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From attitudes to practice: utilising inclusive teaching strategies in Kenyan primary schools[†]

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The purpose of this paper is to provide evidence of Kenyan primary school teachers using inclusive teaching strategies in a rural setting with many known barriers to the development of a sustainable inclusive education system. This qualitative study examines teachers' uses of inclusive teaching strategies in primary schools following a series of teacher trainings, classroom observations, individual semi-structured teacher conferences, reflective lesson plans, and pre- and post-questionnaires. Moving beyond legal mandates and attitudinal assessments, the outcomes of this study demonstrate that in a short time, and among a small sample of teachers, administrators, and Ministry officials, a culturally responsive approach to implementing inclusive learning strategies proved beneficial for meeting the needs of diverse primary school students in western Kenya.

Keywords: international disability law; UNCRPD; international inclusive education; Eastern Africa; capacity-building

SNE (special needs education) students are waking me up. Inclusion has lit a fire in our school. We need to join together for SNE. (Participant 17)

The purpose of this paper is to provide evidence of Kenyan primary school teachers using inclusive teaching strategies in a rural setting with many known barriers to the development of a sustainable inclusive education system. This study examines teachers' uses of inclusive teaching strategies in primary schools following a series of four professional development trainings, one classroom observation per teacher, structured lesson planning, individual conferences with each of the participants, and the results of pre- and post-questionnaires. In connection with our research questions, data were analysed using qualitative methods to provide evidence for meeting the needs of diverse students. Specific attention was given to how these methods support capacity-building, promote the development of a sustainable system of inclusive

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education in a post-colonial Kenyan context, and influence the development of a disability studies perspective.

Previous reports on this topic suggest that over one million students with disabilities are currently excluded from equitable educational opportunities in Kenya (Ministry of Education 2008). Limited opportunities in Kenyan primary education are proved to lead to increased rates of poverty, illiteracy, and decreased opportunities for participation in secondary and tertiary education (Opini 2011). The right to equitable lifelong learning opportunities is recognised as a major factor in individuals with disabilities achieving their full potential and equal participation within society (UNCRPD 2006). The existing literature also suggests that many teachers around the globe have negative attitudes towards students with disabilities and inclusion because disability is misunderstood, inclusion is inadequately supported, and necessary teacher training is absent (Emam and Mohamed 2011; Kovačević and Maćešić-Petrović 2012). Limited literature on inclusion in primary education in Kenya highlights the need for this study. The authors very intentionally chose a frame of moving from attitudes to practice as a way of forwarding this conversation and drew on building teacher capacity as a basis for change. Inclusive teaching pedagogy entails a specific approach to teaching and inclusive education where ‘the strategy behind inclusion is to design supports – innovative approaches to learning, differentiated instruction, curricular adaptations – for every student in the classroom, to include the entire spectrum of learners’ (Schwartz et al. 2006, 35). These strategies were utilised as a means for addressing attitudinal, environmental, social, and cultural barriers. The trainings were analysed using qualitative methods to determine their impact on supporting the needs of diverse students, including students with disabilities in Kenyan primary schools.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD 2006) is the first legally binding international treaty to specifically address the rights of individuals with disabilities worldwide. Explicitly, Article 24 of the UNCRPD (2006) addresses rights and access to equitable education necessitating that all member states establish an ‘inclusive system of education’ (art. XXIV, § 1). Recognising the need for international cooperation, Article 32 supports the stated educational goals and calls on worldwide partners to facilitate and support capacity-building through the exchange of information, experiences, and training programmes and best practices (UNCRPD 2006, art. XXXII, § 1b). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2009), capacity-building efforts have an important role as

a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners ... As an overall principle, it should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society. (8)

Informed by the background outlined above, the following research questions were developed for the project:

- (1) Do teacher trainings on inclusive instructional strategies build teacher capacity and preparedness to support diverse learners in primary school classrooms?
- (2) Does providing teachers with knowledge of legal responsibilities and instructional strategies have an influence on developing sustainable inclusive practice?

- (3) Does providing teacher trainings organised through a disability studies' perspective (e.g. social model of disability and education as social justice) translate into inclusive outcomes for students?

Legal framework

At the start of the teacher trainings, the authors outlined international and domestic responsibilities to create an inclusive education system. The point was not to debate the legitimacy of such laws, but rather use knowledge of the laws as a way to recognise Kenya's commitment to and determine steps for establishing an inclusive education system. The UNCRPD (2006) served as the legal platform for this work and was further supported by Kenya's domestic legislation. For example, in the revised Kenyan Constitution of 2010, Article 27, Section 4 takes a prohibitive stance on multiple forms of discrimination asserting, 'The State shall not discriminate directly or indirectly against any person on any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, *disability*, [emphasis added] religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth' (24). Additionally, disability-specific legislation was passed in 2012 when Kenya adopted the Persons with Disabilities Amendment Bill. This bill revised Article 54 of the current constitution and streamlined rights and services for people with disabilities to comply with the UNCRPD (Persons with Disabilities Amendment Bill 2013). Most recently, Kenya passed the Basic Education Act of 2013, which aims to make free primary education of 2003 a legal mandate for all.

Educational context

Prior to colonisation by the British, the dissemination of indigenous knowledge in the form of oral traditions was the main focus of education in Kenya (Kinuthia 2009). During the British rule, a Western style of education was implemented (Bunyi 1999; Ntarangwi 2003; Strayer 1973). Recent reforms and mandates, such as education for all, while grounded in good intentions, overloaded the existing education system. This created impossible situations for effective implementation of these initiatives without the necessary infrastructure to support it (Mukundi 2004). Consequently, access to and completion of compulsory education remains fraught with obstacles in Kenya (UNICEF 2013).

Of those who do attend school, students without disabilities who move from primary to secondary school is only less than 50% (or about 350,000 students each year), and even fewer transition to higher education (Education System 2012). For those with disabilities, these statistics are even more alarming. According to the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR 2011), 33% of students with disabilities are without primary education, 81% without secondary education, and 98% are without a university education. These statistics underscore the need for significant change in the approaches taken to provide a free and compulsory education to all students in Kenya.

Here it becomes clear that access to education is compromised as age increases. For students with disabilities, it is imperative that access to inclusive education begins early if students will have any chance of obtaining positive educational outcomes as they advance through the educational system. Though small pockets of inclusive practices

are beginning to emerge throughout the country, students with disabilities who are accessing education are overwhelmingly placed in segregated special schools by specific disability categories (e.g. schools for the blind, schools for the deaf, schools for the physically challenged, and schools for the mentally handicapped).¹ Even though there are isolated examples of schools that are seeking to merge students from special schools and primary schools on shared campuses, heavy reliance on special school placements continues in Kenya. The primary school teachers who participated in this study also indicated a new awareness of their student population by acknowledging that students with self-identified or invisible disabilities are present in their primary school classrooms. There were also additional incidents of students disclosing these disabilities to their teachers. Without drastic systemic reform, realising the expectations set out in international instruments, such as the UNCRPD, will continue to clash with the socio-historic trends seen in the Kenyan education system over the years. The factors influencing the prevalence of disabilities often intersect in their complexities and mutually reinforce patterns of disadvantage and oppression. Without interrupting these cycles of oppression through education, changes in favour of an inclusive education system will remain illusory.

This study took place in a village in western Kenya that is particularly impacted by many of the barriers discussed throughout this paper. Teacher trainings were specifically designed to meet the needs of diverse students in primary school settings in western Kenya, drawing on existing school resources with continuous input from local government officials. All schools were located in a rural, agricultural village, a community that presently has limited electricity and food supplies, no running water, and high rates of disease. According to Kawakatsu et al. (2012), ‘this is one of the poorest areas in Kenya and the residents are primarily subsistence farmers or fisherman. Moreover, this area has one of the highest prevalence rates of malaria and HIV infection’ (187). In their study about the risk factors of neurological impairment in children, the authors found that genetic factors, nutritional deficiencies, infections, prenatal and neonatal factors, and socio-economic considerations were the main risk factors for disabilities in low-income countries. There was an estimated disability prevalence rate of 29 of 1000 children aged 6–9 years in this particular region in western Kenya (Kawakatsu et al. 2012).² Given these restrictions on basic human needs, the strategies introduced in teacher trainings needed to be low or no cost. We are defining ‘low or no cost’ as strategies that can be replicated with minimal school resources (e.g. chalk, paper, student groupings, community-building strategies, strategies to increase student engagement, physical classroom arrangement).

Conceptual framework

This paper draws on multiple theoretical frameworks to inform a decolonising approach to development of inclusive educational practices in post-colonial Kenya. Specifically, the authors drew on post-colonial studies, critical cultural theory, educational theory, and learning theory to direct the project. The work of cultural theorist Fanon (1963) informed the foundation of the trainings. Despite achieving independence in 1963, many aspects of the colonial education system have held strong in Kenya. Fanon’s (1963) work describes post-colonial groups of people as those ‘individuals without an anchor’ who cannot return to their pre-colonial roots (176). Recognising and

responding to post-colonial realities with decolonising methodologies is critically important when working in post-colonial cross-cultural contexts.

The Kenyan colonial system of education can be conceptualised through two vectors that Hall (1990) refers to as ‘the vector of similarity and continuity,’ and ‘the vector of difference and rupture’. The vector of similarity and continuity connects the current education system with the colonial past, and the vector of difference and rupture displaces the colonial system on a new trajectory inherently different from, but simultaneously influenced by the first vector. This point of rupture creates conflict between the past and present, and exists within a historic moment in time. Once the rupture occurs, new contexts and structures develop and influence new ways of knowing and interacting in the world. The teacher trainings in this project represent points of rupture that potentially allow a new inclusive system of education to develop.

Decolonising methodology as outlined by Smith (1999) was at the forefront of this project. According to Smith, decolonising methodologies provide non-indigenous researchers with ‘a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices’ (20). Towards the goal of more just ways of interacting in the world, and those ‘which minimize the potential colonizing effects in post-colonial contexts’ Smith (1999, 10) encourages that researchers ask the following questions about their work:

Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will the results be disseminated?

Decolonising methodologies informed all aspects of the project, including interactions with the participants and government officials. Shared authorship of this article where the third author is a government liaison and a local community member underscores the ongoing, reciprocal nature of project interactions and involvement throughout the research process. Though two of the authors are white, Western, and have been educated in the USA, critical discussions with teachers were had about race, privilege, and the cultural relevance of instructional strategies and pedagogical approaches. Also, the Kenyan government requires teachers to be fluent in English, Kiswahili, and the regional language (in this case, Luo); however valuing the indigenous culture, language, and local ways of knowing was critical in this work.

In addition to decolonising methodologies, anti-oppressive pedagogy (Freire 1970) and educational democracy (Dewey 1985), specifically the work of Freire (1970) further informed training pedagogy. Co-construction of knowledge, and valuing the diversity and expertise within the teacher group, and honouring local ways of knowing were the main foci of the project. Specifically, when introducing Gardner’s (1985) Multiple Intelligence Theory³ and Rose and Meyer’s (2002) Universal Design for Learning,⁴ the authors recognised the teachers as experts of their own context. Teachers had the opportunity to explore their own creative intelligences and preferred modalities of learning within the context of these trainings. Teachers’ cultural knowledge was then utilised to engage them in critical discussions about the relevance and effectiveness of Western strategies and pedagogy being considered for application to Kenyan educational contexts.

We approached this project and the topic of inclusive education from a disability studies perspective. Within this understanding, part of the issue related to accessing education and inclusion is the construction of disability as something negative and

located within the individual (Ferri 2006; Humphrey 2000; Linton 1998; 2005; Marks 1997; Taylor 2006; Young and Mint 2008). In an effort to challenge these and other medicalised interpretations of disability, the teacher trainings were designed within a disability studies' framework. Inclusive teaching strategies were selected that highlight societal barriers such as inaccessible environments and negative attitudes towards disability and difference (Barnes, Mercer, and Shakespeare 1999; Charlton 1998; Linton 1998; Pfeiffer 2002). Perspectives of disability as a natural part of human diversity (Baglieri et al. 2011; Hehir 2002; Linton 2005, 2006; Shapiro 1999) were integral to the foundation of these trainings being inclusive and consistent with the goals of a disability studies in education approach. In the title and throughout the article, we discuss meeting the needs of diverse students. When targeting diverse students, we purposely did not subscribe to labelling theories or the perpetuation of segregated or stratified school placements, such as special schools. Therefore, within this project, valuing diversity was a priority informed by a disability studies framework. More specifically, we wanted to know whether applying a disability studies perspective would create more inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities in Kenyan primary schools.

Methods

Site of study and participants

This study originated when members of community in western Kenya expressed interest in creating a model-inclusive school. The local representative of the Educational Assessment and Resource Centre (EARC) in the Ministry of Education (referred to in the remainder of this paper as 'EARC representative') served as our primary liaison for this project. In requesting that we provide teacher trainings around inclusive pedagogy, the EARC representative outlined school needs and expectations for the trainings. Trainings were developed accordingly and submitted to the EARC representative for feedback. Modules and all materials were approved in advance and the teacher trainers debriefed daily with an EARC representative about the efficacy of the trainings and project progress. Changes were made during the course of trainings to adjust for the length and fiscal realities of the project impacted by nationwide school closures. Previously, segregation of students with disabilities, inadequate resources (e.g. financial and material), and lack of teacher training have posed limitations to achieving this goal in the given location.

The EARC representative selected teachers for participation. Teachers were chosen based on the fact that they held current Kenyan teacher certification, indicated interest in expanding their inclusive teaching knowledge, and were considered teacher leaders at their respective school sites. The research component of this study was not intended to preclude interested teachers from attending the trainings; therefore participation with reflective instruments and questionnaires was voluntary. The administrators who participated in this sample were head teachers (school principals) who dialogued with EARC's following the trainings to ensure consistency and sustainability of the project. At times, head teachers do teach lessons at their respective schools, including modelling lessons for new teachers, in a variety of classrooms. Aligned with research about communities of practice in schools, administrators' participation and support are integral factors in the sustainability of school reform (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003).

Given the standard of practice in Kenya for all certified teachers to instruct students in English, Kiswahili, and their indigenous language (in this region Luo), the

Institutional Review Board approved trainings and all research materials to be conducted in the English language. However, collaboration and communication between participants often occurred in multiple languages simultaneously. This was both encouraged and used as an inclusive instructional strategy. For example, Kiswahili was frequently utilised within small groups for inclusive lesson planning and strategy practice and at times by administrators providing clarification to the whole group. Checks for understanding were also embedded as an instructional strategy within the authors' inclusive pedagogy by welcoming interactions and questions between participants and with the teacher trainers. Developing a safe and shared learning community was necessary within our teacher trainings, just as we suggest it is in teachers' classrooms. Several specific community-building strategies were utilised and an established sense of community was evidenced whereby teachers demonstrated willingness to ask questions, constructively challenge the Western origin of curriculum development and language, and create new learning activities based on their own classroom contexts and cultural relevancy.

Changing political climates are an uncertain reality worldwide. One month prior to the scheduled trainings, Kenyan teachers, organised by the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT), went on a nationwide strike over long unpaid wages following new and reportedly irresponsible educational expenditures by the Kenyan government. The strike closed all public schools throughout Kenya and persisted through the time of the teacher trainings. At a time when tensions were high, and employment status uncertain, each of the selected participants chose to attend trainings, an action that further demonstrates their interest and dedication to this project and their professional development. The strike necessitated some unexpected adjustments to the planned methodology of the study. Initially the trainings were scheduled to take place at a primary school campus that shared property with a special school. In light of school closures, a non-school location had to be secured, and participants had to travel to this new central location. In addition, at the outset of the project, six trainings were planned over the course of two weeks. Due to distance, travel, and financial constraints for the participants in the new location, it became necessary to condense material into four trainings instead of six. Schools reopened during the second week of trainings and the authors were able to observe teachers using inclusive strategies in their classrooms and had a conference with them afterward as intended.

Data collection

The authors co-taught a series of four teacher trainings that were jointly developed with local Ministry liaisons. Trainings were attended by 13 primary and special schools teachers and five administrators, totalling 18 participants from 8 different schools in western Kenya (see [Table 1](#)). The trainings were organised around increasing teacher knowledge by providing guided interactive opportunities to practice inclusive teaching strategies and lesson planning for use in primary education classrooms. Within this introductory training, we define inclusion very broadly to encompass the diversity of students that could be expected in any classroom. The content of teacher training modules was intentionally selected to incorporate a variety of community-building strategies and instructional strategies that could be implemented into classrooms immediately following practice in the training sessions. [Table 2](#) provides a list of the various strategies used. Strategies are intended to draw on students' multiple

Table 1. Participant information including numbered list of participants, gender, identification as teacher or administrator, primary or special school affiliation, and grades taught for teachers.

Participant	Gender	Teacher or administrator	EARC, primary, or special school	Standard(s) (grade) taught (for teachers only)
1	Male	Administrator	EARC	
2	Male	Administrator	EARC	
3	Male	Administrator	EARC	
4	Male	Administrator	Special school	
5	Male	Administrator	Primary	
6	Female	Teacher	Special school	4, 5, 6, 7, 8
7	Male	Teacher	Primary	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
8	Male	Teacher	Primary	5, 6, 7, 8
9	Female	Teacher	Primary	Pre-unit
10	Female	Teacher	Primary	1, 2, 3
11	Male	Teacher	Primary	1
12	Male	Teacher	Special	2
13	Male	Teacher	Primary	2, 3, 7, 8
14	Female	Teacher	Special school	1, 2, 3
15	Female	Teacher	Primary	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
16	Male	Teacher	Primary	5
17	Male	Teacher	Primary	5, 6, 7, 8
18	Female	Teacher	Special school	6

intelligences and are aligned with universal design principles across categories of community-building, instruction, engagement and response, and co-teaching. The EARC representative reviewed the planned content of all teacher trainings and provided feedback about the needs of the teachers and local goals for the teacher trainings.

Various qualitative interpretive methods were utilised to collect data in this study (Bogdan and Biklen 2007). A pre-questionnaire was given prior to the start of trainings and a post-questionnaire at the conclusion of trainings. Questionnaires allowed the authors to gain information about teachers' experiences using inclusive teaching strategies, and their general attitudes towards disability and inclusion. Following the trainings, with permission from each participant, the authors conducted informal observations of teachers in their own classrooms. Observations were followed by individual semi-structured conferences between 15 and 30 minutes in length that gave each participant an opportunity to reflect on their use of inclusive strategies and ask the trainers questions. Additional data were collected through field notes and reflective lesson plans that teachers submitted in the form of a trainer-provided inclusive lesson planning template.

Data analysis

Our analysis within this study was informed by a constructivist grounded theory approach along with a constant comparison method, as outlined by Charmaz and Mitchell (2001). A continual comparative analysis allowed for evaluating data while they were collected, as well as, requiring us to complicate our understandings

Table 2. List of strategies used in teacher trainings.

Student engagement is the product of motivation and active learning. It is a product rather than a sum because it will not occur if either element is missing (Elizabeth F. Barkley).

Strategies Introduced and adapted in Kenyan teacher trainings	
Community-building strategies	Instructional strategies
Home groups	Question and answer
Morning meeting	Co-constructed definitions
Inner–outer circle	Cloze format
Class rules	Read aloud
New and good	Color-coding
Lifelines	Incorporating music and movement
Cultural artefact share	Multiple access points (verbal, visual auditory)
Numbered heads together	Use of multiple languages
Jigsaw	Checks for understanding (e.g. partner discussion, instructor summary, one idea learned-one question I still have)
Engagement and response strategies	Grouping strategies
Choral response	Partner work
Thumbs up when you know	Heterogeneous small groups
Loop around	Counting off
Turn and Talk	Student seating (tables, horseshoe, etc.)
Think-pair-share	Natural peer supports (varied by need)
Give one-get one	Co-teaching strategies
Do-check-teach	Team teaching
Must do-may do	One teach, one assist
Pass the brainstorm	Parallel teaching

Source: Gardner (1985), Rose and Meyer (2002), Sapon-Shevin (2007), Silberman (1996), and Thousand, Villa, and Nevin (2007).

of the findings throughout the analysis (Charmaz 2005). Specific coding procedures outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) were followed to analyse open-ended responses on pre- and post-questionnaires, classroom observation notes and reflective lessons plans. Coding occurred in three phases beginning with open coding, axial coding, and ending with selective coding that supported our identification of significant themes and outcomes (Creswell 2013). In an effort to ensure inter-coder reliability, all data were analysed cooperatively and systemically according to an established coding matrix (Patton 2002). The authors met and/or communicated weekly as permitted by distance and time zone differences to consistently and collectively review the data with organised records maintained through the use of NVivo software. Within this analysis, particular focus was given to data that informed our understanding of developing capacity among local communities of practice and evidenced inclusion in action in schools. In an effort to understand how participants are

conceptualising their own lived experiences and the continued development of inclusive education, we also analysed post-training lesson plans submitted from teacher participants and maintained ongoing progress and collaboration check-ins electronically with local EARC representatives.

Findings

From our analysis, four thematic categories have emerged as salient. They are (a) barriers, (b) evidence of inclusion, (c) capacity, and (d) sustainability. Each theme is discussed in detail below with supporting examples from our data that confirm literature-based rationales. Throughout the paper any teacher quotations that are not attributed to a specific participant by number were obtained through anonymous questionnaires or responses.

Barriers

In Africa, global barriers intersect with educational barriers with a multiplicity of consequences. These barriers understandably inhibit the development of inclusive education systems and create or exacerbate exclusionary conditions for students with disabilities. Global barriers (e.g. poverty, child labour, natural disasters, HIV/AIDS, gender, ethnicity, access to healthcare, access to food, and availability of clean drinking water) (UNESCO 2014) and educational barriers (e.g. tuition costs, school location, and stringent entrance exams) (UNESCO 2012) together create layered obstacles to accessing education. As an example, one teacher participant reported, 'I have a student who is a drunkard and uses drugs. He hasn't been in class since the strike ended' (Participant 17). According to this teacher, the primary school student worked as a fisherman at night, and was exposed to drinking and drugs on the job. When he attended his primary school, he would often sleep in class and be inattentive during lessons. This quote provides specific evidence related to barriers cited in the literature and highlights the reality that some families in western Kenya are forced to prioritise child employment over education in order to meet their basic needs.

In many local contexts, child labour is one barrier to students accessing education in Kenya. Other barriers stem from the national structure of the education system overseen by the Ministry of Education. As per Kenyan law, government funds must support schools; however, some local education officials in this project expressed that they did not know how to access such funds. For example, one head teacher (Participant 4) was working to develop a more inclusive school on his special school campus. He explained that he had not yet been successful in accessing government-provided feeding and support grants, and that the school was in dire need of two more teachers to ensure a ratio of at least one teacher per class. He was also attempting to gain the support of a government health specialist to see students with disabilities one time per week. In Kenya, a person in this position would travel between schools to provide necessary medications, therapy services, and evaluations. In a meeting organised by the project facilitators (also authors here) between a Ministry representative, EARC representatives, and local school leadership, the Ministry representative indicated that these needs could be met within a few months with a handwritten letter submitted from the head teacher.

Similar to local EARC representatives being unsure of how to access Ministry resources, one Ministry of Education official was not aware of the regional complexities across outlying, rural areas in Kenya. When visiting western Kenyan schools, this director commented, 'We (the Ministry of Education) forget about rural Kenya

because it is so close to Uganda.’ Consequently, the head teacher of a special school in this region reported, ‘[Our school] relies on community donations to keep running’. Without continuous community supports in the form of food and monetary donations, the school would close. A school closure would cause students with disabilities who live on the campus to go home to their parents and not access any form of education.⁵ Participating teachers reported that schools not only needed more monetary support from the government, but they also require more accessible infrastructure for all students to access schools. Teachers see these infrastructural barriers as a foundational need to all students being physically present in the classroom. One teacher said, ‘Our school needs infrastructure improvement and modification of the environment to make it more accessible.’ Another teacher reported that accessible school environments would help schools ‘meet [students’] basic needs so that they can concentrate in their studies’. According to these teachers, common requests for infrastructural improvements included: wheelchair-accessible latrines, stone removal from outdoor school areas, ramps to all school structures, and larger dormitory spaces.

Evidence of inclusion

The second theme we will expand upon is evidence of inclusion based on observed teacher practice following participation in inclusive trainings. As teachers had opportunities to implement and reflect on their use of inclusive instructional strategies, they were able and share their thoughts on the effectiveness of such strategies. In the individual teacher conferences, teachers were asked, ‘Do you think the trainings reached all students?’ In response, one teacher said,

Yes, the strategies enabled all students to be involved. That is why I have the class sit in a horseshoe; it enhances community. It wasn’t like that before I got the class. It makes it difficult to identify who has a disability. The only one who needs to identify them is the teacher. (Participant 13)

Within the trainings, teachers were asked to think about how to engage all students, including students with disabilities. This teacher’s reflection on student engagement – in this case, through the use of the horseshoe strategy – demonstrates a shift in the level of student participation from some students accessing instruction, to all students being meaningfully involved in the classroom community. The establishment of classroom community potentially allowed for students to be seen as capable and participatory members of the classroom rather than isolated on the basis of diverse learning styles or needs.

Related to increasing student engagement, teachers were encouraged to consider flexible grouping strategies that would expand on the dominant call and response approach being used. Teachers reported making conscious decisions to use flexible groupings based on student need. After using heterogeneous grouping strategies, teachers offered the following comments, ‘Learners were randomly grouped irrespective of their diversity needs’; ‘I grouped them in mixed ability.’ Teachers were observed using the same strategy, but in opposite ways to meet the diversity of students’ learning styles in their classrooms. For example, one teacher recognised a student’s need to participate early in the lesson. To accommodate the ‘weaker’ students ‘... those with special needs were given first opportunity to respond so that they could get variety

of answers to pick from'. Another teacher reported that he called on 'advanced learners' first because he wanted to give the 'slow learners' more time to think.

In another application of flexible grouping strategies, some teachers grouped students based on sensory-based accessibility needs. 'Children with visual impairment were grouped with those with good sights ...' With this grouping, 'assistance was readily available ...' for all students using natural supports. Similarly, another teacher said, 'I put the deaf student in the front with a peer ...' In addition to using natural supports and preferential seating, teachers also used elements of differentiated instruction. When reflecting on a lesson, a teacher wrote, 'I used visual teaching/learning aids that made the learning appealing to all learners with diverse learning styles. All learners' participation was very high since they were very excited to observe the flashcards.' By providing students with multiple access points to the content consistent with recommendations of Universal Design for Learning and Multiple Intelligences theories, teachers noticed increased student engagement with their lessons. One teacher reflected, 'Learning went on well. All the learners were actively involved. There were no boring moments.' Another teacher noticed '100% engagement ... Students were leaning on each other, and leaning into the conversation circle'. A third shared that students were more engaged, and a sense of community was fostered through such strategies because 'All learners were actively involved in learning irrespective of their diversity of needs. Hence an element of unity and togetherness was highly brought up ... Students provided natural support amongst themselves.'

A final example that demonstrates the fusion developing between classroom community, natural supports, and diverse instructional strategies was provided by Participant 11 following his use of the counting-off grouping strategy (see [Table 2](#)) in a science lesson. He stated, 'You see these three boys here? They usually sit in the back, arms like this (folds his arms), and are bored. Here you can see they were in the group actively engaged.' This represents that universally designed and inclusive strategies benefit all students in the class, not only students with disabilities. Students who were not historically successful in more rigid classroom structures were actively engaged with the lesson. The teacher's comment places the onus of responsibility for student participation and engagement on teacher's use of inclusive pedagogy, not on students themselves. The teacher went on to say,

I am going to do this grouping a lot. I used it for another lesson the same day you [authors] were there, and I already told other colleagues at my school about it. I told them they can apply it. It's easy to do.

Thus, this quote represents increased student engagement, but also exemplifies the teacher's commitment to expand his own use of inclusive pedagogy as well as share his knowledge with other faculty at his school.

Capacity-building

As evidenced by this teacher's eagerness, new knowledge was shared across a wider range of Kenyan teachers, representing capacity-building that occurred within his school. At the time of our arrival to one primary school, the head teacher offered verification that the '[Participant 11] mentioned the trainings immediately upon return to post.' She was open to the use of inclusive strategies, but questioned the efficiency of using such strategies and asked, 'Can we use these strategies in only 38 minutes?' Prior to

observing the use of inclusive strategies, this administrator reported, ‘When they [students with disabilities] are in [included] they get more wild.’ Once she observed initial implementation of strategies at her school, she added ‘We realized from them being “in” [included] that they can be in other standards like, Class 3, 4, 6 . . . ’

Participant 11’s account of using inclusive pedagogy in practice recognises that inclusive instruction is applicable with ease of implementation. This acknowledges that additional training supports preparedness to implement the use of instructional strategies. On training post-questionnaires, all 10 teacher participants reported greater preparedness to teach students with disabilities in primary school classrooms (Figure 1 shows participants’ self-rankings on pre- and post-questionnaires according to a five-point Likert scale). Specific examples of this increased preparedness are shown with the following teacher quotes:

With the new strategies I have learnt I am very confident that if I use them effectively I will be able to assist the students with disabilities.

By using the additional strategies acquired my lessons will be more participatory and catering for all the learners in the class.

I have learnt how to use community building [strategies] for social interaction and new learning strategies which make learners with disabilities [able] to be included without discrimination.

Teacher Responses on Pre-Questionnaire

On a scale of 1 to 5: Rate how prepared you feel <i>to teach</i> students with disabilities in the primary school setting?
1: Not at all prepared- 1
2: Somewhat prepared- 2
3: Neutral- 0
4: Prepared- 8
5: Very well prepared- 2

Teacher Responses on Post-Questionnaire

On a scale of 1 to 5: After participating in trainings, how prepared you feel <i>to teach</i> students with disabilities in the primary school setting?
1: Not at all prepared- 0
2: Somewhat prepared- 0
3: Neutral- 0
4: Prepared- 4
5: Very well prepared- 9

Figure 1. Teacher responses on pre-questionnaire.

To further highlight teachers' capacity to support diverse learners in their classrooms,

Participant 16 reflected on his use of flexible student groupings, 'I think the students found it interesting . . . They love learning, I think they want more strategies like that.' During the trainings, another teacher approached the authors and said, 'These [strategies] are definitely things I can do.' Following the trainings, a teacher reflected, 'I will learn about the learners' diverse needs and look for possible intervention strategies to cope with them positively.' Participants in the trainings represented eight schools that are widely spread throughout the region. The varied teacher representation increased the capacity-building potential for the district as a whole to support students with disabilities in primary classrooms.

As evidenced from our findings, the trainings had an immediate impact on developing capacity. Another important consideration of this work relates to continued progress and sustainability of inclusive practices. The continuation of teacher trainings has the potential to support Kenya in realising their national commitment to developing a sustainable system of inclusive education. As evidence of shifting attitudes, Participant 17 reported, 'SNE (special needs education) students are waking me up. Inclusion has lit a fire in our school. We need to join together for SNE.' If attitudes were to continue to develop across Kenyan schools, it would open up new possibilities and lead to ongoing reform towards inclusive education. Taken together, these data evidence that inclusive teacher training leads to new and potentially sustainable considerations for developing an inclusive system of education.

Sustainability

Our discussion of sustainability begins with a reflective comment from a representative from the Ministry of Education in Nairobi following the closing of the teacher trainings,

We need to make changes in the Ministry in regards to teacher training. We don't do anything like this. We have trainings where people talk and talk. There is no interaction. Nothing ever happens. Teachers go back to their schools . . . We also need to think about how to provide this type of trainings to all teachers.

The above quote shows that the Kenyan government is recognising new directions in education, teacher education, and offering governmental support to local educators. Further discussion with this representative and the participants led to these trainings being recognised as national certification for professional development, increased opportunity for promotion, the potential to participate in the national curriculum development process, and to serve as Teachers as Trainers.

Further evidence shows teachers actively taking up the government's approbation for the development of ongoing inclusive practices. Looking beyond the scope of these introductory trainings, one teacher asserted, 'Schools should have [an] inclusion facilitator to be the one who briefs teachers on inclusive practices. The facilitator needs to work with the head teacher.' This reflection represents ideas for sustainability well beyond the introduction of initial strategies.

Six months following the trainings, an EARC representative reported that he was asked to facilitate trainings in Nairobi on the topic of EARCs and steps in developing communities of practice. In another electronic communication, the EARC shared progress that occurred in a school where teachers participated in the trainings, ' . . . We are

celebrating the best performance of two disabled girls, this has given our school good publicity . . . the learnt strategies were [a] major contributor to this success. In return we have an influx of new admission . . . ' Consistent with the literature cited above, our findings show that many students with disabilities were not previously accessing primary school classrooms. At the time of writing, a local EARC corresponded that enrolment had increased to a point where 'learners are congested and we cannot admit anymore . . . Our major challenge now is six spacious classrooms'. Aligned with International Collaboration goals in the UNCRPD, the EARC representative has requested that collaborative efforts addressing education continue within this established partnership.

Discussion

Moving beyond barriers to the development of an inclusive education system in Kenya, this section provides a discussion about evidence of inclusive practices in action, capacity-building, and sustainability. The findings above describe a significant step in the development of inclusive pedagogy that focuses on all students of the classroom community without segregating students on the basis of disability. The fact that teachers were able to consider these new instructional approaches and apply them differently suggests that they are thinking about the needs of the students in new ways. These pedagogical choices are aligned with considerations from Universal Design for learning (Rose and Meyer 2002), Multiple Intelligence Theory (Gardner 1985), and other best inclusive instructional practices that require teachers to know and understand their students' learning styles in order to provide more access to academic content. Teachers' uses of inclusive teaching pedagogy represent a shift away from the transmission model described by Freire (1970) that has been the dominant ideology driving instruction in Kenyan schools.

Our findings challenge criticisms of inclusion and the notion that attitudinal barriers preclude any efforts to effect change in practice. Positive teacher interpretations and outcomes described from this brief set of trainings directly support that moving beyond negative attitudes towards inclusive education is possible, as is improving attitudes towards accommodating students with disabilities when evidenced in practice. These data represent that teachers' had highly positive reflections on the effectiveness of the trainings and the use of inclusive instructional strategies, which directly translated to positive outcomes in student performance. Recognising that this was an exploratory effort, Kenyan teachers requested that existing training models be revised and that more training aimed at supporting students with significant disabilities be organised. Teachers also recognise that inclusion needs support and teacher leadership (e.g. teachers training teachers, inclusion facilitators, and administrative support) to be successful.

Taken together, these elements provide evidence that the barriers to the development of an inclusive education system are permeable, and subject to change. It cannot be overstated that factors influencing the prevalence of disabilities often intersect in their complexities, and mutually reinforce patterns of disadvantage and oppression. If these patterns of oppression are not disrupted, tangible, replicable and sustainable realities of Article 24 will remain illusory. As evidenced above, one way of doing this is co-constructing inclusive education strategies through capacity-building and collaboration with local teachers. The trainings described were presented by the authors acting as facilitators in a co-teaching model. Kenyan primary school teachers

participating in these trainings independently recognised the co-teaching dynamic as successful, leading them to consider applications to their own practice. When one teacher was asked if she would consider using a co-teaching model (see [Table 2](#)) in a maths class for primary and special school students working on the academic content, Participant 13 responded, ‘I am ready to do it. I think it is good.’

As we introduced inclusive strategies, we hoped that teachers would modify them to fit the needs of their students. We observed teachers taking up these strategies and modified strategies in ways that fit the cultural contexts of their classrooms. In this case, teachers’ application of diverse instructional strategies through culturally relevant methods may represent an example of sharing best practice among the international community. It may also suggest an important departure consistent with decolonising approaches because collaborations directly benefited local populations (Israel et al. 1998; Stanton 2014) as reported by teachers. In this way, we hope as authors and researchers that we were acting as allied others (Rogers and Swadener 1999) who valued local ways of knowing, while teachers acted as experts or authorities in their classrooms.

Evidence points to the immediate efficacy of four introductory teacher trainings over a 10-day period; however, sustainability of inclusive practices remains a priority for project stakeholders. The Ministry shared an interest in developing a sustainable inclusive education system that could be replicated throughout Kenya. Following multiple days of observing and participating in teacher trainings and visiting various classrooms, one Ministry representative commented that ‘this [teacher training] process was something I have never seen before, and [I] feel it is extremely replicable’. She expressed interest in this model because trainings were action oriented, occurred within existing school resources, and were not time intensive. She also observed that inclusive strategies were modified and implemented by teachers. To be clear, the Ministry’s support of these trainings is not to suggest that this model is a one-size-fits-all approach to inclusive education. We recognise that the scope of this project is context specific and by no means comprehensive. What it does offer is one approach for consideration. Kenya is a heterogeneous country with many sources of indigenous knowledge and various perspectives on disability. Therefore, effective teacher trainings in urban Kisumu would vary from our trainings in rural western Kenya, and vary still in the capital Nairobi or in coastal Mombasa. The replicable cornerstone of the trainings is the engagement with local stakeholders with inclusive education at the centre of the project, and teachers modifying and implementing strategies that fit the cultural contexts of their classrooms and increase access to education for students with disabilities.

Critics continue to debate the meaning of inclusion and its corresponding practices (Fuchs, Fuchs and Fernstrom 1993; Landrum, Tankersley and Kauffman 2003). Disagreement and medicalised interpretations of disability have formed attitudinal barriers to inclusion that can be seen worldwide (Meekosha 2011). In Kenya, this understanding has directly translated into segregated practices that adversely impact the opportunities available to students with disabilities. From a disability studies’ perspective, Mukuria (2012) claims that a shift in perspective is needed in order for children with disabilities to have more access to Kenyan schools. He argues that the traditional African understanding of ‘disability as a curse’ needs to shift to a strength-based perspective if there are to be any substantial educational changes within Kenya (Abosi 2003; Ihunnah 1984; Mukuria 2012, 3; Mutua and Sunal 2012; Sapon-Shevin 2012).

African cultural strengths related to community and Ubuntu represent the possibility for new interpretations of disability to emerge.

The results of this study suggest that developing inclusive attitudes towards students with disabilities is not linear. In other words, attitudes are a critical factor that needs to shift; however, attitudes do not have to change *before* results can be observed in practice. In other words, attitudinal change could potentially be facilitated by a community of committed educators with a willingness to try inclusive strategies coupled with the understanding that diverse instructional approaches may reach a wider range of students. In this scenario, teachers are positioned as agents of change within their schools who influence attitudes towards disability on a larger community scale. Teacher trainings aimed at introducing and supporting the use of inclusive pedagogy provided teachers with additional means of including more students with disabilities. Successful inclusion of diverse students was evidenced by increased attendance, participation, and performance by students with disabilities. Simultaneously, teachers reported more positive attitudes and preparedness as a result of professional development supporting inclusion. New considerations for teacher training provide one clear avenue for building teacher capacity to increase access for students with disabilities in Kenyan classrooms. As the Kenyan government is in the process of asserting new directions in education, promise is seen for the development of an inclusive system of education that is founded on cultural strengths, and driven and sustained by local communities of practice.

Limitations

One obvious limitation of this project is that authors Elder and Damiani are white American outsiders working in a post-colonial Kenyan context. The authors acknowledge this limitation and addressed it in part by making every effort to enact critical decolonising and indigenous methodologies through local expert knowledge and collaboration from author Oswago and project stakeholders. However, the authors cannot be certain that they did not perpetuate neo/post-colonial oppressions. Though the authors are aware of the violent and oppressive history of Eurocentric perspectives in education in Kenya, awareness does not guarantee certain oppressions may not have been experienced by participants in the project. There is also the potential that participants felt internalised colonial pressure provide practice-affirming responses during trainings and observations. Efforts to minimise these realities were taken into consideration by giving participants opportunities for flexibility of implementation of strategies and anonymous reflection.

Similarly, all of the authors are (temporarily) able-bodied, and do not identify with any disability labels. The authors can be considered allies of individuals with disabilities; however, that does not replace the fact that the authors do not have the lived experience of living with disability in Kenya. The authors tried to decrease the impact of these limitations by implementing certain tenets of participatory action research (PAR) (Herr 1995; McTaggart 1997; Schön 1983). However, due to time and resource constraints, a more comprehensive approach to PAR (e.g. engaging participants in all aspects of the project, including publication) could have yielded more authentic, and more culturally appropriate results. An effort to incorporate a more traditional PAR project is in the planning phase, and is contingent upon future funding. Aside from limited time to implement PAR procedures, the scope of the project was very small, as it occurred over a short period

of time in one localised region of Kenya. Generalisation of findings and replication of the study would be difficult outside the region and resources affiliated with this project. Though this study does provide one example of sharing best practice within the international community, it does not reflect the breadth and depth of training that teachers would require to be sufficiently prepared to educate students with disabilities, especially those labelled with multiple significant disabilities. Trainings are, however, a positive first step.

Finally, Kenya is a country with a finite amount of additional resources available to fund education. Since students with disabilities are currently segregated into special programmes, and because there are inadequate material and financial resources, the development and sustainability of an inclusive education system remains slow. Without more government funding and ongoing international support, teachers will not receive consistent professional development on best practices in inclusive education, and a majority of students with disabilities will continue to be educated in segregated special programmes. Unfortunately, financial limitations may inhibit a more comprehensive teacher training programme that moves beyond introductory strategies to addressing students with more significant disability needs. It is important to note that the teachers who participated in these trainings also requested further training and identified the absence of such professional development opportunities as a limitation.

Implications and conclusion

Despite the presence of numerous barriers and noted limitations, the findings of the study are encouraging for Kenya. The successes documented from this exploratory study suggest that inclusive instructional practices may be expanded to other areas of Kenya, giving greater numbers of Kenyan students access to equitable participation in education while building capacity and supporting attitudinal change among Kenyan educators. Primary school teachers who completed a brief module of teacher trainings reported improved comfortability for implementing inclusive teaching strategies and including students with disabilities in primary school settings. Teachers' interest and willingness to dissolve rigid distinctions between 'primary' schools and 'special' schools and engage in co-teaching methods suggests that a new and even more inclusive ideology is emerging in Kenyan schools.

Taken together, the low resource demands of providing training, combined with positive training outcomes, such as increased enrolment of students with disabilities and improved student participation and performance, lend support to newly identified government considerations about how to share and further develop teacher training on a national scale. Aligned with government initiatives and international mandates, the findings identified in this paper have the potential to inform how inclusive pedagogy can be incorporated into new teacher preparation programmes and be provided to in-service teachers through professional development trainings. Moving beyond legal mandates and attitudinal assessments, the outcomes of this study demonstrate that in a short time and among a small sample of dedicated teachers, administrators, and Ministry officials, a culturally responsive approach to implementing inclusive learning strategies proved beneficial for meeting the needs of diverse primary school students in western Kenya. Additionally, from a social justice and human rights' perspective, this study might also develop an expanding awareness and acceptance of disability as human diversity that contributes to more positive cultural

attitudes towards disability and inclusion. This study also has the potential to contribute to a growing body of literature about the development of inclusive education in African countries.

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Notes

1. This is the language currently used to describe special schools in the Kenyan education system which does not currently use person-first language.
2. The study by Kawakatsu et al. (2012) utilised the Ten Questions Questionnaire developed by the World Health Organization to assess children's functional ability. This questionnaire was reportedly tested for cultural validity across five countries, including Kenya (187).
3. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences builds on the idea that it is imperative to know your students such that lessons can be intentionally tailored to students' strengths and capabilities. Specific intelligences include: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and spiritual modalities.
4. Universal design principles began in architecture and expanded to pedagogical and content considerations that address access for students of all abilities. A main tenet of the Universal Design for Learning framework necessitates that teachers know their students, such that they anticipate and plan from the outset for the widest range of diverse student needs related to content delivery, materials, and engagement methods (Rose and Meyer 2002).
5. In Kenya, it is not uncommon for students to live on their school campus in a boarding-style arrangement. Lack of transportation between school and home, long commutes, and limited financial resources contribute to students living on school campuses.

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