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Inclusive practice, cultural contexts and perceptions of disability in a Christian foundation special needs school in Bangalore, India.

Author(s): Sally Elton-Chalcraft (presenting / submitting)
Paul Cammack
Liz Harrison

Conference: ECER 2015

Network: 04. Inclusive Education

Format: Paper

Session Information

04 SES 04 B, Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusive Education

Paper Session

Time: 2015-09-09
09:00-10:30

Room: 206.Oktatóterem [C]

Chair: Susanne Schwab

Contribution

With funding awarded by St Christopher's Trust and also the University of Cumbria, the principal investigator was able to collect data in two mainstream and two special educational needs schools in Bangalore, India.

This case study investigates inclusive practice, cultural contexts and perceptions of disability in one of the Christian foundation Special Needs School in Bangalore. The aims of the research are:

To investigate

- Perceptions of disability in a Christian foundation Special needs school in Bangalore
- How these perceptions are informed by cultural contexts and belief systems

To provide

- A forum for sharing good practice and identifying teacher development needs

In the last 30 years there has been a fundamental shift in India in the education of children with special educational needs away from segregated provision towards a more inclusive approach (Das et al, 2012). Legislation such as the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995) and initiatives such as the Education for All Movement (2001) and the Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (2005) have focussed attention on the provision of educational opportunities for children with special educational needs in Indian schools (Bhatnagar and Das, 2014). Although considerable progress has been made, it is recognised that much remains to be done in order to ensure that the needs of children with special educational needs are met in Indian schools (Thapan 2014).

There are many factors that inhibit effective inclusion of students with special educational needs within Indian schools. Some of these are structural aspects of education policy, including the large percentage of Indian schools that are private; the lack of adequate inclusion policies in many schools (including a lack of goals and objectives for inclusive education), and restrictive practices that limit the opportunities of students to enrol in mainstream schools (Bhatnagar and Das, 2014). Other aspects of impediments to inclusive education within schools include poor physical infrastructure including access difficulties and lack of physical adaptation to schools (Bhatnagar and Das, 2014), financial limitations such that funding does not meet basic needs (Bhatnagar and Das, 2014; Sharma et al., 2009) and large class sizes that make effective one-to-one interventions difficult to achieve (Sharma et al., 2009; David and Kuyini, 2012). Whilst these factors inhibit the access of children with special educational needs to mainstream schools, the focus of this study is on those factors that impact on the everyday experiences of teachers and students in school.

The purpose of this case study is to contextualise how the concept of disability is understood by a sample of children, their parents and teachers in one of the schools and how these perceptions are informed by cultural contexts and belief systems. The case study also identified perceptions of effective educational provision for special needs children and provided a forum for sharing good practice and identifying teacher development needs.

The philosophical stance adopted is constructivism utilizing an interpretive approach 'reality and knowledge reside in the minds of the individuals and knowledge may be uncovered by unpacking individual experiences' (Savin-Baden and Howell-Major 2013:56). Through an ethnographic lens perceptions of disability were explored, as understood by the sample of individuals from the school. The project gained ethical approval from the University of Cumbria and adhered to BERA guidelines. The multi-disciplinary research team (Special Educational Needs, Religious Studies, Geography and occupational therapy colleagues) designed a range of fit for purpose data collection tools. Data was analysed using a grounded theory constant comparison method to identify emerging themes from the data (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003, Robson 2002).

Method

The project gained ethical approval from the University of Cumbria and adhered to BERA guidelines (Machpherson and Tyson 2008). The multi-disciplinary research team designed a range of fit for purpose data collection tools utilising sociological and

anthropological field methods - focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, participant observations, collection of documentary and photographic evidence and narrative reports. A case study approach was used in terms of context and data collection - firstly the 'case', as described by Robson (2002) being the bounded setting of one Special Needs school in Bangalore. Secondly a case study methodology, as described by Yin (2009), was adopted because the empirical enquiry investigated affinities between Christian ethos, spirituality and concepts of disability within the real life context as experienced in the special needs school in Bangalore. A case study approach was chosen for several reasons, as identified by Savin-Baden and Howell-Major (2013: 163), because it : • is flexible- the research goals are both descriptive and evaluative, • draws on a range of research approaches and data collection tools • presents diverse points of view • has wide appeal –the case study findings can be used to inform a variety of audiences including teachers, parents, teacher educators and occupational therapists, policy makers in the SEN, RE and occupational health spheres. Firstly the project leader gained the trust of the participants by visiting the school and getting to know the children their teachers and their families in the first two weeks of the research. The sample, negotiated with the headteacher, included interviews with four children from a range of ages, socio- economic status, different faiths and castes, three parents and five teachers (including the principal and deputy of the school) (Kvale 1996). During a workshop one male and thirty female teachers completed a questionnaire. The research design included the use of the 'least adult role' technique for accessing rich data from children (Elton-Chalcraft 2011) a participatory role attempting to gain trust was adopted. Through interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and participant observation the children's, teachers' and parents' perspectives were sought about their concepts of disability and the basis for these opinions, how faith (including the school's Christian ethos) and teacher expertise are seen to contribute to the children's quality of life in the present and the potential for the children's future independent living and economic self- sufficiency.

Expected Outcomes

Data analysis was undertaken by the research team (specialists in inclusion, geography, religious studies and occupational therapy). We drew on all the data sources to look for evidence of affinities between faith (including Christian ethos) and concepts of disability to gain an understanding of the diverse perceptions of children, parents and teachers. We also investigated teacher reservations towards special needs provision, self perceptions of teacher confidence and competence, teacher development and training needs. The data provides an understanding of the school's 'institutional body language' (Dadzie 2000) -for example the displays, taught and hidden curriculum, relationships with the staff, equality of opportunity and so on. Participants views are mapped onto frameworks found in the literature to identify how inclusive practice is exemplified in different contexts (Armstrong et al 2013, Bangs and Frost 2012, David and Kuyini 2012). In India the lead researcher drew on preliminary findings to facilitate a forum for sharing good practice in terms of strategies, techniques and resources for inclusive practice and to identify teacher development needs. The study provides insights and understandings from teachers, parents and children concerning effective educational provision for SEN children and teacher development needs (Das et al 2013) which will be of interest to practitioners in a range of countries. The findings have wide appeal as they can inform a variety of audiences including teachers, parents, teacher educators, occupational therapists and policy makers in the SEN, RE and occupational therapy spheres, in a variety of countries. We aim to produce at least two articles: inclusion- belief and practice in the case study school and implications for teacher development; the impact of faith and concepts of disability on special educational needs provision.

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Author Information

Sally Elton-Chalcraft (presenting / submitting)

University of Cumbria, United Kingdom

Paul Cammack

University of Cumbria

EAB

Lancaster

Liz Harrison

University of Cumbria, United Kingdom

Programme by Network

00. Central Events (Keynotes, EERA-Panel, EERJ Round Table, Invited Sessions)

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Network 3. Curriculum Innovation

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Network 6. Open Learning: Media, Environments and Cultures

Network 7. Social Justice and Intercultural Education

Network 8. Research on Health Education

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Network 10. Teacher Education Research

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Network 16. ICT in Education and Training

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Network 18. Research in Sport Pedagogy

Network 19. Ethnography

Network 20. Research in Innovative Intercultural Learning Environments

Network 22. Research in Higher Education

Network 23. Policy Studies and Politics of Education

Network 24. Mathematics Education Research

Network 25. Research on Children's Rights in Education

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Network 28. Sociologies of Education

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EERA Office

European Educational Research Association

Feurigstr. 22

10827 Berlin, Germany

Telephone: +49 (0)30 857 36220

Telefax: +49 (0)30 377 19572

office@eera.eu