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SPECIAL SCHOOLS AND THE SEARCH FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
Perspectives From Two Marginalized Contexts

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This study shares the perspectives and experiences of members of staff from two established special education institutions in Trinidad and Tobago on the issue of how they are responding to national calls for inclusive education. Methodology within the case study tradition included narrative analysis of responses to open-ended questions, observations, document analysis, and the critical experiences of the co-researchers. Findings reveal resilience as one characteristic displayed by the staff of special schools in addressing inclusive education. There is also a concern about whether social justice is possible with an inherited elitism. Staff identified challenges, which include building and sustaining collaborative relationships, resourcing and utilizing technology for education, culturally responsive teaching, early identification and intervention, and teacher preparation. Recommendations for moving forward include more local and Caribbean-wide practices that address culturally responsive curricula, action research-based interventions, a continuum of professional development systems targeting teacher dispositions, and public mobilization regarding the role of education in social justice.

Introduction

This paper shares the perspectives and experiences of staff from the Cascade School for the Deaf (CSFD) and the Wharton-Patrick Special School (WPS) on how they are responding to national calls for inclusive education, and how their responses might contribute to social justice. WPS serves students with emotional/behavioural and related learning difficulties (SEBDs).

Educators in Trinidad and Tobago remain unconvinced that policymakers are providing the means and ways to effectively meet the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Conrad & Brown, 2007). This has been viewed as a lack of will on the part of policymakers rather than a lack of money (Brown & Conrad, 2007;

Worrell, 2006). Yet, initiatives of the Ministry of Education (MOE) expect regular and special schools to be partners in the inclusive process. This position is perceived to be reasonable regardless of the resources provided to support inclusive practice. It is the teachers and school leaders' challenge to generate a positive and responsive environment that determines the success of inclusion and social justice (Gause, 2008).

Key Concepts

Inclusive education

As Caribbean and Trinbagonian [from Trinidad and Tobago] educators and special educators, we might view "inclusion" as a meeting of rivers and the seas. Here, currents that represent human rights and capital, social justice, meritocracy, and economic productivity meet, merge, and displace. Within these cross currents we seek to delineate between the rhetoric and the reality of inclusive practices; more specifically, disability inclusion.

We celebrate the case for addressing exclusionary practices based on race, ethnicity, social class, gender and orientation, religion, and age. Indeed, we applaud the recognition that inclusion and inclusive education are not limited to issues of persons with disabilities. However, we argue that as special educators there is need to move beyond the rhetoric of inclusive disability education to making this a reality, and to help the case for a broader conceptualization of inclusion that facilitates citizenship education committed to a democratic society. This is especially so in multi-ethnic, developing, or less developed countries such as Trinidad and Tobago. Here, we are still wrestling with a politics of difference, and the postcolonial burdens of power, privilege, and elitism—very slow in relinquishing their holds. In such a context, we need progressive educators who are committed to social action, responsive research, and pedagogy aimed at promoting a democratic society and teaching the "other" (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). We affirm that while we want progressive educators, they should not be crusaders in the classroom, but facilitators helping learners to explore values, actions, and their consequences (Banks, 2006).

These activities are just as critical to the rich academic diversity in our classrooms. For example, students should be encouraged to explore differences and to recognize that this is normal; notwithstanding the fact that for some learners, skill diversity is significant enough to warrant specially designed instruction to realize educational equality (Banks & Banks, 2006).

For purposes of this paper, we describe inclusive education as a philosophy and process of organization and teaching that addresses and responds to the diverse needs of all learners. This is accomplished through "increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities. It involves modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies" (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13). Inclusion involves the reduction and elimination of exclusionary practices in education, by creating and sustaining welcoming learning communities. Inclusion is not a place but a process that includes a continuum of student support services.

The *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994) has proven to be a significant catalyst to inclusive education practice worldwide. This statement recognizes the need for and commitment to providing education for all learners within the regular education system. It further states that children with disabilities or significant academic needs and skills must have access to regular schooling and child-centred pedagogy.

The co-researchers recognize the diverse interpretations and explanations of inclusive education, while acknowledging that their predominant perspective on inclusive education is framed by their roles as special educators.

Social justice education

The increasing recognition that inclusive education is about democratizing learning environments and the facilitation of opportunities for all students makes it a key to social justice (UNESCO, 2008). While there is no single definition for social justice, there are two main social justice theories—the individualistic or rights-based and the communitarian. Individualistic philosophies consider whether a particular set of policies are acceptable and fair in serving a person. Communitarian philosophies consider whether policies serve the interests of a defined group with a shared sense of community. Neither of these two sets of social justice principles relates directly to students with disabilities. In an effort to address this, Christensen & Dorn (1997) argue for a relational approach. This perspective is based on a comprehensive understanding of the history of discrimination and privilege against people with disabilities and differences. The relational approach asserts that it is in the quality of relationships that we identify justice or the lack of it.

Understanding the Contexts

The Special Schools

In Trinidad and Tobago, as elsewhere, philanthropists and religious institutions have led the journey towards social justice by addressing the special and educational needs of persons with disabilities since 1943. In its 1966 Education Act, Trinidad and Tobago included a statement on provision for students with handicapping conditions, and in 1981 the Special Education Unit was formed. This Unit supervised the more established special schools like the CSFD (1943), Santa Cruz School for the Blind (1952), Princess Elizabeth School for the Physically Handicapped (1953), WPS (1958), Audrey Jeffers School for the Deaf (1967), and the Lady Hochoy Homes/Schools for the Mentally Retarded (1961). When the Pointe-a-Pierre Government Special School was developed in 1988, it was subsumed within the Unit's authority (Conrad & Conrad, 2007).

Over the last decade, the Unit has been incorporated into the Student Support Services Division (SSSD). This comprises Guidance and Counselling, School Social Work, and Special Education/Diagnostic Prescriptive Services (Trinidad and Tobago [T&T]. Ministry of Education [MOE], 2004). All institutional and private special schools are now supervised through the SSSD.

Cascade School for the Deaf (CSFD)

Reverend Frederick Gilby and a local team that included the then Anglican Bishop, Arthur H. Anstey, have been identified as the visionaries responsible for the school's founding. This followed the establishment of the Trinidad Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb in 1942. The CSFD was named for its location at Cascade Road, Cascade—a suburb of Port of Spain.

It is a two-storied structure with an additional west wing that includes residential facilities, sewing, and information technology services. CSFD caters for approximately 114 students with hearing impairments (SWHIs) and 25 special education teachers. The school and its related host institution, the Trinidad and Tobago Association in Aid of the Deaf, have contributed significantly to educational development nationally and have produced outstanding pioneers and educators. It has led the integration movement towards inclusive movement in the Caribbean for over 30 years (Paul, 2008).

Wharton Patrick School (WPS)

This was established within the country's only psychiatric hospital as the School for the Mentally Handicapped. It was subsequently named the Wharton-Patrick School after its two founders—Mildred Wharton, a volunteer; and Dr. Nesta Patrick, a celebrated pioneer in social work, education, and child welfare throughout the Caribbean.

Students attending WPS may be: (a) patients of the psychiatric hospital, (b) students from regular primary schools on short-term intervention, (c) children referred by the Child Guidance Clinic, or (d) from a growing number of walk-ins. Students generally exhibit serious emotional/behavioural disorders (SEBDs) and related mild to moderate learning difficulties, and/or pervasive developmental disorders.

In 1990, WPS was relocated outside of the hospital to better serve regular schools with, or at risk of, SEBDs. The original building has undergone significant redesign, and now is a two-storied building with two additional annexes. WPS has established itself as a resource centre for behaviour and classroom management. As with the Cascade School for the Deaf, it has earned a reputation for outstanding staff and pioneering efforts.

National Efforts

The shift in special education from a humanitarian and charitable to a rights-based/social justice paradigm emerged with the establishment of the Special Education Unit. It signalled an emphasis on resource development and public accountability. The road to this point was paved by the efforts of informed parents, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and educational pioneers including Lydia Harper and Wallace Pedro with education of the Deaf; John Knox and Errol Pilgrim with the Blind; Claris Manswell with the Physically Handicapped; Nesta Patrick with the emotionally disturbed; and others like Eileen Guilleaume in Tobago.

In the mid-1980s, a few special educators accessed key reports and aggressively disseminated these. This strategy helped to shape professional opinions and actions. Among such reports was the Marge Report (1984), which estimated significant percentages of students with disabilities needing urgent intervention. The CIDA/University of Manitoba's Sensitization Special Education Project (1987–1990) and the collaborative project involving The Association for Special Education (TASETT), the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA), and the University of Sheffield further mobilized teachers and jolted teacher education initiatives towards exploring and addressing

postcolonial relationships and understandings regarding social justice and education.

The MOE responded with a national consultation, which emphasized a philosophy that students with special needs have the right to "full opportunity for self development in a wholesome educational environment" and equal education treatment in the "most productive and least restrictive environment" (T&T. National Consultation on Special Education, 1990, pp. 57, 58). A subsequent education policy paper (T&T. National Task Force on Education, 1994) echoed the earlier report's appeal for prevention, multi-professional assessment and intervention, and decentralized services. The 1990 report articulated as its mission the mainstreaming of children with special needs—except for severe cases. Subsequently, the MOE's 2004 report on the development of education in Trinidad and Tobago asserted the government's commitment to a socially inclusive education system.

Despite these laudable efforts, education remains stymied by: (a) a sluggish bureaucracy, inadequate teacher preparation, and ineffective leadership (Brown & Conrad, 2007; Worrell, 2006); (b) complications of educational funding and failing curricular delivery (Lavia, 2007); and (c) a conflicted national philosophy ensnared by meritocracy and economic inequalities (Armstrong, Armstrong, Lynch, & Severin, 2005).

One is reminded that special education is not just the maintenance of the status quo but, as all education, about preparing the nation's children to be active partners in society and in nation building. As such, all teachers are transformative leaders, advocates, and agents of change. Schools, then, are communities where models of democracy and social justice are nurtured (Gause, 2008).

As in any community, challenges abound. The more resilient teachers respond to these with creativity and energetic style, engaging students about their feelings and giving voice. Such teachers also use critical observations, transform their assignments, and reflect on their own mission as teachers (Nieto, 2005).

International Efforts

The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) emphasized parental right to educational choice (Article 26 (3)), affording a basis upon which parent groups and educators may seek equal accessibility to schooling. With the proclamation of the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981) came the exploration of its theme of full participation and equality.

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) went further, supporting inclusion as the preferred educational practice for students with disabilities. Yet it emphasized value for the services of the special schools as valuable resources for the development of inclusive schools. The staff of these special institutions possess the expertise needed for early screening and identification of children with disabilities:

> Special schools can also serve as training and resource centres for staff in regular schools . . . or units within inclusive schools - may continue to provide the most suitable education for the relatively small number of children with disabilities who cannot be adequately served in regular classrooms or schools. (Item 9, p. 12)

The Statement identified new and expanded roles, including the provision of professional support to regular schools, and aligning curricular content and method to the individual needs. More recently, in 2006, the UN passed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities—of which Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory—unambiguously supporting inclusive schooling.

Information Gathering and Analysis

We used a qualitative dual case study to explore the perceptions, experiences, and recommendations of staff at two special schools. We describe this as an intrinsic case study since the two schools that we focus upon are within two miles of each other, and both have long traditions working with the community and other regular schools. Both cases are bounded by the time of the data collection (November to May 2008), geographic location (in Trinidad), and in their programmes that offer special education services (Creswell, 2006, Stake, 1995).

The schools had shared their perspectives on inclusive education and social justice at a symposium in November 2008 on inclusive education hosted by the Special Education Committee of TTUTA, at which the primary researcher was the feature speaker. The perspective from the CSFD was informed by data from the M.Ed. thesis of one of the co-researchers of this paper. Following the symposium, because of the completeness of the contributions of the CSFD and WPS presenters, they were invited to collaborate with the primary researcher to write a paper.

Further, they were asked to seek responses from 19 respondents to three guiding questions:

1. How is your school best responding to inclusive education expectations?

2. What are the major challenges you face in providing services?
3. What are your recommendations for facilitating a socially just education for students with special needs?

At the time of the data analysis, four responses from one special school were unaccounted for. However, the opinions of four other respondents—experienced regular education teachers working with special school students with disabilities—were included in the analysis. Subsequently, through documents analysis, a group meeting, and numerous revisions, narratives were developed. In our examination and interpretation of the data, we were guided by the Data Analysis Spiral approach (Creswell, 2006). One of the researchers is knowledgeable about both schools. He taught at and was a principal at one, and has a good working knowledge of the other, based on his former roles as president of the Association for Special Education and chair of the Special Education Committee, TTUTA. The two schools are just about a mile apart and historically have also enjoyed a close collaborative relationship. All researchers know each other and have articulated a high level of trust with each other and the conclusions of the study.

We used crystallization through multiple forms of data collection and representation, including collaborative poetry, to ascertain and illustrate trustworthiness of the data and findings (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson, 2000).

Results and Discussion

In response to the first guiding question: *"How is your school best responding to inclusive education expectations?"* the narratives reveal a basic sense of satisfaction that they were doing their best given the situation and resources. Both schools saw their success in terms of facilitating social justice through facilitating inclusion where appropriate.

Following a prompt by one reviewer, the co-researchers decided to explore the respondents' interpretation of "inclusion," and so reviewed comments and solicited clarification in this regard. Four respondents limited their concept of inclusion to meeting the specific and individualized needs of students within their schools. The analysis reveals that 11 of 19 respondents interpret inclusion as a welcomed encompassing of minority or oppressed groups into society and schools, with an emphasis on students with disabilities or at risk of such disabling contexts. Among indicators of a broader interpretation of inclusion are statements alluding to: (a) the role of dispositions and teacher education in accommodating learner differences; (b) school leadership commitment

to all learners in their schools as communities, including immigrants; (c) the need for culturally responsive pedagogy; (d) co-ed versus same-sex schools; (e) pervasive elitism; (f) notions of successful schools versus those identified as warranting "performance enhancement programming;" and (g) those prestigious schools where behavioural problems and academic difficulties appear to be invisible or hidden. The other respondents portray inclusion as more directly an issue linked to accommodating students with disabilities in regular schools.

Essentially, the narratives indicate a consciousness that while the respondents were committed to getting their charges engaged in non-segregated schooling, they were mindful of a bigger picture—their role as special teachers in the identification and classification of student differences as deficits; how this related to the students' self worth; the distribution of resources; and the rejection of difference as normal, even desired.

CFSD and WPS accept the concept of including students with disabilities into regular education, as well as those who are without disabilities into segregated settings. They share a commitment to facilitating these practices. They also consider social justice to be synonymous with an adequate and effective approach to inclusive education. Staff, however, distinguish between the rhetoric of inclusive education and the commitment to a systematic inclusion of students, along with adequate and sustainable support services: "*Without adequate services it's just talk—not inclusion*" (WPS2).

As far as CSFD is concerned, they have been addressing issues of inclusive practice and social justice long before these terms "*became fashionable*" [CSFD1]:

> *It was just the honorable thing to do . . . to ensure that you were not keeping back your students. After all our country has benefitted from leaders at the highest levels who were deaf or hearing impaired. Remember Eric Williams?* [CSFD]

Support units or mainstream units serve as the major strategy for addressing inclusion. These units provide critical support to academically and socially integrate students. Where a support unit has been established within a regular school, the school is deemed the "host" school. Students who satisfy criteria developed by the teachers of CSFD are mainstreamed. These include: visible and viable parent support, effective sign language and oral speech, and being less than eight years old for initial integration. The attitudes and dispositions of regular teachers at the host schools play a critical role:

> *Teachers were welcoming to the children and quite willing to make additional efforts to accommodate their needs. Some even wrote notes to the parents of deaf students inviting them to Parent/Teacher conferences*. [CSFD]

In sharing their best interventions, CSFD identifies several stories of successful inclusion. One 15-year-old boy with very little oral speech, and who gets "*terrible grades in all academic subjects*" is celebrated. He is given the pseudonym Jaheem. A poem is developed to share his story:

Jaheem
loves life dancing
and "signing" [American Sign Language] his success
yet little oral speech frustrates
his goals

Language
Comprehension
and representation
remains the biggest challenge
for him

Know though,
that he affirms
his survivor spirit . . .
making bridges anchored with smiles
and hope

We fear
that his hunger
for learning will soon end
Successful inclusion needs more
than hope

We use
student centered
Curriculum that is
Total and Culturally rich
Because

We know
Ability

is ONE of many doors
denying inclusive space to
Jaheem

Respondents share that Jaheem uses Sign Language and Total Communication effectively and dances with the school choir in the Parang Competition [Music, sung mostly in Spanish at Christmas time, which reflects the strong Hispanic colonizing influence] despite ongoing challenges:

> *He has not had life easy–his father is incarcerated, his mother long gone from his life. Yet he has developed the social understandings and signing skills that allow him to communicate effectively with both hearing and deaf people. His smile is always infectious, and students and teachers alike describe him as "fun to be with." He was also the first prefect [student leader] that is hearing impaired at the school.* [CSFD]

Like Jaheem, most students at one such support unit shared the view that they neither felt lonely nor isolated, but bonded to each other. Some were confident enough to teach Sign Language and befriend their hearing peers and teachers.

At WPS, staff portray inclusive education practice and the aim of social justice as "*efforts in progress*":

> *Our students are perceived as "being mad", "acting mad" or just "too bad". Indeed schools, society, and often their own parents feel threatened and burdened. So for us the main job is marketing hope and social skills development. Our main strategies for social justice remain information sharing, advocacy, and establishing positive collaborative relationships with parents and schools.*

Service is afforded to regular schools on request. WPS identifies its success with in-service training, advisory services, and short-term withdrawal of students at risk. This applies when a student is exhibiting behaviours that pose a threat to self or others. A behavioural intervention plan is determined in collaboration with the referring school. This generally will involve staff at the school also participating in some specific training, and a collaborative response to the problem that involves the parents and the student. Often these services warrant a further referral to the Diagnostic Specialist or SSSD.

The WPS staff identifies a student named Peter as one of their successes and makes a case for his inclusion through poetry:

For Pete's sake
we ask a place
In your classroom so that
He can practice his social skills
And grow

"For Peace's sake"
You say "No . . .
disruption will follow;
Class . . . School will deteriorate
besides . . .

The teachers
are not ready--
Support is not available--
Parents might protest his presence
You see."

For Pete's sake
We ask that
you include him and we
will provide support, resources . . .
training . . .

"Well maybe . . .
I'll talk with staff.
No promises! Don't quote me . . . "
But it's 'bout the teachers not Pete
You see?

WPS1 shares that Pete's early life was marred by a string of events and circumstances that negatively impacted on his development. By age 14 he had been incarcerated at the Youth Training Centre:

> *The magistrate deemed him "beyond control" and so had him remanded to the facility. We have been advised that he is now better adjusting to his situation.*

While WPS celebrates its growing relationships with some regular schools, they express caution that these schools are often less likely to welcome the students in most need of social inclusion, namely "*those with a history of violence or combined behavioral and developmental difficulties.*"

About Resilience and Advocacy

In response to guiding question 2: *What are the major challenges you face in providing services*? CSFD identifies the following: (a) host school relationships; (b) curriculum, pedagogy, and communication link; (c) screening, assessment, and early intervention; (d) professional development; and (e) use of technology in education. WPS identifies its primary challenges as relating to host school relationships [which they refer to as partner schools], curriculum, and pedagogy. Other challenges are the: (a) pervasive shortage of staff at the facility, (b) difficulties pairing SEBDs and at-risk students with positive peer models, and (c) public/parent education and partnership development.

Host school relationships

Both CSFD and WPS are sensitive to their host school context, the regular teachers' dispositions and attitudes, and the behaviour of regular peers. There is a pervasive perception by parents and teachers of the deaf that SWHIs are welcome if they do not pose learning or behavioural challenges to the host school. With SEBD students that is a given, so resistance is high. Regular teachers appear to be more tolerant of SWHIs rather than committed to being more responsive to the students or changing their teaching styles. Paul (2008) notes the opinion of one parent recorded in an earlier paper that if it took a lot of effort to get the child hearing impairment included, the regular teacher lacked commitment.

For WPS, the dispositions of teachers at partner schools are influenced by fear of violence, disruption, and negative models to their regular students. Further, such students often reflect an intersection of factors including: (a) inadequate or inappropriate parenting skills, (b) abuse and neglect, (c) family disruptions, (d) poor academic achievement, (e) poor social skills, and (f) few social ties and mixing with anti-social peers. These nourish the view that "*students with behavioural difficulties handicap the learning of others, pose a threat to themselves or the school's image, and make parents uncomfortable*" (WPS1).

Another challenge for CSFD is poverty of space:

> *In one instance, the unit is within the school, but it is actually half of a typical class space, located next to the toilet. It provides no reprieve from the noise of other classes separated by only a chalkboard*.

Culturally responsive pedagogy

This is not referring to ethnicity but to the marginalized cultures of the hearing impaired and the emotional/behavioural and academically challenged.

For SWHIs, their first language is Sign Language. With the paucity of training and development in this area, there is a generated sense of inadequacy in higher-order literacy skills; with a resultant and serious challenge in Language Arts and Social Studies. Also, SWHIs are largely visual learners. Interpreters aim to provide the visual "equivalent" of the teachers' instruction.

Some educators of the Deaf view inclusion as more exclusive for children who are deaf, and advocate that SWHIs should receive direct instruction from trained Sign Language teachers (Cohen, 1994).

WPS staff assert that there is a need for biblio-therapeutic and responsive material that is geared both to the reading and emotional levels of students. Such materials should also engage the reader with situations that include issues and model appropriate behaviours. Regular education teachers need to be more sensitive to home contexts typified by single parents, sibling-parenting, drugs, and violence, among other factors.

An inclusive environment must also be nurtured through leadership, access to needed resources, and a caring community, which is not limited to the school context:

> *Too many of our students are all alone emotionally. They do not feel as if they belong to a community. Even when they are welcomed at WPS or a partner school, there is an ongoing tension about what happens when they leave school. Our system needs to ensure that appropriate education and support is continued as needed.* [WPS]

Teacher preparation and professional development

Both schools agree on a critical need for teacher education. They applaud the efforts of The University of Trinidad and Tobago's (UTT) pre-service, generalist special education programme. However, CSFD and WPS voice the need for specialist training in their respective areas, and in-service training of experienced teachers in regular and special schools.

With the discontinuation of The University of the West Indies' (UWI) Certificate in the Teaching of the Hearing-Impaired, there are no courses in the Education of Deaf Students available, nor is there ongoing professional development for already trained teachers of the Deaf. Recently, the MOE added "Assistant Interpreters" to secondary schools

where SWHIs are integrated, in the absence of professional training programmes and standards.

The situation is similar with WPS, with no initial training and professional development programmes for the education of SEBDs. Further, WPS has had only 50% staffing for more than 5 years. Only one of the three staff members has completed professional training in the area. The competences of the other two have been nurtured and shaped by their commitment to teamwork and ongoing staff development, led by the principal:

> *We too need training! And we need seasoned, well-qualified teachers who can earn the respect of regular ed teachers; many who oppose the inclusion of special needs students into their schools.* [WPS1]

WPS is also concerned about the difficulty of recruiting teachers in the area of behavioural difficulties. With no difference in remuneration for special school placement options, they claim that special education teachers are generally more attracted to "safer student populations."

Sense of community. Both CSFD and WPS express views of feeling marginalized as a community of students and teachers. CSFD shared that the absence of sign language in local television programming, particularly public information, "*suggests that SWHIs are unimportant*":

> *Too often budget speeches, hurricane warnings, important news bulletins are unsigned and uncaptioned. No wonder our students see us as the "other" and build their own sense of community. Unfortunately we the teachers get caught in the middle*. [CSFD]

A particular concern of CSFD pointed to safety and emergency concerns. CSFD posits that school and public safety concerns warrant a system that provides visual alerting devices for emergency situations.

WPS holds that the community at large needs to take greater responsibility for helping decrease the rising incidence of violence, insensitivity, and lack of accountability. They assert that schools and students are reflections of the broader society; and appropriate values, dispositions, and attitudes by students are inextricably linked to the community. Society itself and, by extension, the MOE seem to be portraying such disabilities as "collateral damage."

Screening, early intervention, and assessment

This is also a priority area for both schools: "*We cannot continue with crisis intervention and ignore both the contributing factors and early signs*" (WPS3).

The lack of either a national system of screening to determine deafness at birth (or at least within three months of birth) or a national Parent Support Programme for parents of deaf children results in parents being unsure of what to do and where to go to get help:

> *In the meantime, the most valuable years of language learning and development would have been lost, and that, really, is the disability—deafness without language*. [CSFD]

Nor is there any locally available language development intervention programme for pre-lingual infants with hearing impairments that make use of current research findings and advances in modern technology. Unaddressed deafness places the child with hearing loss at a steep and distinct disadvantage: "*From quite early, many . . . are set on a path to low self-esteem, academic and socialization problems in the short to medium term*" (CSFD).

Routinely, national tests are designed with the hearing child in mind and exclusive of the needs of SWHIs. There is an urgent need to develop a system that allows those who are grading examinations to identify SWHIs. Paul (2008) contends that nowhere is this more glaring than in the section of the English examination papers that tests Poetic Language and its interpretation. In these papers, deaf students are confronted with onomatopoeia, and other aural/oral poetic devices for which they have had absolutely no corresponding schematic systems.

The Way Forward

With regard to question 3: *What are your recommendations for facilitating a socially just education for students with special needs*? three themes emerge from the narratives: culturally responsive research and pedagogy; teacher education and in-service training; and a National Centre for early identification, intervention, and support.

Culturally responsive research and pedagogy

Both CSFD and WPS urge the need for research that addresses local concerns and needs. For CSFD, this should urgently address the teaching of English as a second language and a Caribbeanization of signs that reflect Trinidad and Tobago and Caribbean words and phrases. WPS proposes the use of action-based collaborative research by special and regular schools on the efficacy of their strategies: *"Perhaps this could be emphasized at the teachers college. We would be happy to accommodate such student teacher researchers*" [WPS3].

Other suggestions include:

- Ensuring that examinations are moderated and scripts of SWHIs are identified and marked by persons trained in Sign Language and Deaf culture [CSFD]
- Providing safe, appropriate ,and adequate learning spaces where SWHIs, SEBDs, and other students with disabilities can retreat for supplemental tuition—this might be after school and weekends [CSFD, WPS]
- Utilizing contemporary and adequate technology, particularly for communication issues [CSFD]
- Mandating that automatic suspension should go along with alternative placements along a continuum for an offending child/child with behaviour difficulties [WPS]
- Establishing the teaching of Sign Language as part of the National Curriculum [CSFD]

Teacher education

CSFD and WPS propose addressing the need for categorical or cross-categorical specialist teachers teaching in special schools or regular education teachers working or interested in working with SWHIs and SEBDs. This, WPS contends, will utilize existing experienced teachers, and also provide mentors and models for the new wave of pre-service special education teachers. WPS also made a case for shorter courses aimed at the re-education of existing special and, particularly, regular education teachers. These might include courses that:

> *enhance classroom/behaviuor management skills; review underlying philosophies and attitudes; and assert that it is the right of the child to an education that will ensure all-round development . . . not just merit based privilege*. [WPS1]

In addition, CSFD suggests a system to provide internationally accepted training and certification of interpreters for deaf citizens. Together, CSFD and WPS further suggest the need for teacher educators and policymakers to review the philosophies and policies that underlie special education. This, it is hoped, will highlight the importance of high standards in teacher recruitment and the need to have courses that explore the social construction of disability, without denying the challenges and needs evident in the academic development of students with disabilities. Teacher education and professional development for enhancing pedagogical and services organization remain critical at multi-levels—special educators, regular teachers, and administrators. However,

there is no less the need to provides courses or forums that explore how privilege and power intersect with disability and other marginalizing concepts; related meanings of inclusion; and the role of educators—including special educators—in all this.

National Centre

CSFD visualizes a centre that provides training in early screening, identification, and intervention in Sign Language and Speech. WPS, however, anticipates that such a centre should go beyond screening and early intervention, and should serve as a clearing house and database of materials accessible to professionals and parents. Such a centre should also aim at ameliorating risk factors and building resilience in the child and the family through inter-ministerial and interagency [NGOs] collaboration.

Summary and Conclusions

We note the resilience of the staff at each school, striving through collaborative practice to be resourceful advocates and educators. Staff at both schools place emphasis on their evolving relationship with supportive schools.

The differences lie with the delivery of services and the prevailing attitudes towards their student clients. CSFD has decentralized services through support units, while WPS takes a broader range of their services to the regular schools on a more personal level. Increasing the number of staff with appropriately trained specialists would readily enhance this. Modifying the work of Prouty (2007), the co-researchers strive to summarize the voices of the students at these schools through the following:

We do
not have to earn
the right to learn. It's ours.
And if because of faulty laws
Errors
of design,
And too many
places where still far **too**
many people do not care, then
for us. . .
that class
room door Is still

beyond our reach, Please know
those wrongs do not remove our right
to learn
So here
we are with you
The future is our name
And all we claim Is this:
our right
to learn.
We insist
that you respect
not subject, ignore, nor
reject by politricking
Our right!

(adapted with permission from R. Prouty, 2007)

For SWHIs, the key problems lie in enhancing communication within the students' subculture, collaboratively enhancing higher expectations of teachers, and increasing the effectiveness with their host schools. With WPS, negative perceptions and fear associated with psychiatric or developmental disorders create barriers with their partner schools. Both CSFD and WPS, however, have embraced the principle and practice of inclusive education; and reject the position that special schools are part of the problem of exclusion and cannot be partners in the process of social justice.

Regardless of these realities and barriers, CSFD and WPS note the assurance of the *White Paper* on education (T&T. National Task Force on Education, 1994) that all our citizens should be provided with the opportunity to develop their potential to the fullest.

This brings attention to the role of policymakers in providing resources needed, and to question whether this apparent apathy is a reflection of the value given to the cause and the stakeholders (Worrell, 2006). All educators should be prepared to be advocates and activists, committed to advancing the move towards socially just pedagogy. Inadequate training, inconsistent leadership, and minimal consultation with teachers plagued these efforts (Conrad & Brown, 2007).

WPS acknowledges efforts by the state towards social justice. These include the role of the SSSD in supporting inclusion models; government's active collaboration with United Nation's agencies regarding inclusive education reform; and "*the School Feeding, Textbook Rental, Transportation, Public Assistance programmes and teacher*

education" (WPS 2). The recently established University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) offers pre-service programmes leading to the B.Ed., with a specialist option in Special Education.

While we applaud these efforts, more is needed to adjust teacher expectations and attitudes if *all* are to believe that they belong in our classrooms, are valued, and are being prepared to be active partners in our democracy (Corbett, 2001). Teacher education reform should address both pre-service training and ongoing professional development programmes. Teachers should be professionally prepared to accept that all students learn, that difference is normal, and that they should take responsibility for educating all the students in their classes (Black-Hawkins, Florian, & Rouse, 2007) regardless of real or perceived learner or learning differences. Further, teacher confidence must be re-affirmed through culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Florian (2007), they must be re-convinced and even convinced that they are capable of teaching all children, through skilful teaching and knowledge of learner differences. We add to this the need for reflective practice focusing on learner differences and similarities; and an exploration of how personal philosophies inform our dispositions and pedagogy.

Recommendations

We recommend four core strategies for achieving effective inclusion and, by extension, socially just education. This revolves around a community where all are valued and actively engaged in maintaining such an environment. The four strategies are:

1. Revisiting the purpose of education and inclusive practices as an issue of social justice, and the maintenance of democracy hinged on relationships and community (Giroux, 1988, Hopkins, 1997)
2. Reviewing teacher education preparation and re-education to provide effective culturally responsive teaching and assessment (Gause, 2008)
3. Ensuring that educational leadership preparation is advocacy oriented, responsive, community-centred, and committed to transformation (Conrad & Brown, 2007; Gause, 2008; Ryan, 2006)
4. Establishing a National Centre combined with a Parent Support Network, which will serve as a clearing house for local and international research, and a resource /support centre for the students, professionals, friends, and parents of students.

A thread woven through these core strategies is community-centred collaboration. We urge the development of collaborative community-centred skills in each of the core approaches. Effective collaboration brings leaders, teachers, teacher educators, parents, and community groups or businesses together with students to achieve a socially just society and pedagogy. Collaborative practice and the four strategies proposed, while not perfect, will lead the way forward and connect the major themes emerging from the narratives of CSFD and WPS. We hold the informed view that social justice through inclusive education lies with strong visionary leadership, collaborative practice, and resource development involving all parents, community, government, and regular and special educators. Further, while we use a disability frame to explore how two special schools respond to mandated roles in inclusive education and to interpret these responses, we recognize that inclusion, though embracing of, is bigger than students with disabilities. We strive to summarize our views as follows:

We talk
Bout how every creed,
and race find an equal place . . .
Time to add learner
difference;

And to
reform teaching
to reflect value, concern
and respect for all the children
as well.

We need
Pedagogy
that is 'We Culture Rich'
Not individualistic
Other

WE must
find alternate
spaces and time to make
all learners and teachers alike
reflect

On where
we are going
with "we and them" schooling.
Look closer at this inclusion
Ole talk.

Are we . . .
assuming that
equality in place
brings equity in citizenry . . .
for all?

Ella!! [calling witness to Ella Andall, calypsonian – Missing Generation (see Appendix)]
Thank you sister.
Missing Generation
is a condemnation
Of us
Elders.

[sigh] Do we
the Colonized
handicap our learners
with labels of worth rather than
freedom?

[long pause/final appeal]

Teachers
consider Lovelace—
first free self then "other" . . .
then see ourselves in each other
Amen?

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Appendix

Missing Generation by Ella Andall

Without truth there is no life to honor
Without love no reason to live
There's still time to change inhumane behaviour
And to learn all that we should give
This world is not our own we're just licensed custodians to guard to guide and feed our children's needs
Yet we fill their hearts with hate alone and show no direction
We daily kill the plants; we throw away the seeds . . .

There's a missing generation out there . . . who cares
Find them we better find them
they are dying disappearing everywhere' who cares
Find them . . . we better find them
Somebody better pray, somebody better pray
there's a missing generation and soon if we don't find them
they're surely going to find us one day
There's a missing generation
And soon if we don't find them there'll be no generation to care

In this world of overriding ambition,
in this world where Money must rule
Hearts of rock washed in blood and corruption
Hatred only kindness can cool
Those cries that fill the night shout out for love and salvation
Are we to hear yet turn and walk away
Or should we stand with hands outstretched to show protection
And boldly still the fears that make them stray

CHORUS

Look behind every sound of thunder
Search beneath every mound of dirt
There you'll find the price of our behaviour
hiding from the cause of their hurt
Look out there goes another lonely son or daughter
With unshed tears and smiles we've never seen
Lets all reach out and snatch just one from their Destroyer
And change that heart to one that's pure and clean

CHORUS

With one touch there is so much to offer
Feel the hearts of those yet unborn
See the smiles hear the joyful laughter
of the generation to come
Let's join our hearts and dream our dreams like our ancestors
Striving the hungry mouths and minds to feed
For this last chance to touch the soul of our creation
Let's till the ground . . . help to prepare the seed

CHORUS

Somebody better pray…somebody; Somebody better pray…somebody.