DISES Highlights Inclusive Practices Around the World
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DISES recognizes the knowledge, strength, and hope that our community holds. We recognize ability, race, and gender as social constructs that can impact learners and families in powerful ways. In this session, we asked members worldwide to share insights about global research on inclusive practices and instructional strategies. Our interactive session included an esteemed panel of educators from England, Singapore, India, Kenya, and the United States who described their experiences and perspectives around inclusive practices. Our audience then interacted with our panelists in a facilitated discussion. Everyone was given access to a list of relevant resources shared by the presenters. This brief highlights the topics and resources covered in this session.

Panelist Biographies

Dr. Sonia Sawhney is an Assistant Professor with the TISS-Azim Premji School of Education at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad, India. Her research interests are in the areas of inclusive education and special educational needs, equity and social justice, child rights, and socio-emotional well-being in schools. Sonia has been an investigator/co-investigator on several research projects. She is currently carrying out studies on students' social-emotional learning and challenges in human resource development for inclusive education. **Dr. Robai Werunga** is an Assistant Professor of Special Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education, University of Massachusetts, Lowell. Her research focus is on early academic and behavioral interventions through multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Dr. Werunga's target population is students with or at risk for Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (EBD) and/or Learning Disabilities with a focus on culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners. Dr. Werunga has over 20 years of experience working with individuals with disabilities; sixteen of those years were spent working directly with students with disabilities within elementary school. **Dr. Zachary Walker** serves as the Head of Department for the Department of Psychology and Human Development (PhD) at the University College London Institute of Education (IOE). He is a Senior Fellow with the Higher Education Academy. Zachary is recognized as an expert in individual and organizational learning performance. In the last ten years, Zachary has worked with educators and policymakers in more than 30 countries on issues of diversity and inclusion, inclusive pedagogies, and innovative practice.

Summary

Dr. Sawhney shared her experience as a volunteer teacher with students with differing abilities within the Indian context. This led her to learn more about classroom management and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills associated with inclusion. She explores how we can

increase belongingness for our learners. Dr. Werunga began as a high school teacher in Kenya teaching religious studies and Swahili. She shared how Kenyan special education is focused on physical, visual, or hearing dis/abilities. It was noted that schools' classroom management practices sometimes include corporal punishment. In the United States, she moved into the special education classroom, specifically high incidence dis/abilities. Her growth as an educator focuses on training teachers in strategies and support for all learners. She now works with immigrant families by assisting them with understanding the stigma related to different abilities and learning advocacy skills. Dr. Walker shared he also started in the general education classroom and as a basketball coach. As he saw players struggling in the classroom he became interested in what we teach and how we teach. This ultimately led him to explore emergent bilinguals, global education, and special education in France, Switzerland, Singapore, and now the United Kingdom. He is now looking deeper into the impact of leadership and policy and how that drives education for all learners across the globe.

Effective Inclusive Practices

Dr. Werunga mentioned the collaborative approach to teaching to ensure those with differing abilities are able to stay in the classroom. This can be done if students receive the same information their peers are being taught but with the scaffolds and support they need to understand it. We need to prepare teachers with knowledge and skills to identify needs and provide support. Students benefit when teachers build relationships with them over time. Dr. Walker highlighted a practice he learned about in Iran whereby every course related to special education is co-taught with an instructor with a disability from the community to give better representation around the experience. In a Pakistani university, they use ten mini modules about inclusive practices (versus full courses) in every class to teach the specific knowledge and skills for working with diverse learners (vs. the one course often offered in general education teacher preparation programs). In Singapore, ten percent of the teaching force goes through a three-day training every year. In India, Dr. Sawhney trains professionals (policymakers, leaders, and masters program teachers) on different aspects of attitudes educators have about inclusive education (e.g. empathy) and critical aspects of engaging with the field so the educators internalize the need for inclusion (e.g. getting rid of labels and using strategies to include the learners).

Instructional Strategies

Dr. Werunga shared about the power of being innovative, loving educators who purposefully create engaging and supportive environments. This often starts with inviting them into your space, getting to know them as individuals, and sharing their positive qualities with others. She explains this takes time, but interacting with students and their families will increase comfort and connection in powerful ways. One area Dr. Walker spoke about is the need to maximize the use of teacher assistants/paraprofessionals. Most schools provide little or no training for them on inclusive practices. They have inconsistent schedules, and their input is rarely sought after when developing inclusive educational experiences. There is an ethical and legislative responsibility to become politically active in our communities as the law is linked closely with funding. As Dr. Walker put it, "follow the money-see where the money goes and how things are funded." We need to help thoughtful leaders who will support our learners. This may encourage more teachers to feel supported and stay in the profession. Dr. Sawhney shares that in India many students with differing abilities are being served in government schools without the necessary assistive technology. Some students with disabilities choose to move to private schools because they are teaching English medium education. A shift to private schools

and homeschooling has begun for those who can afford it. With the Rights to Education Act passed requiring students are admitted into schools, Dr. Sawhney highlights collaborative teaching, collaborative learning, and scaffolding, especially in the early years (before students feel stigmatized for having a differing ability).

Recommendations Around the World

In the breakout groups, the educators shared various practices and strategies. The groups realized that educational systems around the world need support. It was noted that many schools need additional funding, laws do not always translate into what is feasible in practice, and educators desire additional training and support for their job effectively. There was also an appreciation for the efforts of learners, families, and educators across the globe. The groups described examples of empowered families and communities sharing their stories, recognizing differences, and working together to gain equitable access to education. Two areas that came through in the breakout rooms were the need to prepare effective teachers and strategies for success.

Preparing effective teachers. Based on the group discussions, the following recommendations were given for preparing effective teachers:

- Empower all teachers (general and special education) and school support personnel (e.g. instructional assistants and administration) with the skills necessary to work with all learners (Jez, Hauth, & Ramers, 2022; Kauffman et al., 2018).
- Share strategies for building positive partnerships with learners, families, and colleagues by learning about each partner's perspectives, interests, values, and needs. Encourage school personnel to begin with positive messaging about strengths and assets (Epstein, 2019; Gay, 2013; Meda, Jez, & Mosito, 2022).
- Proactively teach families about advocacy and their rights using culturally responsive/sustaining practices. Recognize some families have had negative experiences with the school and they may be put off or shy about asking for services or resources because they have felt unheard in the past (Burke & Goldman, 2018; Trainor, 2017).
- Disability is a social construct, therefore, not all families focus on the differing abilities as a deficit (Annamma et al., 2013). Educators need to highlight learners, family, and community assets (Yosso, 2005).

Strategies for success. Based on the group discussions, the following strategies for success were provided:

- Connect with families using mobile devices such as phone calls, text messaging, WhatsApp, and emails (Natale & Lubniewski, 2018).
- Integrate low-tech assistive technology such as rulers, large pens, organizers, large print, and flexible seating to increase focus and comprehension (Alnahdi, 2014; Anderson & Hartley, 2018).
- Provide incentives (time, financial support, and resources) to those who are providing support for youth with dis/abilities (Mbiti et al., 2018).
- Implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL)- give learners choices for learning, thinking, and expressing their knowledge (CAST, 2022)
- Dialogue with the family about their child. Let the family know you care about their child. Ask families about their experience at home with questions such as, "This is what I saw…what are you seeing at home? Do you have any suggestions for us?" Offer to help the family find resources and services that will support their child's growth (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

Recording

A recording of *Culturally Sustaining Partnerships with Families Around the Global* can be accessed on the DISES YouTube page or here.

Panel Resource List

Sonia Sawhney recommends:
- Ministry of Education (2020). The National Education Policy – India 2020 - Retrieved on 28 September 2021 from https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
- Ministry of Human Resources Development (2011). The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 - The First Year. Retrieved on 20 January 2021 from: http://seshagun.nic.in/docs/reports/RTE_1st%20Year.pdf
- Ministry of Law and Justice (2016). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Act 49 of 2016. Retrieved on 28 September 2021 from https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2016-49_1.pdf
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- Kalyanpur. M. (2020): Disrupting the Narrative of Universality of Inclusive Education: The New Marginalization of Low Income, English Language Learners in India, The Educational Forum, 84(4), 296-308. DOI https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2020.1796071
- Singal, N., Ware, H., & Bhutani, S. (2017). Inclusive Quality Education for Children with Disabilities https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321213728_Inclusive_Quality_Education_for_Children_with_Disabilities
- Sawhney, S. (2015). Unpacking the nature and practices of inclusive education: the case of two schools in Hyderabad, India. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 19(9), 887-907.DOI: http://dx.doi.org10.1080/13603116.2015.1015178.

Zachary Walker recommends:
- Inclusive education: From targeting groups and schools to achieving quality education as the core of EFA. https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4wn9L-sTApJY0FkNktsTk5rSkE/view?usp=sharing&resourcekey=0-PxEObiD29qme79_zIQHCSg
- UN Financing of Inclusive Education: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1web4nXKph-Y9ZCh967crT8NIYtLY1gQq/view?usp=sharing
- A Guide for Ensuring Equity and Inclusion in Education (UN): https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254

Robai Werunga recommends:
- 10 Strategies for supporting immigrant students and families https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/ten-strategies-supporting-immigrant-students-and-families
- Breaking Down Education Barriers.

https://weareoneamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/Breaking-Down-Education-Barriers-Report.pdf
- Evidence-based interventions for immigrant students with behavior and academic problems
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298828399_Evidence-based_Interventions_for_Immigrant_Students_Experiencing_Behavioral_and_Academic_Problems_A_Systematic_Review_of_the_Literature
- Resources for Immigrant Families
https://www.pta.org/home/events/About-Every-Child-in-Focus/Every-Child-in-Focus-Leadership-Series/Immigrant-Families

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Burke, M. M., & Goldman, S. E. (2018). Special education advocacy among culturally and linguistically diverse families. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *18*, 3-14.

CAST (2022). *The UDL Guidelines.* Retrieved from https://udlguidelines.cast.org/?utm_source=castsite&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=none&utm_content=footer.

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Kraft, M. A., & Dougherty, S. M. (2013). The effect of teacher–family communication on student engagement: Evidence from a randomized field experiment. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, *6*(3), 199-222.

Mbiti, I., Muralidharan, K., Romero, M., Schipper, Y., Manda, C., & Rajani, R. (2018). Inputs, incentives, and complementarities in education: Experimental evidence from Tanzania. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

Meda, L., Jez, R. J., & Mosito, C. P. (2022). Towards a responsive community engagement: Reflections of key stakeholders. In Van Eeden E., Eloff I., & Dippenaar H. (Eds.), *Community engagement research in South Africa: histories, methods, theories and practice* (pp. 475-488). Van Schaik Publishing. ISBN: 9780627037931

Natale, K., & Lubniewski, K. (2018). Use of communication and technology among educational professionals and families. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, *10*(3), 377-384.

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