages from inclusion in social, educational and employment. Successful experiences, policies and strategies that reduce discrimination for women with disabilities can help to inform inclusive practices in developing countries and provide strategies and frameworks to approach complex problems with an improved possibility of success.

Community and public places are still characterized by architectural barriers such as steps and small doorways. This means that people with disabilities are unseen in schools, social venues and employment yet highly visible in street poverty (Paterson et al. 1999).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) provides a framework for countries to change attitudes and beliefs about the potential of people with disabilities and their active participation in society. Legislative changes to reduce discrimination are the strongest statements a society can make to change entrenched or negative cultural values and beliefs and to enforce a change in practice.

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On a global scale there are still inconsistencies in the way services are offered to those with a disability. Questions surround who is eligible for support services and why. The quality and relevance of facilities and support programs have to be personalized to suit individual needs. The integrity of family and institutional care varies in respect and dignity. Technology is still expensive and inaccessible in many regions. Schools and teachers need high level skills and abilities to be responsive to individual needs. Employers rely heavily on economic accountability to minimize social responsibility. Improvements, development and resourcefulness are required in all aspects of life for a person with a disability. There are countries where the very nature of a disability is still questioned and inconsistencies prevail in information, attitude, resourcefulness and strategic approaches. The general population will only respond more effectively when leaders in governments, the media, schools and employers accept diversity and model decision making for greater inclusion. Even in the embryonic stage in terms of inclusion, developing countries can depend on the fundamental aspects of respect for the individual and a democratic appreciation for diversity.

It is from this appreciation of diversity that a more complex understanding of disability will emerge. A person will be treated with respect as a person first, then a person with a disability next. The use of inclusive language teaches us there are students with special needs (the student first) and they are not just those kids where the challenges of the disability extinguish their unique capacity for being an individual. When such values are made explicit in legislation, policy and process then the general public will learn to communicate inclusively.

The rights-based approach underlying CRPD contends that individuals with disabilities should not be denied the opportunity of a meaningful educational experience on the grounds of disability (CRPD 2006; Marshall and Goodall 2015). A matter of great concern is that societies need to think strategically about accessibility

and reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities for the implementation of the CRPD (Melish 2007). To achieve such social change and access the benefits of inclusion, organizations need to ensure that the dynamic paradigm change in disability policies begins with an awareness of human rights for people with a disability (Quinn 2009a, 2009b). Henceforth inclusion in all sphere through various strategic actions can resolve many of these challenges.

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