

The Tensions of Northern Imports: Disability and Inclusion in Kenyan Primary Education

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I explored the tensions that arise when Northern concepts of inclusive education and disability rights are imported to countries in the global South. Specifically, through this project I examined the development of a sustainable inclusive education system in western Kenya through community-based participatory research (CBPR) and critical disability studies (CDS). Through three cycles of qualitative interviews with a variety of stakeholders in inclusive education, participants explained what they saw as foundational components of how to create more inclusive primary school classrooms utilizing existing school and community resources. With a qualitative approach to data analysis (e.g., grounded theory) informed by CBPR and decolonizing methods, participant responses comprised the data I recorded and analyzed. These data illuminated the creativity, resourcefulness, and resiliency the stakeholders used daily to mitigate systemic disability oppression as it related to inclusive education. Both CBPR and CDS approaches to this project offered participants frameworks to collectively trace the historical events that created the current segregated education system in Kenya, allowed them to identify disability rights-based alternatives to special schools, and to develop inclusive practices based on joint inclusion committee decisions. Through this research, I offer alternative views on inclusive education in the global South. Rather than constructing Kenya as one of many “poor” countries in Africa consistently in need of help from the global North, I argue that the severely under-resourced educational realities in Kenya have created resourceful and resilient inclusive stakeholders in education whose approaches to community-based disability rights advocacy have transformative potential in the global North. I hope this dissertation offers educators and CDS scholars tangible starting points from which to begin similar work in other under-resourced regions of the world.

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