

Experience in Mpika

Using the Child-to-Child approach to promote inclusive education, children in Mpika, both disabled and non-disabled, have been able to explore issues around disability and exclusion, and the role that they as children could play in facing related challenges. In so doing, they have been able to make an important contribution to the inclusion of disabled children in regular schooling. Teachers in the 17 project schools have had opportunities to reflect more deeply on their own practice, recognizing that many children already in school were experiencing difficulties in learning as a result of unrecognized impairments, poverty, illness and family breakdown. Whilst working to include previously excluded children – mainly those with disabilities – teachers developed new ways of teaching that helped to ensure that the learning in their classes was more meaningful to all the children.

What children have done through MIEP

- Children have participated in the identification of children with disabilities in the villages.
- They have befriended children until they could confidently attend the local schools.
- They have supported them in their learning at school.
- They have facilitated their journeys to and from school.

There is evidence that many of the teachers involved in MIEP have explored, and continue to explore, the use of more participatory teaching methods.

Group work has been especially important, as it has encouraged the children to support each other's learning. Children have worked together, learning from each other and sharing their knowledge and experiences. All have benefited and been enriched by this experience.

Disabled children have learnt from non-disabled children, and non-disabled children have also learnt many skills from their disabled friends, such as signing. Many children and teachers were thrilled to learn sign language and use it to communicate with their friends with hearing impairments — as well as creating a 'secret' language, impenetrable to most adults.

As one head teacher stated, 'All the children, both disabled and non-disabled, have benefited socially and academically.'

For inclusive education to be accepted in the schools and communities of Mpika, changes in attitudes have had to occur at many levels of both schools and communities. Children and teachers have acquired new skills to accommodate and care for children who would not otherwise have been accepted in their classrooms.

Changing attitudes and transferring skills are difficult, time-consuming processes, requiring continuous support and imaginative strategies. However without such changes it is impossible to remove some of the psychological barriers to inclusion.

Examples of activities carried out in Mpika at each of the six steps

The activities at each step below are presented as examples of what has been done in Mpika. Many of them will also be suitable for other contexts.

• **Step 1: Choosing the right idea, understanding it well**

This step involved children in learning and understanding more about disability. Activities took place over a series of lessons in different subjects.

Lesson 1: Social studies

Learning about the family.

Lessons 2/3: Religious education

Caring for disabled people.

Stories of Jesus healing people with disabilities.

Acting out these stories.

Who would Jesus visit today?

Do we know any people with disabilities in our community?

What is our attitude towards them?

Lesson 4: Zambian language

Based on stories about helping disabled people.

Investigation of language used to describe disability.

Lesson 5: English language

Based on the Child-to-Child Reader I Can Do It Too,

Investigation of language used to describe disability.

Lesson 6: Science

Causes of disability.

Accidents, illness, and problems at birth and in early childhood.

• Step 2: Finding out more

Here, the children have been involved in gathering information about their families and the wider community, in order to identify children with disabilities both in and out of school.

Lesson 7: Social Studies (for Grade 7 pupils)

A family tree survey in the classroom

Creating a family tree, and marking the age and schooling of children: an activity developed by a teacher at Kabale school.

Revise vocabulary to be used. The teacher asks, 'Who belongs to the family?' Children give answers, 'mother, father, children, parents, sons, daughters ...'

Draw your (the teacher's) family tree on a piece of paper.

- Show the children your family tree.

- Now draw it on the board so the children can see how you do it.

- Use simple drawings to stand for male and female.

- Start with the mother and father.

- Then add the children. If the pupils know your family, ask them to provide the names of your children.

- Show them how to draw the children in the tree.

- Order the children by age.

- Add each child and their age, and show if they go to school, college or stay at home (symbols can be created to stand for this information).

Children draw their own family tree

Now ask the children to draw their own family tree. They must put in their own parents and all their brothers and sisters.

- Tell them to put the page of their book on its side to give more room.

- Tell them to draw a line about a quarter of the way up the page.

- Ask them to draw mother and father first.

- Then help them to space out their family across the page. If they have many people in their family, they will have to try to make an equal space between each. Ask them to try and space all the lines for the children so they are not squashed.

Ask the children to take their family tree home and to check with their parents if the ages they have written are correct.

Finding out in the community

An activity developed by a teacher at Kabale School.

The teacher draws a family tree on the board or chart and shows children how to record:

- Parents.

- Children.

- Disabled children.

Children and teacher discuss the tree and record:

- Disabled children.

- Disabled children in school.

- Disabled children not in school – including the child's age and sex.

Individual children draw their family trees and record disabled children in school and out of school.

Children in groups prepare forms for community survey of disabled children using the form below:

Family Name

No. of Children Under 15

List of disabled children In special unit

Age

Sex

Not in school or unit

House no.

Children in groups go into the community to carry out an identification survey of disabled children using the forms.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to children several other groups were involved in the identification exercise to minimize the chances of disabled children being overlooked. The groups included village headmen, church leaders, traditional birth attendants, and community development officers.

The results of this activity as carried out by the pupils of Kabale School were:

Family trees

Number of family tree sheets completed 51

Number of parents included in family tree 102

Number of children included in family tree 279

Number of children in largest family 12

Number of families with seven children each 9

Number of families with six children each 9

Community survey

Houses covered 203

Adult population covered 1413

Child population covered 974

Disabled youth aged 12-plus 12 (4 girls and 8 boys)

Disabled boys and girls under 12 36

• Step 3: Discussing what we have found out and planning action

The children discussed the findings of the community survey. They then planned action to be taken, both within and beyond the school.

The information collected was discussed, analyzed, and stored by the head teacher. It was agreed that teachers and pupils would visit the disabled children identified during step 2.

Meetings were held to plan activities between the children in the special units and the children in the regular classes. It was important that children were sensitive to the feelings of disabled children, parents and community members. Consequently, through role-play and crosscurricular activities, children carefully practised how they would communicate with others to share their ideas and take action with others in and beyond the school.

• Step 4: Taking action

Home visits by teachers

The core team members were responsible for planning inclusive education at school level. One of their responsibilities was to plan home visits to disabled children identified in the survey and their families. The following are extracts from reports by teachers from Kabale School on some of the home visits they have made.

'R is a girl with learning difficulties. She was found very sick with malaria and there were no parents to look after her. She was alone. We took her to TAZARA Clinic where it was found she had a very high temperature. She was given Fansidar, but she was very hungry so we decided to buy her some food.'

'P is a boy with learning difficulties and was left alone to take care of the home. Therefore, we were not able to meet his parents.'

'Mis a girl with learning difficulties. The parents were present and they were happy to see teachers at their home.'

'C is a boy with learning difficulties. The boy was locked inside his home, so we spoke to him through the window. He complained bitterly about the parents' decision to lock him up. Consequently, the following morning we met the parents and talked to them. They accepted what their child had said, but argued that they are poor and young. They complained that they had no money to take the boy to the hospital, where they would be asked to pay for registration and admission. However, they said that presently they were using herbs and had seen some improvement. We saw that the boy was not in good health. As professionals, we therefore decided on our own backs to take the boy to the clinic. At the clinic the boy was given folic acid, chloroquin and multivitamins. The clinical officer told us that the boy was lacking food.'

Home visits by children

One teacher emphasized the benefits of cross-curricular activities to help his children to express and overcome any initial concerns about visiting a child with a disability. He asked for three volunteers to visit and play with a child with disabilities. The teacher went with them to visit the child on the first occasion. He then asked them to report on how the visit went. One child did not want to go back but the others wished to continue, so he encouraged them to do so and to keep a record of their visits. They made friends with this child but also began to learn some things from him, as he was very willing to share his experiences. Soon other children in the class also wanted to be included in this activity. The boy now comes to school and when there is group work he rotates among the groups, as everyone wants him in their group. In such cases, each group discusses what they can share with him.

Twinning - a key strategy for children's action

Twinning is the linking of one child with another or several others and has been used in Child-to-Child activities in Mpika for many years. It works best when practical tasks are involved; for example, carrying water, preparing toys or alphabet books, and keeping clean. The aim is that these tasks are beneficial to both parties in the 'twinning' relationship.

The benefits of twinning

Two or more pupils can get to know each other. They can visit each other at home, come to school together and work together at school. Thus, through interaction, they can develop close and usually beneficial friendships. Two or three children can 'twin' with a child with a disability to make activities for the disabled child easier and more fun. MIEP has found this way of twinning to be very useful for all the children concerned as it reduces the responsibility that would otherwise be placed on one child and increases the companionship. Non-disabled twins can often advise the teacher on how to work with their disabled twin, as the children know each other better than the teacher. For example, one child communicates through drawing, and the others interpret the drawings. Twinning can link children from lower grade classes with those from upper grade classes. In this way, younger children can learn something from older children and vice versa. Twinning helps children recognize the benefits of collaboration in everyday activities. Teachers can highlight these benefits and help children make links between the twinning process and their daily lives.

Some disabled children make enormous efforts to be like their friends and can benefit as a result. An example of this was one child who always wanted to clean the blackboard even though it was a great effort for him to do so. In fact he was giving himself some informal 'physiotherapy' and as a result his movements improved.

What children say about twinning

'Every day I work with my friend at home, especially working out mathematics.'

'My parents passed away in 2000 and now I stay with grandmother. I play and work with another boy who I am twinned with. He is the first person I share my problems with, including my problems with school fees.'

'I had a good time at school because I was busy helping my friend in class who is slow in hearing.'

'My legs hurt because I use metal crutches to help me walk and they cause me pain. I have three friends at school. They help me by bringing me to school and taking me back home.'

'Twinning has helped me pay extra attention to what the teacher is teaching us because afterwards I share it with my friend. My friend says she is now reading with less difficulty than before we were twinned.'

Working together to make model animals

A project to make model animals at Musakanya School unleashed a great wave of creative talent. It was enjoyed enormously by the children who took part and enabled hearing and nonhearing pupils to work together in groups. A teacher who worked in the Musakanya special unit led the project. Locally available and cheap/free materials were used and included wire, scrap paper and glue made from cassava flour. The activity provided many opportunities for communication and learning new words and signs. Many of the pupils in the school were unfamiliar with the animals that were being modelled. The idea was that the animals could be used as teaching aids. The pupils' enthusiasm for the work generated interest throughout the school. The project helped to break down negative images that had built up around the children in the unit because of their previous isolation. It showed that they were not 'lazy' and 'selfish', as some people had labelled them, but could work happily and co-operatively with others.

Some of the children with hearing impairments became group leaders.

Resurrecting a sign language club

In order to address the difficulty of non-communication between the hearing and hearingimpaired population, the head teacher at Musakanya School had set up a sign language club in the local community in 1991. However, as most of the children in the Musakanya special unit were boarders, there was little local interest and in 1992 the club closed. Thanks to the urging of the MIEP co-ordinator, the sign language club was resurrected in a new form in 1999. It is now based in the school and targets the teachers and all pupils. After one year in operation, three quarters of the 53 teachers had acquired some ability in communicating with children with hearing impairments.

The club operates once a week. The head teacher selects teachers and teaches them a particular set of signs one week and they teach these signs to a group of pupils the following week. However, as hearing children work more closely with the children with hearing impairments the children's skills in signing have rapidly increased – outstripping the adults. The children constantly make up new signs and gestures. They are particularly inventive when it comes to names. The head teacher has a scar on the left-hand side of his forehead, so his name sign is one finger brushing that area. Gradually all the hearing children who now interact with the unit children have acquired their own name signs.

Sharing responsibilities

Children with hearing impairments share responsibilities with other children, for example, being class monitors, closing and locking the doors and windows of the school, raising and lowering the school flag, helping to take care of the school pit latrines. Enabling the children with hearing impairments to take part in these tasks helps them feel that they are full members of

the school, and has encouraged an atmosphere of co-operation and mutual understanding.

• **Step 5: Discussing results of the action**

The children have discussed what they have done with their teachers and tried to evaluate the effectiveness of their activities. Children's exercise books have been examined to see the kind of activities children with and without disabilities have done together. Disabled twins have been observed to see what they can do on their own, for example, keep themselves clean, bring water to school and so on. Checklists have helped children keep track of activities, such as how many toys were made for the Musakanya unit, which ones have been most popular or useful and which have needed replacing. In social studies and religious education, children have discussed how they felt about helping and co-operating with others.

Class attendance records have been used to monitor attendance by children with disabilities and others who were previously often absent. Records show that few out of approximately 200 children with disabilities who have come to school as a result of the project have subsequently dropped out.

There have been annual surveys to measure changes in attitudes of children, parents, teachers and other community members during the life of the project. The surveys were carried out by a lecturer from the University of Zambia who also took part in the final evaluation.

During an evaluation seminar one mother of a child formerly in the Kabale unit said, 'Before the introduction of the project, especially the inclusion aspect, my child behaved badly. She now behaves very well at home and is able to do a lot of work that she never used to do. We as parents of the disabled children do understand that you, our teachers, face a lot of problems. But as parents of a disabled child we are prepared to work with you so please do not send the children back to the unit.'

• **Step 6: Doing it better and sustaining the action**

During this step, improvements were made to activities carried out earlier, in order to make them more effective.

For example, the evaluation of the first community survey of disabled children highlighted some difficulties. Some of the 'children' identified were in fact adults. Additionally, it was not clear how many of the disabled children were in school in regular classrooms, how many were in special units, and how many were not in school at all. The survey form was amended to clarify these details.

Step 6 was also used to make improved practices part of everyday life. In Mpika, the children, teachers and parents have been involved in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the project through their own experiences. They have helped to identify lessons learnt and aspects of the project that might be sustainable in the future.