Chapter 3

SCHOOL CULTURAL INFLUENCES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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INTRODUCTION

Formal education in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a relatively recent phenomenon compared to other countries; primary schools have been in existence only for the past 50 years, secondary schools were a later development. PNG primary schools were built with the intention of serving the communities (Department of Education, 2002a). In the face of remoteness created by the rugged terrain and scatter of islands, the government intended that primary schools would be available to all children in their own communities, in the hope of achieving the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy direction as advocated by the United Nations (UN) (Webster, 2000). However, teaching experiences and observations in PNG schools suggest that children with special needs are often given less consideration or are ignored during the initial education planning, organisation and policy development and/or programme implementation. This situation, however, is contrary to the Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, which stipulates five national goals, listed by Matane (1986, p.7) as: integral human development; equality and participation; national sovereignty and self-reliance; natural resources and environment; and Papua New Guinea ways or custom. Matane points out that the goal of integral human development is important for the education of all children in PNG, acting as the foundation for achieving the other goals. In its definition of the goal of integral human development for all, the constitution also, by implication, advocates the education of children with special needs:

> We declare our first goal to be for every person to be dynamically involved in the process of freeing himself or herself from every form of domination or oppression so that each man and woman will have

the opportunity to develop as a whole person in relationship with others. (Matane, 1986, p.7)

The PNG education philosophy underlying the previous and current education systems supports this approach in its advocacy of 'Integral Human Development' and 'Education for All': as Matane insists, the education process must provide socialisation with maximum participation by all members of society, including children with special needs (1986). So doing can lead to such children's full involvement and participation in the learning process. According to Matane, deliberate action of this kind can lead to the achievement of vital national goals such as liberation from all forms of domination and oppression, resulting ultimately in a society where education is based on the principles of equity, equality, access and social justice. Thus the PNG education system is based on these goals and principles that are vital for the education and well-being of all human beings. The importance of educational reform and in particular, the reform of the curriculum, has been considered and laid down in the report titled; A Philosophy of Education for Papua New Guinea (Matane, 1986; Department of Education, 2002b). Though this vital document does not specifically mention the education of children with special needs, it does state that all children have to be educated in their own community and/or schools in line with the government's intentions.

However, influenced by their various cultural perspectives, teachers and school administrators have often thought that children with special needs should be institutionalised rather than being educated in the regular schools. Hence, from the 1970s to the early 1990s, school-aged children with special needs were often institutionalised in schools such as the Mt Sion School for the Blind in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, Cheshire Homes and the Laloki Mental Health Rehabilitation Centre in Port Moresby, and in the major hospital wards, among other facilities. However, the move towards the education of children with special needs was finally recognised in the national education system with the introduction of the National Special Education Plan and Policy and Guidelines for Special Education in 1993 (Department of Education, 1993). This was a major policy shift towards the recognition and education of children with special needs in the regular schools in PNG. With the special

education policy already in existence, the Department of Education expects all children to be educated in the regular schools, with consideration being given for some children to continue their education in other institutions, particularly for children with severe developmental needs (Department of Education, 2002a). It is, though, not mandatory that all children be educated in regular PNG schools. At the same time, teachers and school administrators play a major part by accepting children with special needs and educating them along with their 'normal' peers in the regular classrooms. It follows, then, that for the achievement of inclusive education in PNG, the school cultural features and practices play a pivotal role.

Rationale

Experience in the nation's primary schools, secondary schools and primary teachers' colleges has shown that children's learning is largely influenced by the social culture they experience at the school they attend. The learning needs of children with special needs are, through the teachers' and school administrators' actions and attitudes, often neglected, or met only minimally. The school culture is broadly defined as 'everything that is going on in the school based on the features of the school context' (Stoll, 2000). According to Dorczak (2013), school culture is defined as "a set of beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and artifacts that characterises the school and shapes its everyday functioning" (p.48). Hence, the school culture plays a major part in the inclusion of children with special needs in regular classrooms. However, teachers and school administrators in schools in PNG take the school culture for granted and the basic features and practices of the school are often ignored or depend on other sources such as the school inspectors to provide the needed direction and support. This issue is quite prevalent in both schools and the wider socio-cultural context in PNG societies. In other words, the teachers and school administrators ignore or possibly consider only pay little attention to what may be the desirable features of the school culture in order for children with special needs to be included in the regular schools.

It cannot be over-emphasised that the features and practices associated with the school culture are thought to influence the way children with special needs are educated in regular schools. It is generally assumed that most school

administrators and teachers in PNG schools have little or no knowledge about the causes and conditions of children with special needs. It is evident that even where they are taught in the regular classroom environment, such children are taught in a way that is minimal at best; most are in effect marginalised or excluded from the formal education system. Since the school cultural features and practices appear to play such a critical role, it is important to understand them and how they influence the treatment and inclusion of children with special needs in the regular national education system.

Research in Papua New Guinea Education System

Due to the nature of the case study, a semi-structured interview and a non-participant observation were used as the data collection methods. It was considered that through the use of semi-structured interviews, the participants could freely express themselves and where needed the research participants would be probed with further questions to gauge their lived experiences and perspectives about the school cultural features and practices that influence inclusive education. On the other hand, the non-participant observation was used because the researcher was interested in observing what was going on in the classrooms in the real life situation whilst the teachers were in action (Cohen et al., 2000; Creswell, 2005). A total of 19 research participants (n=19) took part in the study. The composition of the research participants was that in each of the four schools that took part in the study, three classroom teachers and two school administrators were selected. The schools were categorized into Rural 1, Rural 2, Urban 1 and Urban 2. This means that two rural schools and two urban schools were selected for the purpose of a within-case and cross-case analysis. This was done to identify similarities and differences of how the school cultural features and practices influenced inclusive education in the case study. However, the data collection was guided by some preempted themes drawn from the literature and the first author's personal experiences as a teacher educator in special/inclusive education in PNG. The criteria used to select the research participants was that both experienced and graduate teachers had to take part in the study. A judgment was made that experienced teachers must have been teaching consistently for more than five years whilst the graduate teachers were inexperienced in teaching and they came directly from the college, and were on probation yet to be

registered as teachers.

The data derived from the two methods of data collection were analysed using colour coding and thematic analysis procedures (Bouma, 1996; Bouma & Ling, 2004; Creswell, 2005). First, the tape-recorded and field notes collected from the semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations were transcribed verbatim. Once all the data was in the form of script, the the first author did colour coding and thematic analysis of all the scripts. Different colour codes were used for different themes that emerged for each of the scripts under analysis. For instance, a red colour code was used to highlight sentences, words, phrases or lines which referred to professional development and education on disabilities, a yellow colour code was used to highlight school cultural processes, and a blue colour code was used to highlight attitudes held by the teachers and school administrators towards inclusive education. The different highlighted texts were then placed in categories which included major and minor themes depending on what they attempted to describe (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In coding, the texts are formed into descriptions which are labelled and ideas that overlap and redundant are collapsed into themes (Creswell, 2005). All this was done by way of creating files and folders for all related codes, categories and themes.

Staff Understanding of Special and Inclusive Education Concepts

Teachers and school administrators have a record of holding diverse personal views and understanding about what constitutes special needs and inclusive education. Carrington (1999) found, for instance, that teachers' ideals and knowledge on special and inclusive education concepts influenced the way they were implementing the inclusive programmes in some Australian schools. In the schools under study, the teachers and school administrators' knowledge about and understanding of the concepts varied depending on whether they had been exposed to the concepts prior to the time of the study. It was shown that teachers and school administrators who had attended college training, further study opportunities and in-service training after 1994 were able to define and explain what constitutes special and inclusive education, no doubt because 1994, the year when the teachers who took courses in special and inclusive education graduated, was also the year when

the National Special Education and Policy Guidelines was implemented in primary teachers' colleges as part of the teacher training programmes.

Trained Staff Members

The findings suggested that most teachers and school administrators who had attended special and inclusive education training are able to understand the concepts from a 'whole school approach', where all children are brought together in the same school/classroom and taught. From an ecological systems perspective, the school context and the child that evolve within the microsystem are seen to be inseparable (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Thomas, 2005). Thus, Mentis, Quinn and Ryba (2005) argue that training is an important aspect and it can promote inclusive education in the microsystem. In the PNG study, however, it seemed that although the teachers and school administrators had gone through some form of training in special and inclusive education, the implementation part at the school and classroom level was demonstrably less than wholehearted. This group of teachers and school administrators was engrossed in the teaching community and their knowledge and skills were 'enveloped' with those held by the other staff members of the school microsystem. One reason for this has been identified as the lack of continuity through staff professional development programmes, whether at the school microsystem, provincial or national levels as the wider macrosystem (Beh-Pajooh, 1992). According to Ceci, Baker-Sennett, and Bronfenbrenner (1994), the individual person and the context can influence each other. Another reason is that the school leadership was not proactive towards fostering inclusive practices. Teachers and school administrators often took their prior learning for granted and therefore, their ideas were not implemented at the school and classroom levels. This grim situation was contrary to the findings in other inclusive studies, where training had a positive impact on the inclusion of children with special needs in inclusive classrooms (Buell et al., 1999; Dickens-Smith, 1995; Van-Reusen, Shoho, & Baker, 2000).

Untrained Staff Members

Conversely, teachers and school administrators who had little or no knowledge about special and inclusive education concepts were confused

when defining the terms. This group of staff members defined the concepts in terms of training, education and seeing people with special needs in their communities and schools. It was seen that teacher education and professional development programmes focusing on inclusive education were neglected. In some studies, it was seen that through teacher in-service training and preparedness full inclusion was reported to be successful (Avramidis et al., 2000). However, this was not the case in the schools that took part in the present study, which found that teacher education and professional development were minimal, or in most cases, non-existent. Due to the teachers' and school administrators' lack of understanding of the basic concepts of special and inclusive education, they appeared less able to cater for the needs of children with special needs in the regular schools/classrooms. For instance, when an experienced teacher was seen in action in the classroom, his meeting of the learning needs of the individual child with special needs through his instructional strategies and practices was extremely limited, probably as a result of shallow understanding of what constitutes special and inclusive education concepts and the different forms of special need conditions. From the ecological systems perspective, this inaction had negative ripple effects on the subsequent layer-like configuration of structures such as the mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Thomas, 2005). It was therefore strongly argued that in order for inclusive education to be successful, teachers need thorough training in how to modify the classroom structures, differentiate the curriculum and select appropriate teaching and assessment strategies to meet the needs of children with special needs (Avramidis et al., 2000).

Conceptions of special education, special needs and inclusive education

Studies have shown that teachers and school administrators conceive special education, inclusive education and special needs from different perspectives. Gender disparity in their understanding of the concepts may be quite marked: while female teachers may conceive children with special needs from the perspective of their own children and how they are treated and included in the regular classrooms (Einchinger, Rizzo & Sirotnik, 1991), male teachers may define the concepts in terms of impairments (Fulcher, 1989). Oliver (1990) found that when special needs are defined and assumed as

being real, the consequences associated with actions and practices are more likely to be real and meaningful. In short, gender seems to have a bearing on teachers' and school administrators' perceptions, which flows on to the practice. The outcome is that the female teachers appear to be more tolerant and sympathetic, in line with the charity discourse, which views children with special needs as objects of pity or compassion (Fulcher, 1989). On the other hand, most male teachers blame either the child or the parents for the difficulties the children face in the school/classroom contexts, which is perceived as aligning with the medical discourse (Fulcher, 1989) or the deficit model (O'Brian & Ryba, 2005). Other staff members in PNG study also conceive the concepts along the lines of tribal conflicts, poverty and socio-economic status experienced in the contexts under study. However, these were not definitions so much as causes of different forms of special needs and difficulties the children face. That meant generally the teachers and school administrators were not able to define properly and interpret what constitutes special and inclusive education concepts. This failure in understanding affects their practice, meaning inevitably that children with special needs are being schooled only minimally or not at all in the regular schools in PNG.

School Cultural Leadership and Organisational Practices

The school administrators, perceiving themselves as leaders with authority in school cultural contexts, feel that in discharging their leadership roles and responsibilities, they play a vital role in the schools. At the same time, the areas of school organisation, re-organisation, leading the staff, student discipline and the education reform made greater demands on the school administrators. Thomas (2005) identifies 'roles' as one of the three aspects of the microsystem in ecological systems theory. According to Thomas, these are actions and practices performed by people holding responsible leadership positions, such as teachers and school administrators. Other authors have also recognised leadership as a fundamental condition for school improvement (Portela, 2013). It is evident that the education reform introduced at the wider macrosystem level in PNG during the time of the study led school administrators to see changes and demands in their roles in the schools. School administrators were perceived not only as leaders for

others, but as bureaucrats with power, influence and superiority. Sergiovanni (2001) describes this kind of leadership as symbolic, lacking in the substance and value as a precursor for school improvement and development, which might have positive effects on the different configurations of the ecological system level (Thomas, 2005). In the process of discharging their leadership roles, the school administrators play a vital role by providing leadership and management of the schools as social communities. However, the study results suggest that the inadequate understanding of concepts of special and inclusive education has negatively affected their roles and practices in all the schools. Consequently, appropriate leadership direction and influence to promote inclusive education practices in the schools has been lacking.

School Management and Organisation

The school administrators in the PNG study seem to have been obsessed with their professional responsibilities in managing and organising their schools. In part, they see their roles as being influenced by the individual job descriptions the National Department of Education (NDOE) in the capital, Port Moresby, has formulated and imposed on them. The apparent rigidity of their job descriptions allows less flexibility in the way the school administrators execute their professional responsibilities at the school level. It appears that the school administrators are more focused on their inspections, as these determine their job continuity in their substantive positions, promotional opportunities, demotions and salary increments. They view and execute their professional responsibilities in line with their individual job descriptions as their inspection reports will be based on how well they have executed their specific roles and responsibilities. In the process of concentrating their attention on their inspections, they do not necessarily give a lot of thought to how they can effectively include children with special needs in the regular schools, so their school leadership and management practices may appear to make few changes to the school culture to accommodate the learning needs of children with special needs. The weakness probably lies in the failure of their job descriptions to mention how they can make this accommodation or even of the importance of doing so. A further suggestion is that nearly all the school administrators in the schools have little or no knowledge, training or

experience in catering specifically for children with special needs. The lack of understanding of the different forms of special needs and the special and inclusive education concepts means failure to create a school environment conducive to supporting their learning needs. In other words, the school administrators' practices have been executed as a 'school-wide approach', in which children are generally considered and taught as an undifferentiated bloc in the regular schools. Consequently the school leadership, management and organization practices do not support the flexibility and needs-based approach to an inclusive culture. The schools seem to lack the kinds of visionary leadership characteristics Deal and Peterson (1999) and Pijl, Meijer and Hargarty (1997) advocate. This is evident in the non-existence of vision, mission and school based policy statements in the schools. According to Villa and Thousand (2005), having a clearly spelled out vision and mission statement helps to foster successful inclusive practices, but such a document is non-existent in the schools in the study. However, the school administrators are aware of children with special needs being enrolled in their schools. They also endeavour to enrol children with special needs in their schools, but from the leadership perspective, support provisions towards full inclusion are simply not there.

The study results indicate the truth of the school administrators' claims to be accepting children with special needs into their schools. That means children with special needs are already in the regular schools but this acceptance of their enrolment is based on personal love, sympathy and compassion: it is based on the discourse of charity (Fulcher, 1989) and services are rendered to these children with special needs for reasons pertaining to empathy and compassion (Webb-Hendy, 1995). Nevertheless, the school administrators do not have any set criteria or programme to cater for the children's special needs in the regular schools. A culture of blame shifts the fault to the parents or the extended family members for not doing enough to meet the children's special needs. The school administrators consider they are supporting people for learning in the school contexts. The culture of blame is evident when the staff members from the schools under study collectively state that the Callan Services centre based in Mendi is not doing enough for their in-service training and other staff development programmes to include children

with special needs in the regular classrooms. Most school administrators also consider that the disabling conditions and difficulties the students face are caused by the parents and the children themselves. This view is held along the lines of the lay discourse (Fulcher, 1989). The respondents consider that parents are doing little for the education of children with special needs in the regular schools in PNG.

School Administrator and Teacher Relationships

A vital aspect pointed out in the study is the relationship between the school administrators and the classroom teachers. From the administrators' perspective, teachers are regarded as staff there to teach and discharge their professional duties according to their individual job descriptions and positions. That means the school administrators are detached from the teachers and their practices at the classroom level. Hence, the notion of skilled communicator as one of the leadership characteristics of an effective inclusive school is missing (Portela, 2013). At the same time, with the introduction of regarding the school administrators as inspectors, in line with the education reform, the administrators have come to consider themselves as education officers with the power, force, influence and right to direct the teachers in what to do. A culture of the superiority of the school administrator has developed, seeming to place them over the teachers and their professional responsibilities. In this kind of school culture, the school administrators act like 'bosses' with power and influence (Sergiovanni, 2001). Again, this means the school administrators ensure teachers work within their specific job descriptions as their inspections will be done in line with their job descriptions. This is an evidence of coercive leadership wherein changes for improvement are imposed with only minimal encouragement or effort to 'sell' them. In so doing, it is evident that the special needs of these children have been overlooked and neglected through the school administrators' actions and practices.

From the perspective of the teachers, the school administrators are viewed as authoritative figures whose decisions will affect them, positively or negatively. All the teachers therefore endeavour to build positive relationships with the school administrators. The main reason behind this behaviour is to bid for the

teachers' own benefit in terms of attaining positive inspection reports, which will determine their promotions and salary increments and avoidance of forced transfer from one school to another. In the concentration on power relations for the purpose of benefits, the vital role of executing their professional responsibilities to include children with special needs in the regular schools has been sidelined. This is also reflected in the school administrators' grudging provision of minimal help and support to the teachers who are the front line in the action. The effects on the teachers' ability to discharge their professional duties effectively to include children with special needs in the regular schools are palpable. Nevertheless, Center and Ward (1987) report that teachers are more supportive of inclusive practices when they receive adequate support from their head teachers. Webb-Hendy (1995) identifies that school cultures are making changes and inclusive practices are evident when proper leadership decisions are made and teachers are shown to be responsible for inclusion on a personal basis. However, the study finds that the kind of support and help received depends on several perspectives such as being a Christian, non-Christian, male or female school administrator. For instance, the Christian female school administrators, particularly from the church agency schools, are judged to be more approachable and to have more concern for the education of children with special needs in the regular schools than those who come from the government schools. This is a moral decision to do the right thing based on their personal convictions as well as their church doctrines and belief orientation.

School Cultural Features and Practices, and Implications for Staff

Acceptance of everyone in the school

Schools are considered to be social institutions where all children are accepted despite their differences. That used to mean children with special needs were already part of the school microsystem and rejection was limited, except for those children who were difficult to include, such as those with severe developmental disorders. However, according to the literature, what was happening in the schools could not really be called full inclusion, but rather was a manifestation of 'functional mainstreaming' that is one of the three forms of mainstreaming identified in the Warnock Report in the UK

(Webb-Hendy, 1995). In the schools in PNG, the vital aspect that was lacking was the knowledge and 'know-how', in terms of curriculum differentiation, specific teaching strategies, appropriate assessment practices, and alteration or adaptation of the school environment, to meet the specific needs of the individual children (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). The study found that most teachers and school administrators are attempting to be proactive towards promoting special and inclusive education in their schools. However, in the light of other research findings, it may be that they lack appropriate training and leadership direction to foster special and inclusive education practices (Dickens-Smith, 1995; O'Brian, & Ryba, 2005).

It was evident that though all children were enrolled at the schools, children were perceived to be detached from the teachers and school administrators. That meant children's learning needs and abilities were given very little consideration or attention; hence, the teachers and school administrators' practices were not focused on the individual child's learning needs. In the process of discharging their professional duties, there was evidence of school administrators' superiority over the teachers and teachers' superiority over the students. However, the acceptance of all children into the regular schools was based on the 'rights' principle (Mitchell, 2005). Fulcher (1989) says that the rights discourse attempts to deviate from practices associated with discrimination, exclusion and oppression. The notion of rights is also evidenced when schools accept all children, whether with special needs or not, in the regular schools. UNESCO (1994), an organisation of which PNG is a member, also advocates that all children have basic human rights to education and thus have to be recognised by being accorded equal educational opportunities in the regular schools.

However, the degree of acceptance of every child in the schools is based on individual staff members. As stated earlier, while most staff members accept all children into the regular classrooms on the basis of 'rights', others accept all children, based on personal 'sympathy and compassion' (Fulcher, 1989). These actions show that the real need to include all children on the basis of educational needs is lacking, but the inclusion of all children in the regular schools is based on the staff members' personal convictions. For instance,

others accept all children on the basis of their own masculinity/femininity and/or motherhood/fatherhood experiences. While staff members who are single tend not to have any moral or parental obligations, staff members who are parents include all children in their schools out of personal love and compassion as parents. Also, all the female staff members in the study expressed concern for the difficulties faced by all children. Other studies have reported that female teachers have greater tolerance of inclusive practices than their male colleagues (Aksamit, Morris, & Leunberger, 1987; Einchinger, Rizzo, & Sirotnik, 1991; Thomas, 1985). Therefore, the female staff members allow children with special needs to be included in their classrooms, where they endeavour to help them in the teaching and learning process. Other staff members' acceptance of all children may derive from religious perspectives or sense of obligation. Staff members who come from the church agency schools explain that children are considered as Christ's image and so they accept them into the regular schools. That means the staff members feel obliged to accept and teach all children in the regular schools. However, this action is also based on the principles of 'rights' and 'equality'. At the same time, the underlying assumption of the acceptance of children is because they consider it as their moral duty to accept all children as Christians and as part of upholding their church doctrines.

The study demonstrates that staff members who come from one of the schools under study are more supportive and proactive towards including children with special needs in their classrooms. This group of staff members is confident of their ability to make changes to their teaching approaches, assessment practices and classroom organisation to accommodate the learning needs of children with special needs. This means making changes to 'how they do things' in their classroom and the school as a whole. The influential factor that underpins this practice is the Callan Services Resource Centre that was established within the vicinity of the school. This resource centre plays an important role in teacher in-service training on how to include children with special needs in the regular schools. Therefore, it is influential in promoting and enhancing teachers' inclusive practices. Other scholars have also reported that when regular teachers and their practices are supported by special education resource specialists, their level of confidence to include

children with disabilities in the regular classrooms also increases (Gargiulo, 2003; Kauffman, Lloyd, & McGee, 1989). With the in-service training and support the staff members receive from the Callan Services Resource Centre, they feel confident to teach children with special needs in their classrooms. Jenney, Snell, Beers, and Raynes (1995) and Clough and Lindsay (1991) also find that when specialists and special education teachers become co-workers with regular classroom teachers, their confidence increases and they are more positive about inclusion. Thus, the need to attain support from the Callan Services Resource Centre is also expressed by staff members from other schools. This suggests that the work of Callan Services as a support agency is considered invaluable and thus needed by all staff members in all the schools. Unfortunately, in reality the support from Callan Services appears not to be extended to the other schools in PNG but to concentrate on only one school.

Equal valuing of all students

Equal valuing of all children was a practice that at least in theory was already in existence in the schools in PNG. The teachers and school administrators considered that all children had to be respected, valued and educated in the regular schools and classrooms. However, this was not a 'zero reject model' (Zionts, 2005, p. 7) as some children who could not be accommodated in the regular schools were still allowed to attend special schools like the Callan Services Resource Centre in Mendi. However, the study revealed three vital considerations in terms of valuing all children in the schools. Firstly, from the church perspective, staff members who come from the church schools and who are Christians are of the opinion that all children, whether with special needs or not, have to be treated equally in their teaching and learning practices. They consider that this belief aligns with the Church teaching principles and doctrines, under which everyone is loved and treated equally. Secondly, teachers who come from the government run schools are more likely to view the difficulties and hardships faced by children with special needs as things of the children's own making so they make connections to issues associated with the parents. This is the deficit and/or medical model (Fulcher, 1989). They consider that the children are at fault and the teachers'

own shortcomings and weaknesses are not acknowledged. The staff members place a certain degree of blame on the children with special needs. Holding this stereotypical connotation has a negative impact on staff practices in their efforts to meet the learning needs of children with special needs in the regular schools. Thirdly, it is suggested that there is a bias in the decisions that teachers and school administrators make when valuing and relating to children. This practice implies a 'societal worldview' in which, the study suggests, staff members exhibit a certain degree of bias and nepotism when relating to children. For instance, children who come from the staff members' own village or community or who are relatives are treated more positively than those who come from other areas. This practice also appears to have had a negative effect on the way children with special needs are treated and given learning opportunities in the schools. In part, the 'favouritism' arises because children who come from the same area or who are related to the staff member(s) listen to them and follow their instructions well, more so than those children who come from other areas or are non-relatives.

School Cultural Policies and Practices

Inclusive education is about including all learners in the regular classroom and supporting them by relevant policies and practices. The teachers in the schools consider it important to educate all children in the regular schools and the concept of giving equal education opportunities is revealed in the study. However, while all the staff members recognise and acknowledge the right of all children to an education, a gap is found to exist in their understanding of what constitutes special and inclusive education policies and practices. The results of the study suggest two major themes: 'special and inclusive education policies' and 'functional practices for the classroom'. These two school cultural practices appear to be congruent that on the basis of understanding the special and inclusive education policies, it had impacted on the staff members' practices at the school contexts.

Existence of special and inclusive education policies

The staff members in the schools seem not to be aware of the existence of special and inclusive education policies. They appear to have little idea about

whether there are already any special and inclusive education policies at the school, the Provincial Education Division, and the National Department of Education levels. The major policy is the National Special Education Plan, Policy and Guidelines for Special Education developed by the PNG National Education Board in 1993 (Department of Education, 1993). When unveiled, this policy was intended to be implemented beginning in 1994. In his capacity as the PNG Education Secretary, Tetaga (1994) advised all the education institutions in PNG through a circular that the first batch of special and inclusive education graduate teachers from St Benedict's Teachers' College in PNG would commence their teaching careers in 1994. Then in 2003 the special education policy was revised after a decade of operation (Department of Education, 2004). This policy framework was intended to be implemented from 2004 to 2013. The study, however, found that though the special and inclusive education policy was already in existence at the national level and despite the then Secretary's circularised instructions to implement the policy, many teachers and school administrators were not aware of its existence. From inference, one reason was that the policy did not trickle down to the school level through appropriate communication channels. Viewing it through the ecological systems lens, Peck and co-authors (1989) establish that inclusive practices may portray a negative ripple effect when the intended policies do not reach the intended contexts like schools. This situation was revealed by staff members who took some training on special and inclusive education, as well as those who did not. Even at the school level, there were no special or inclusive education policy documents in existence to guide the staff members' practices.

Policy development and implementation

It was seen that the teachers and school administrators did not have a good understanding of the development and implementation of the special and inclusive education policies. Mentis and colleagues (2005) argued that the development of inclusive education policies is a step towards advocating the education of children with special needs in the regular schools. However, the study noted that the vital aspect of what constitutes a special and inclusive education policy was misunderstood by the staff members. While they

understood and explained policies in terms of school and classroom rules, they seemed not to be aware of how to develop such a policy. It was seen that the school and classroom rules emphasised student behaviour, relationships and general conduct whilst in school. These, though, fell far short of being special or inclusive education policies and also there were no policy documents at the school level. Therefore, the staff members in all the schools blamed the National Department of Education and the Provincial Education authorities for not making the policies available to them. They perceived the development and implementation of special and inclusive education policies as the responsibility of the National Department of Education and the Provincial Education Division. The staff members took special and inclusive education policies for granted and they did not take personal responsibility and ownership in developing them at the school level. According to O'Brian and others (2005), schools have to develop school based policies to cater for the needs of a wide spectrum of children in inclusive schools. However, one of the major factors contributing to the inaction was teachers' and school administrators' lack of knowledge about how to develop relevant education policies.

Functional Practices for the Classroom

School curriculum in action

The school curriculum is considered to be one of the functional practices within school culture. Several authors have advocated the need for functional and applied curriculum oriented towards fostering academic, vocational and life skills in inclusive classrooms (Connell, 2004; Mitchell, 1999; Peterson et al., 1992). This is to ensure that the curriculum developed and implemented is learner centred. In PNG, a context bound influence towards school practices was the introduction of the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) curriculum in all schools. It was found that the schools had deviated from the traditional curriculum, which had been behaviourist and took a rigid approach to the outcomes-based education curriculum. This was in line with the education reform agenda that was introduced in PNG. Most staff members in the study characterised the outcomes-based education curriculum as one based on an ecological perspective. From the ecological systems theory, human

behaviour emanates from the function of the human person and the degree of interaction within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Damon & Lerner, 2006). The assimilation of the curriculum content and skills is the manifestation of this interaction that exists between the learner, the staff member and the school context. That focuses the outcomes-based education curriculum on the academic subjects as well as the practical skill pathways. However, whilst the staff members report confidence in meeting the learning needs of all children through the application of the outcomes-based curriculum, the materials/documents and content to support inclusive practices appear to be limited. The staff members depend on two documents: a syllabus and a teachers' guide. These curriculum documents are inadequate in content and the necessary pedagogical skills for effective implementation of the intended curriculum objectives and achievement of the intended outcomes. Development of more support teaching materials to enhance effective teaching and learning is necessary. The inadequate curriculum support materials and lack of professional development programmes mean teachers are under immense pressure to develop student support activities. This situation has grave effects on their practices in directing the curriculum to meet the students' specific learning needs. According to Taylor and others (1997) and Gurganus and others (1995), teacher training and preparation should precede curriculum development and implementation in order for the learners to be conversant with the required skills. But since this was not the case in the schools, the learning needs of children with special needs were not considered or were only minimally met through practices like curriculum, instruction and assessment differentiation.

Instructional strategies in action

Instructional practices play a vital part in meeting the learning needs of all learners who are included in the schools. It appears in the study that due to the outcomes-based education initiative, there was a little difference in how the graduate teachers and experienced teachers used different instructional strategies, though the graduate teachers were more comfortable with implementing the outcomes-based curriculum. One of the reasons for their positive attitude was that they had learnt how to implement the curriculum

whilst in the teacher training college, where they also took some courses in special and inclusive education and the associated teaching pedagogy. This group of teachers did seem to make use of various instructional strategies such as instructional differentiation, peer tutoring, whole class teaching, and project work. This supports the findings of a number of studies that teachers with fewer years of teaching experience were found to be more supportive of inclusion (Berryman, 1989; Centre et al., 1987; Cough & Lindsay, 1991). In one study, in Western Australia, teachers with fewer than six years of teaching experience were more supportive towards inclusion than those who had six to ten years of teaching experience (Forlin, 1995). One reason would be that all the skills they had learnt at the college were still fresh in the graduate teachers' minds and they were energetic and desired to implement them in the regular classrooms. However, the experienced teachers felt immensely pressured by the demands of implementing the outcomes-based curriculum effectively. Two main reasons were identified about this situation in the schools. Firstly, the content of the outcomes-based curriculum is complex for the teachers to absorb and implement. The style of presentation and the outline in the curriculum materials are advanced and complicated and they are by no means user friendly. Secondly, the teachers lacked the different instructional strategies that are relevant to implementing the outcomes-based education. For instance, to conduct research on the different strands and outcomes of the curriculum was deemed difficult for the teachers. They were accustomed, in the traditional curriculum, to using curriculum materials that had various pre-developed teaching strategies, teachers' questions and answers as guides, and children's activities ready for them to use in their teaching practices. The outcomes-based curriculum however, required the teachers themselves to search for appropriate instructional strategies to complement the curriculum content.

Assessment strategies and practices in action

Assessment has always been viewed as a vital and central practice in the teaching and learning process in the schools in PNG. However, there were marked differences in the way assessment was perceived and executed in the schools. The use at the time of the study of assessment based on the

outcomes-based-education curriculum (Department of Education, 2002b) meant a major shift in the way assessment was carried out. Teachers had moved from the traditional tests and exam driven assessment to an apparently more liberal ecological assessment (Mentis et al., 2005). In other words, not only were tests and exams central to the assessment practices, but assessment was also required for everything the children did, such as practical subjects and sporting skills. According to Gurganus and co-authors (1995) this was a shift towards achieving constructive, hands-on and authentic assessment and evaluation of the children's learning, drawing on different perspectives, academic as well as practical. This kind of assessment is arguably an ecological assessment that is based on the child's interaction with the surrounding environment in the form of human, physical and social relations.

It was also seen that all the staff members expressed satisfaction with the use of ecological based assessment, largely because it was liberal and fair in assessing the students' learning from different perspectives, particularly the promotion of an 'academic pathway' as well as the 'practical life skills pathway' that all children were capable of achieving. The difference identified was that while the graduate teachers were supported by their college training, the experienced teachers and school administrators were supported by their professional experiences. However, though staff members expressed satisfaction with the ecological assessment, the assessment strategies did not specifically focus on children with special needs through assessment differentiation. Conversely, instead of differentiating the assessment practices to cater for individual children's learning needs, the uniform form of assessment practices was applied to all children in the regular classroom. Thus, it seemed that this approach made no effort to cater for the needs of children with special needs in the regular schools, although it had the potential to promote inclusive practices.

Classroom management and organisational practices in action

Based on the assessment results, students are often categorised into three main groups, above average, average, and below average students. The categorisation or grouping determines the staff members' classroom management and organisational practices and promotes deficit connotations

(O'Brian et al., 2005) meaning that students not doing well in the academic subjects are 'often labeled as slow learners' and are placed in the 'below average category' whilst students with good grades are 'assumed as the gifted and talented' and are placed in the 'above average category'. It can therefore be inferred that below average students are categorised under the medical and/or deficit discourse and derogatory labelling ensues (Fulcher, 1989) implying that children thus categorised are regarded as 'slow learners' or 'children with learning difficulties'. Generally it is suggested that as a temporary measure through the classroom management and organisational practices, below average students are placed in the front seats. One reason for doing this is for the teachers to pay close and particular attention during teaching, though another is to minimise the children's being distracted by things around them, including peers. The study notes that staff members are in fact deploying some of these practices as means to include children with special needs in the regular classrooms. However, while this may be true to some degree, inclusive education is more than just classroom placement and seating. The study results are clear that the specific changes to their teaching styles, the curriculum, individualised assessment, the classroom sub-culture, and assistive tools to meet individual children's learning are lacking in the schools.

Staff Members' Attitudes Towards Students with Special Needs

Teachers' and school administrators' attitudes influence the way they perceive children with special needs and their subsequent inclusion in the regular classrooms. However, differing views and attitudes are held by the staff members in the schools, influenced by various aspects. Firstly, gender disparity influences the kind of attitudes exhibited by staff members. Studies suggest that staff members who are teachers as well as mothers, and have children of their own, tend to be more supportive of the idea of inclusion of children with special needs in the regular classrooms (Aksamit et al., 1987). However, this attitude is based on the staff members' personal sympathy, compassion and love for the children rather than on the need for 'authentic education' (Janney et al., 1995). In this discussion, authentic education is generically referred to as the assimilation of the academic and life skills

based content knowledge in the outcomes-based education curriculum. Nevertheless, despite the staff members' rhetorical acceptance of children with special needs, their actions and practices to cater for the needs of these children are minimal or non-existent in the schools. Secondly, the location of support services like the Callan Services Resource Centre plays a major part in the way teachers develop and exhibit their attitudes. Staff members in only one school expressed more positive attitudes towards including children with special needs in their classrooms, perhaps because this group of staff members is supported in some measure by staff from the Callan Services Resource Centre through in-service training programmes. In so doing, they have been exposed to some ideas on how to include children with special needs in their classrooms. Other studies, too, have found that specialist resource teachers' expertise and support can be an important factor influencing regular teachers' attitudes, actions and practices towards fostering inclusive practices (Carrington, 1999; Janney et al., 1995; Kauffman et al., 1989). Thirdly, generally staff members who have had some training in inclusive education are more supportive of inclusive education. Other studies report similar findings (Beh-Pajooh, 1992; Dickens-Smith, 1995). Therefore, it may be a useful pathway to regard training in special and inclusive practices as a necessary precedent to the implementation of inclusive education programmes.

CONCLUSION

There is evidence of four broad school-cultural features and practices in the schools: 'staff understanding of special and inclusive education concepts', 'school cultural leadership and organisation practices', 'school cultural features/practices and implications for staff', and 'school cultural policies and practices'. The teachers and school administrators in the schools generally are found to have limited understanding and knowledge about what constitutes special and inclusive education. One of the major setbacks is that they have not all been exposed, either during their initial teacher training at the college or through purposeful staff professional development opportunities, to the concepts and methods for teaching children with special needs. The fact that children with special needs are already accepted into and are part of

the education system in the schools has perhaps influenced staff members to perceive this practice in itself as inclusion. However, the literature on inclusion from the western countries argues that this acceptance is no more than 'functional mainstreaming': children with special needs are merely accepted and placed in the regular classrooms all of the time and they are allowed to take part in the same programmes as other children. The literature suggests that this practice is not inclusion because there are no adequate support provisions to meet every child's learning needs through curriculum content, instructional, and assessment differentiation practices. The major factor influencing effective inclusive practices in the schools in PNG is the limited understanding and knowledge among practising staff members about what actually constitutes special and inclusive education practices. This situation has a negative ripple effect on the features and practices of the culture within the school. Generally, the staff members' limited understanding of the principles, skills, values and assumptions associated with special and inclusive education affect their practices. The results further indicate that the special education policy, which was a centrally formulated document, has not trickled down to the school and classroom levels. Therefore, this inaction has created a gap between policy formulation, implementation and classroom practices.

Reflective Questions

1. Why is there a gap between the special and inclusive education policy and practice in the schools?

2. How can the inclusive education practices taking place in some of the schools be translated to other schools?

3. What kind of attitudes do teachers and school administrators exhibit in the schools that promote inclusive education practices?

4. How can school administrators improve the school culture so that it promotes inclusive practices?

5. What kind of relationship should teachers and school administrators have to promote inclusive practices?

6. What kind of leadership is required to promote inclusive practices in the schools?

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