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# Going to school for the first time: inclusion committee members increasing the number of students with disabilities in primary schools in Kenya

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper is an extension of a prior research project where Kenyan primary school teachers began using inclusive education strategies that proved beneficial for meeting the needs of diverse primary school students. Specifically, this paper highlights a project where these inclusive practices were expanded to a second region of western Kenya. This expansion of teacher training on inclusive education and critical disability studies promoted sustained school- and community-based discussions on inclusive education and sensitisation on issues related to disability. These practices also led to the development of inclusion committees, co-teaching practices, and stimulated the partial dissolution of the physical boundaries and categorical distinctions between 'primary' and 'special' schools. In conjunction, all of these factors ultimately led to an increase in the number of students with disabilities accessing *any* form of education for the first time. Furthermore, such approaches to the development and small-scale expansion of a sustainable inclusive education system led to the Kenyan government's consideration of the replication of such practices on a national scale. As a result of this work in conjunction with a growing inclusive network of governmental and non-governmental organisations, a national review on special education policy is underway.

## Introduction

This paper provides one example of how the formation of inclusion committees and providing training on inclusive education to primary school teachers led to an increase in the number of students with disabilities accessing inclusive primary school education for the first time. We suggest the formation of the inclusion committees as one potential way to develop sustainable inclusive practices and to identify priorities for ongoing inclusive teacher training. A community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to the formation and maintenance of the inclusion committees led to the development of teacher training where trainers infused critical disability studies (CDS) perspectives with inclusive education strategies that utilised existing school and community resources.

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## Educational context

Currently, Kenyan schools use the 8-4-4 American school system with eight years of primary school, four years of secondary school, and four years of university (Ministry of Education 2008). Dirty floors, corrugated tin walls, no running water, no electricity, and minimal government funding is the reality in many rural agrarian Kenyan schools. In many rural regions of western Kenya, primary and special schools are in close proximity to one another, with some only separated by a fence or a gate (Elder, Damiani, and Oswago 2015). In western Kenya, this proximity allows stakeholders in inclusive education from both schools to learn together about inclusive school settings.

The Kenyan Ministry of Education (2008) reported that over one million students with disabilities are excluded from equitable educational opportunities. Opini (2011) cites that this exclusion leads to increased rates of illiteracy, poverty, and decreased access to higher education. The UNCRPD Kenya State Party Report (2012) cited that 39% of people with disabilities have attended a mainstream preschool, while only 37% have attended a mainstream primary school. This percentage decreases to 9% for students with disabilities attending a mainstream secondary school. Additionally, only 4% of persons with disabilities had attended some form of special education institutions, and with a smaller percentage of persons with disabilities in rural areas.

## Legal context

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD 2006), which the Kenyan government ratified in 2008, guides this work and provides international legal justification for inclusive education. Specifically, Article 24 outlines that ratifying countries establish an 'inclusive system of education' (UNCRPD 2006, art. XXIV §1). Acknowledging the importance of international collaboration, Article 32 underscores the need for the development of international partnerships through an exchange of information, experiences, and training programs and best practices (UNCRPD 2006, art. XXXII §1b). Grounding international disability law in domestic legislation, the revised Kenyan Constitution of 2010, Article 27, Section 4 prohibits multiple forms of discrimination affirming, 'The State shall not discriminate directly or indirectly against any person on any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, *disability*, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth' (24, emphasis added). Other disability-specific legislation includes the Persons with Disabilities Amendment Bill (2012) as well as the Basic Education Act of 2013.

## International inclusive education

The literature on inclusive education around the world suggests that some teachers have negative attitudes towards students with disabilities and inclusive education because disability is misunderstood, teachers do not receive appropriate teacher training, and such practices are inadequately supported (Bhatnagar and Das 2014; Galović, Brojčin, and Glumbić 2014). The current research on inclusive education in Kenya is sparse. In this study, we move beyond teacher attitudes on inclusive education and focus on using inclusion committees and community engagement as a way to set and implement an

agenda for inclusive education reform. This project builds on the work of McConkey and Mariga (2011) who have used community-based approaches to develop inclusion committees in Zanzibar. In our review of existing literature, this work is the only other example that specifically addresses inclusive education committees in the African context. They established inclusion committees in 20 schools. Their findings encourage countries with more resources to consider developing inclusive practices through community engagement and collective approaches research to be used as ways to move closer to developing a more inclusive education system and accessible society. This work also builds on and connects to other inclusive education work in African contexts including Chitiyo et al. (2017), Franck and Joshi (2017), Hui et al. (2017), McConkey (2014), Oswald and Swart (2011), Polat (2011), and Tesemma (2011).

This project is an extension of a smaller project on inclusive teacher training in western Kenyan primary schools (Damiani, Elder, and Okongo 2016; Elder, Damiani, and Oswago 2015) through which we began to move beyond assessing teacher attitudes on inclusive education (see Bhatnagar and Das 2014 and Galović, Brojčin, and Glumbić 2014) and focused on developing what we hope to be generalisable action-oriented first steps to the development of a sustainable inclusive education system. The initial 2013 project involved 13 teachers from 8 regional primary and special schools who participated in the inclusive teacher trainings and volunteered to participate as teacher members of the inclusion committee over a two-week period. This project extension took place over the course of seven months at two school sites, included three iterative cycles of CBPR, and had approximately 52 participants.

Our intended audience includes university professors and teacher educators who study inclusive education, special needs education (SNE) teachers, and any stakeholder in education who might find this work applicable to their local context. We hope this work informs educators in settings with limited educational resources who want to create sustainable inclusive school reform. The practices outlined in this paper are in no way meant to be prescriptive. The goal of this work is to clearly articulate the inclusion committee actions which led to the increase in the number of students with disabilities accessing *any* form of education for the first time. The objectives for implementing such strategies aligned with collaboratively developed inclusion committee goals along with social justice- and activist-based approaches to decolonising methodological research (Kaomea 2004, 2005; Smith 1999; Warrior 1995; Womack 1999).

Within this approach, the following research questions guided the inquiry:

1. What are the local meanings and discourses of disability and inclusion operating within the western Kenyan primary school context?
2. How do teachers engage, enact, and modify inclusive reform in culturally relevant ways?
3. What does inclusion look like in the context of post-colonial western Kenyan primary schools?
4. How does engaging with CDS influence teachers' views about students with disabilities?
5. What can be learned from the experiences of enacting inclusive reform at School Sites A and B in this project that could inform efforts to enact inclusive reform in under-resourced schools in the United States and beyond?

6. What follows are sections on author positionalities, the theoretical framework, methods and procedures, a discussion of results, the implications of the work, and the conclusion.

## Positionality

Central to our transnational collaboration is our acknowledgment of our positionality and how that influences how we make sense of our respective worlds. Elder's positionality is inherently tied to how disability and education is constructed in the global North. Recognising this, he has no desire to speak *for* colonised people. However, he believes in the importance of allyship in international collaboration so that both the colonisers and the colonised have informed partners outside of their communities (Kincheloe and Steinberg 2008). Elder was raised in a middle-class European-American family and is aware of the many unearned privileges he has. His hope is that his Kenyan colleagues view him as someone who questions and attempts to deconstruct positivist perspectives of the Northern academy.

As a promoter of citizenship, an important life skill, Kuja values and advocates for persons with disabilities and is happy to see them become self-reliant without barriers constituted culturally, economically, or politically. From childhood, Kuja has been living in a rural Kenyan setting where he went to school and has been working. He understands what damages physical, social, cultural, and economic background can do to the persons with disabilities. If these issues are adequately addressed, the lives of people with disabilities would be greatly improved. He is also a teacher at the special school at School Site A.

Both authors are able-bodied and do not identify as having a disability. They recognise that this inherently influences how they make sense of the world. Neither author has lived experience negotiating disability within the Kenyan context. This fundamentally limits their ability to understand the realities of the lives of people with disabilities living in Kenya. From the outset of this project, our goal as able-bodied, educated, privileged men engaged in this work was to learn about culturally appropriate, transnational, collaborative educational approaches that could lead to better outcomes for disabled people in Kenya. We never claimed to 'know' what was right for the people we were working with, and attempted to minimise the impacts of this reality by engaging in decolonising methodologies and CBPR.

## Theoretical frameworks

In this study, we utilised multiple theoretical frameworks to inform our approach to this work. To acknowledge the post-colonial context of Kenya, we drew on critical cultural theory as well as post-colonial and decolonial studies. These lenses support the reality that formerly colonised peoples cannot return to their pre-colonial existences (Fanon 1963; Grech 2015; Hall 1990). Being responsive to such colonial realities is critically important in such transnational work.

Additionally, the utilisation of decolonising methodologies (e.g. critical and culturally driven praxis), as outlined by Smith (1999), were central to this study. Decentring the Northern academy and redistributing power to the margins (e.g. to those who have been historically marginalised) is another key tenet of decolonising research (hooks 1989; McCarthy 1998). Decolonising researchers take an active role in performing

decolonising acts that focus on social justice and activism (Kaomea 2004, 2005; Smith 1999; Warrior 1995; Womack 1999).

Freire's (1970) work on anti-oppressive pedagogy through cycles of participatory research informed our study. To connect with Freire's work, we attempted to honour local ways of knowing, to value diversity and expertise within the inclusion committees, and to promote the co-construction of knowledge. Specifically, when teachers from special and primary schools planned to co-teach lessons based on Friend et al.'s (2010) six models of co-teaching, they acted as experts of their own classroom contexts and were encouraged to modify (or reject) Northern strategies to fit their students' needs.

Aside from SNE and primary school teachers, we invited other local stakeholders in inclusive education to help identify local barriers to inclusion. Identification of such barriers helped the inclusion committees to create plans of action to increase the number of students with disabilities accessing inclusive primary education. Such community approaches to research are grounded in CBPR. CBPR engages community participants, but not necessarily in all phases of the project (e.g. analysis and publication) (Minkler and Wallerstein 2003). Such projects emphasise community collaboration and promote collaborative practices with the ultimate goal of initiating actions with immediate and clear application to local communities (Israel et al. 1998; Stanton 2014).

In addition to utilising CBPR, we approached this project from a disability studies perspective. Disability studies reject the notion that disability is negative, that the person is in need of medicalised fixes, and that disability is located within the individual (Ferri 2006; Marks 1997; Taylor 2006). This framework allowed us to identify societal barriers as potential causes of disability rather than blaming people with disability labels for their differences (Barnes, Mercer, and Shakespeare 1999; Charlton 1998).

In order to include a more global perspective on disability studies, we also infused CDS into our work. CDS scholars promote participatory citizenship in Southern countries. In this study, we used CDS as a way to connect disability oppression to larger systems of oppression like neo/post/colonialism, capitalism, globalisation, and neo-liberalism. Drawing on Grech and Soldatic, we believe that disability theory is uniformly constructed in the global North while its ideas and practices are too often monolithically exported to the global South[1] with 'minimal attention paid to cultures, context, and histories, and rarely responsive or even acknowledging Southern voices, perspectives and theories that have been developing as a counter discourse' (2014, 1).

## Methods and procedures

The purpose of this study was to create sustainable and replicable inclusive practices through qualitative research methods informed by CBPR and decolonising methods. We held weekly inclusion committee meetings to monitor the progress of the development of an inclusive education system at School Sites A and B (described below). We used qualitative research methods to attempt to uncover how people 'make sense out of what is happening to them' (Bogdan and Biklen 2007, 248). We applied qualitative research in Kenya 'to bring to the surface stories of those whose voices have not been heard, those who have been oppressed or disenfranchised in schools' (Pugach 2001, 443). This gave participants a platform to share their perspectives and experiences that may have been overlooked or ignored under other circumstances (DeVault 1999; Pugach 2001).

All members of the inclusion committees volunteered their time to participate in weekly meetings. See Table 1 for the composition of the inclusion committee. Each committee developed and prioritised goals for inclusive education. Goals of both committee involved teacher training and public sensitisation on issues related to disability. The outcomes of these activities are highlighted throughout this paper in the form of tables and excerpts from semi-structured qualitative interviews with inclusion committee members.

## Design

CBPR served as a foundation for the design of this study. Through regular member checks (Creswell and Miller 2000; Lincoln and Guba 1985), we asked the participants to reflect on research questions, to plan and implement iterative next steps, and to monitor goal progress. Due to time and geographical constraints, of all the inclusion committee members, only Kuja co-authored this paper. All participants, however, were encouraged to participate in the publishing, authoring, and dissemination of other forms of local publication (e.g. advertising community awareness activities).

In this study, Elder[2] used a qualitative approach to data analysis (i.e. grounded theory) informed by CBPR and decolonising methods. Weekly inclusion committee meetings and three cycles of interviews with inclusion committee members at both school sites provided the forum for participatory dialogue. Elder employed a constructivist grounded theory approach along with a constant comparison method to inform his analysis (Charmaz and Mitchell 2001). This approach allowed him to continuously complicate his understandings throughout that project (Charmaz 2005), and to collect and evaluate data concurrently. Specifically, Elder coded memo and interview data in three phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which concluded in the identification of three significant themes and outcomes (Creswell 2013). Member checks were implemented at the end of each cycle of research as a way for committee members to confirm the validity of emerging findings and project goals (Creswell and Miller 2000; Lincoln and Guba 1985). Specifically, member checks occurred at the end of each cycle of research, where each committee was asked to assess goal progress. The Authors used that information to direct the subsequent cycles of research. Monthly interviews and ongoing discussions at weekly meetings provided opportunities for each committee to assess project directions and collectively interpret and triangulate the data. These member checks provided a

**Table 1.** Inclusion committee membership by school site.

| Committee member | School Site A | School Site B |
|---|---|---|
| Students with disabilities | 4 | 4 |
| Students without disabilities | 3 | 3 |
| Parents of children with disabilities | 2 | 2 |
| Parents of children without disabilities | 1 | 1 |
| SNE teachers (includes Kuja) | 5 | 4 |
| Primary school teachers | 4 | 4 |
| SNE head teacher | 1 | 1 |
| Primary school head teacher | 1 | 1 |
| Community members with disabilities | 2 | 2 |
| Community members without disabilities/Board of management members | 1 | 3 |
| Ministry of Education EARC | 1 | 1 |
| Elder | 1 | 1 |
| Total | $N = 26^a$ | $N = 27^a$ |

[a]Due to fluctuating attendance, there was an average of 24 participants at each meeting.

greater reliability within the project and shaped how the Authors made sense of the complexities that emerged from the CBPR and decolonising methodologies utilised in the project.

## Project sites

The inclusion committees were formed at two locations – School Sites A and B. A 'primary school' and a 'special school' on a shared campus composed each school site.[3] The school sites were at opposite borders of a rural school district in western Kenya. Both study sites were particularly impacted by many of the barriers to education including frequent drought conditions, limited access to electricity and food, no running water, and high rates of poverty and disease. This region has been reported as being 'one of the poorest areas in Kenya and the residents are primarily subsistence farmers or fisherman. Moreover, this area has one of the highest prevalence rates of malaria and HIV infection' (Kawakatsu et al. 2012, 187).

Prior to Elder's arrival in Kenya (August 2015), a local Education Assessment Resource Coordinator (EARC) in the local Ministry of Education identified two school sites (May 2015), School Sites A and B, to participate in the study. School Site A was located at the southern edge of the district and is composed of a regular primary school and a special school for children with physical disabilities on a shared campus. There were 156 students enrolled at the special school and 280 students enrolled at the primary school. Barbed wire fences and a rocky dirt field separated the two schools. Students shared a common playground area. There are dormitories on campus for students with physical disabilities who cannot commute to and from school on a daily basis due to physical disabilities or chronic illnesses. The day scholars at the special school are composed mostly of students with learning disabilities who live with their families at home and were previously inadequately supported in regular primary schools. There are students with learning disabilities who attend the primary school, but according to the head teacher, these students do not require significant enough support to warrant placement at a special school.

School Site B is located at the northern edge of the district and is composed of a school for the Deaf[4] and a primary school. There were roughly 150 students at the school for the Deaf and 250 students at the primary school. These schools are adjacent to one another and are separated by houses and a dirt road. Aside from supporting students with a variety of hearing impairments, the school for the Deaf also supports students with vision impairments, autism, and intellectual disabilities. Like the special school at School Site A, this school is residential for students whose families live too far away to commute on a daily basis. At the primary school, according to the head teacher, there are a few students with learning disability labels, but none significant enough to require placement at a special school.

## Timeline

The three cycles of CBPR were as follows: (a) Cycle #1 – mid-September to mid-October, (b) Cycle #2 ran – mid-October to mid-November, and (c) Cycle #3 – early January to early February. The gap between the last two cycles was due to the closing of one school term and the start of a new one.

## Participant selection

Participants were invited to participate in the project by either the EARC or the head teachers at the school sites. Participants were asked to serve on one of the inclusion committees depending on their geographic location. Head teachers chose adult committee members for participation because of their known interest or roles in supporting local schools. Teachers chose student members because of their known leadership qualities. Head teachers and EARCs approached community members with and without disabilities to participate based on their historic support of local schools and interest in inclusive education.

## Inclusion committees

The composition of the inclusion committees at each school site is represented in Table 1.

Membership and attendance fluctuated weekly due to a variety of circumstances (e.g. funerals, transportation issues, and miscommunication). In order to qualify for committee membership, all teacher participants had to be employed at either school site and have current Kenyan teacher status (e.g. current employee of the Teacher Service Commission). All SNE teachers had government certification allowing them to teach students with disabilities. The primary school teachers had all taken at least one course related to SNE. The only prohibitive factor in this study was age. Student participants had to be enrolled at a school at either school site, and be old enough to independently assent to committee participation. Teachers at both school sites agreed that only students aged 10 (standard four/grade four) to 13 (standard six/grade six) could participate because of issues related to maturity and assent. Parent consent was a prerequisite for their participation. Though not a prerequisite for participation, all participants identified as Kenyan and Luo/Abasuba as the study took place in a largely Luo/Abasuba region of Kenya. Similarly, gender, socioeconomic status, or ethnicity did not preclude potential inclusion committee members from participating in the study. In addition, a particular disability label was not a prohibitive factor for participation as long as committee members could consent/assent to participate.

Topics discussed at each school site varied during weekly meetings. However, issues discussed generally related to the domestic and international legal mandates for inclusive education, allocation of grant funds for project activities, participants sharing what is going well and what needs more support in the project, personal actions toward project goals, and the sustainability of the project. While some participants undertook project actions that could be observed at the school sites, many engaged in project activities in their respective communities. These activities, as reported by participants, included discussing disability rights and inclusive education: in church groups, in women's groups, with neighbours, with employers, with local community leaders, and with local media outlets.

## Results and discussion

From the three cycles of semi-structured qualitative interviews, three salient themes arose through member checks and data analysis: (a) sustained discussions on inclusive education and disability were foundational to this work, (b) development of co-teaching

practices promoted partial dissolution of the physical boundaries and categorical distinctions between primary and special schools, and (c) an increase in the number of students with disabilities accessing any form of education for the first time. Evidences of each of these themes are presented below.

## Sustained discussions on inclusive education and disability

Inclusion committees at both school sites identified 'sensitisation' on disability as the highest priority for our work. In this context, the term 'sensitisation' was used to describe the need to create more awareness about disability and inclusive education in schools and in the community at large. What follows are committee members' reports of the need for sensitisation, and the outcomes of such activities.

Here, a student without disabilities from the primary school at School Site A discusses student perceptions of inclusive education and students with disabilities.

> STUDENT: My [committee] task was to go and sensitize the [sports] club members. So, I went outside and talked with them. Fortunately, [and] unfortunately, some took the matter as positive and some took it negative as some were saying that he was just wasting time talking and telling them those issues. (Anonymous, personal communication, October 13, 2015)

As this student attempted to sensitise his peers on inclusive education, he found that there were mixed perspectives. Drawing on the local narrative of people with disabilities, some students felt inclusive education was a waste of time. These negative attitudes towards inclusion typically develop because such practices are oftentimes inadequately supported and disability is misunderstood (Bhatnagar and Das 2014; Galović, Brojčin, and Glumbić 2014). Aside from school-based barriers to inclusion, below, an SNE teacher at School Site B describes how he engaged his community on disability-related issues.

> TEACHER: There are many things which we are discussing as a community. Like, how we can improve the community [since] many people [with disabilities] are not going to school. So, we were asking ourselves, 'Why is it that some people are just dropping out of school like that? What are the reasons? How can as a group we help this?' (Anonymous, personal communication, October 9, 2015)

By questioning the oppressive social structures that serve to marginalise people with disabilities (e.g. people with disabilities hidden at home), this teacher employs a disability studies framework to engage his community in discussions that are critical of existing structural oppressions that individuals with disabilities face in Kenya (Heshusius 2004; Ware 2005). He is also naturally calling on the social model of disability by locating 'the problem' in social barriers to inclusive education rather than within the students with disabilities themselves (Barnes, Mercer, and Shakespeare 1999; Charlton 1998). Below, a community member with a physical disability shares her thoughts on being invited to be a member of the inclusion committee at School Site A, and how her membership is shifting views on disability in her community.

> COMMUNITY MEMBER: My thoughts on the inclusion goals is that for the first time I got a letter which was inviting me to join the committee. I was surprised because basically all the time I have been discriminated – people of the community showing discrimination upon me.

> But now that I was given a chance to join [the committee] … This now my first time even to join a team like that. (Anonymous, personal communication, October 13, 2015)

In this excerpt, this community member recalls her invitation to the committee as the first time she had ever been asked to contribute in a positive way to the construction of a positive disability identity in her community. Her ongoing participation on the committee hopefully continues to break down social barriers for people with disabilities in her community and encourages the spread of a 'nothing about us without us' perspective in the local disability community (Charlton 1998, p. 3).

### Development of co-teaching practices

Teacher inclusion committee members identified the need for more training on sustainable inclusive practices. Table 2 represents the training topics requested by both school sites.

In response to these needs, Elder and a local teacher leader (not associated with either school site in this project) co-delivered a two-day teacher training on the topics listed above. During participant interviews, teachers frequently discussed their initial experiences implementing various co-teaching models through which they partnered with faculty from their own campuses and with teachers from neighbouring schools (e.g. special school teachers were planning to co-teach with primary school teachers). Some primary school teachers delivered co-taught lessons with teachers on the special school campus, while some special school teachers delivered co-taught lessons on the primary school campus. The approach and delivery of such lessons depended on teacher expertise on subject area content, the number of students in each co-taught classroom, and teacher comfort with initiating a co-teaching model. Teachers from both schools paired up to support students in their respective classrooms depending on school schedules. The first Author evaluated the efficacy of co-teaching practices by collecting and reviewing weekly 'What is Going Well/What Needs More Support' data sheets filled out by participants as well as the semi-structured qualitative interviews that occurred at the end of every cycle of research.

The first excerpt highlights an SNE teacher describing his experience trying the co-teaching in math for the first time.

> TEACHER: Okay, during math [the primary teacher] gave the pupils support at the back of the class while the pupils, some of them were doing the calculations at the board for the rest of the pupils to see … So, it was like he was just to give instructions, maybe give some guidance, and the pupils did the rest …

**Table 2.** Identified school site training needs.

| |
|---|
| Teaching strategies to help the 'slow learners' |
| How to give students more time on writing composition exams |
| How to get students without disabilities to help students with disabilities during recess |
| An introduction to inclusive education |
| An overview of the categories and causes of disabilities |
| Specific teaching strategies to support the categories of disabilities |
| Co-teaching |
| Government policies on inclusive education |
| Modifying curriculum |
| Mobilisation and sensitisation of the community |
| Modification of classrooms to fit the needs of students with disabilities |

ELDER: Good, and you said you were going to do that again today?

TEACHER: Yeah, we are going to do that today. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 2, 2016)

This excerpt shows the SNE teacher taking the lead with the primary school teacher assisting students as needed. The teachers chose the one teach, one assist model and were establishing a routine of co-teaching. According to Friend et al. (2010), one teach, one assist is a good strategy for beginning co-teachers because it allows them to develop trust and establish more complex co-teaching routines. A teacher from the primary school at School Site A mentions trust in the following example.

TEACHER: I like [co-teaching] because there was something like a partnership. For example, if somebody was tired then another person would lead … Another good thing about [co-teaching] is you are always able to trust one another when the other is speaking.

ELDER: Good, so you developed trust. Great. What are your plans for co-teaching in the future?

TEACHER: I think we will continue with it. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 1, 2016)

The development of trust with these teachers is a critical aspect when establishing co-teaching relationships and supporting students with complex support needs in inclusive classrooms (Walther-Thomas, Bryant, and Land 1996). In the following excerpt, a teacher at the special school at School Site A reflects on using the one teach, one observe for the first time with a colleague at the special school.

TEACHER: My co-teacher was [another teacher at the special school]. We were doing social studies. He taught and I was observing. It was real interesting.

ELDER: So, you did one teach, one observe. And what did you observe?

TEACHER: I observed the strategies used. Although I did not talk, I was able to see where he did extraordinarily well, and some areas where it was not up-to-date. Then when we sat now to the lesson, we talked about it. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 2, 2016)

There are a few things of note in this excerpt. First, this teacher uses the one teach, one observe strategy as a way to constructively critique her co-teaching partner's teaching practice. Using this strategy as an opportunity to collect data is in alignment with how Friend et al. (2010) suggest using the strategy. Secondly, the teachers reflected on their shared experiences during a lesson debriefing. According to Friend (2008), a debriefing session, following a co-taught lesson, is critical so that each teacher gets better at meeting the needs of the students in the class. This suggests that these teachers are establishing new ways of supporting students with disabilities that may produce more positive learning outcomes for the students in their classrooms.

### An increase of students with disabilities accessing education

Throughout the project, we witnessed an influx of new-to-school students with disabilities at both school sites. Committee members attributed this increase to their sensitisation efforts. Table 3 highlights the numbers of new-to-school students with disabilities at

**Table 3.** New-to-school students with disabilities at each school site.

| | School Site A | School Site B | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| New-to-school students with disabilities | 9[a] | 5[a] | 14 |

[a]These numbers were reported by school site officials at the time of writing (December 2016).

each school site. Below, the head teacher from the school for the Deaf at School Site B discusses the increased enrolment of students with disabilities at her school.

> ELDER: How do you know the inclusion committee actions have had an impact on the local community?

> HEAD TEACHER: Well, one thing I realize is that there is improvement in enrollment of children with special needs in our school. Another thing I've realized is that the community is more and more aware of special needs children and what should be done for them. And that is why they are now recommending the school to those who have not been able to come to school. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 3, 2016)

Like this head teacher at the School Site B, the head teacher from the special school at School Site A attributed the increase of students with disabilities at his school to the collective action of the inclusion committee.

> ELDER: So, what do you think changed? If you have had five new students that have never been to school before, why did these parents decide to do this?

> HEAD TEACHER: This is because of the sensitization. We have really sensitized the parents more so. When we admit severe cases and they stay in school the parents take the message home. So, when they go to the village they speak about our school and they sensitize other parents. Then you find that their parents also become impressed and they become open to [inclusive education]. They also sensitize the parents who have the same cases. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 1, 2016)

This increase in enrolment of students with disabilities at each school signifies a direct benefit to the local communities involved with this project. This is in alignment with what Smith (1999) and Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008) would consider to be examples of effective implementation of decolonising methodologies. This is likely because methodologies were 'localized, grounded in the specific meanings, traditions, customs and community relations that operate in each indigenous setting' (Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith 2008, 7). Below, a parent of two Deaf children from School Site B spoke to this positive community reception of the project.

> ELDER: Have you noticed any changes in the community since our project began?

> PARENT: [Parents] did not want to come out that they were the parents of those pupils with disabilities. But after sensitization and educating them on why we have this inclusive committee, they came out now and want their pupils to come to school, and a number of them have brought their pupils to school. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 3, 2016)

This excerpt represents parent action aimed at disrupting systemic oppressive power dynamics that serve to marginalise people with disabilities in her community by encouraging other parents to bring their children with disabilities to schools. By doing this, this parent is attempting to redistribute power to members with less influence (e.g. parents

of children with disabilities) (hooks 1989; McCarthy 1998). Taken together, these excerpts highlight that 14 students, with a possibility of more enrolling in the future, are now accessing education for the first time due in part to the actions of the inclusion committee.

## Limitations

This project provides a glimpse into two school sites in one school district in rural western Kenya. The only perspectives that were shared in this project were perspectives of those who were invited to participate in the inclusion committees. As a result, the qualitative interviews of this project only involve perspectives of a select group of stakeholders. Perspectives of people with dissenting or disparate perspectives on disability rights and inclusive education were not solicited for this project. Consequently, the perspectives presented in this paper represent a limited view of disability rights and inclusive education in Kenya.

Another project limitation was gauging committee member accountability on inclusion and sustainability goals. With over 20 committee members at each school site, it was unrealistic for us to observe all activities of all communities as they engaged in their committee-based goal work. Aside from classroom observations and the occasional community-based organisation observation, we were not physically able to witness many community- and school-based goal activities. In terms of data collection, one limitation is that we did not use participants to cooperatively and systematically code data as outlined by Patton (2002). Though we did conduct member checks (Creswell and Miller 2000; Lincoln and Guba 1985) at the end of each cycle of research as a way for committee members to confirm the validity of project goals, we would have liked to have done this in a more thorough manner.

One obvious limitation of this project is that Elder is a white American outsider working in a post-colonial Kenyan context. He acknowledges this limitation and addressed it in part by making every effort to enact critical decolonising and indigenous methodologies through local expert knowledge and collaboration from project stakeholders. Another limitation is the scope of the project. It was relatively small and occurred over a short period of time in one localised region of Kenya. As a result, generalisation of findings and replication of the project remain unknown. However, the formation of inclusion committees is a positive first step.

Being that both Authors are able-bodied and do not have lived experience of disability in Kenya, it is important to note that we can only view this project from our own partial respective lenses. Though we engaged many people in the project who live with disabilities in Kenya, this does not negate the fact that the Authors have never experienced these realities. However, we attempted to minimise the impacts of this reality by engaging in decolonising methodologies and CBPR with people with disabilities.

In terms of resources, all project activities focused on developing inclusive practices in primary schools only. We did not have the capacity or the financial resources to expand this project to secondary schools or universities. One final potential limitation to note is the tension between creating viable inclusive reform utilising existing school and community resources while at the same time raising funds for sustainability. The tension is in the duality of needing to co-construct inclusive reform strategies that do not require extra resources, while at the same time establishing sustainability goals that require committee members raise funds for sustainability. This tension is something we plan to explore in future projects in Kenya.

## Implications

When we began this research, we wanted to know how to increase the number of students with disabilities in primary schools in western Kenya. As we developed this project, we wondered what this actually *looked like* in practice. Such practices are largely absent from existing literature on inclusive education in the global South. This project goes beyond assessing teacher attitudes on inclusive education. Rather than asking, 'Can we?' we ask, 'How can we?' We outline the implications of such practices below.

Inclusion committee members referenced community sensitisation as the main factor influencing more students with disabilities accessing education. These community-based sensitisation efforts, accompanied by inclusive trainings, increased the capacity within the community to value disability as a diversity, and increased the capacity of teachers to support diverse learners in their classrooms. These findings suggest that such approaches, if adopted by teacher education programs (e.g. Kenyatta University), have the potential to increase pre- and in-service teacher capacity to support students with disabilities in primary schools.

Since the beginning of this project, we witnessed the inclusion network in Kenya grow exponentially. Faculty members from Kenyatta University and inclusion stakeholders from UNICEF, USAID, grassroots disability organisations, and the Ministry of Education have established an inclusion network and a national disability dialogue, which at the time of writing, aimed to unify the national policy on inclusive education and bridge policy and practice. As an inclusion network, we collaborated to identify effective best inclusive education practices currently in place in Kenya. If similar, contextually relevant inclusive supports are put in place as we have done in western Kenya, national replication of this project could become a reality.

One of the more significant implications of this project is the potential for (re)importation and implementation of CBPR practices from Kenya to under-resourced schools in the global North. This project repositions Kenyan teachers and inclusive stakeholders as the experts of their own contexts whose approaches to inclusive education can be of value to teachers in under-resourced schools in the global North. Specifically, employing CBPR practices in under-resourced schools in the United States (and other Northern countries) has a transformative potential to disrupt the top-down school reform process that is so prevalent in modern neo-liberal school reform (Apple 2016). While students with disabilities in the United States must receive access to a free appropriate education in the least restrictive environment under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004), the current special education system serves to disproportionately segregate students of colour into *more restrictive* special education classrooms away from their typically developing peers (Ferri and Connor 2005). This reality provides such students with disabilities access to separate and unequal education (Linton 1998; Lipsky and Gartner 1996). The CBPR approach in such under-resourced schools can potentially disrupt the hegemonic power in schools and redistribute it to historically marginalised stakeholders in inclusive education (e.g. poor families of colour). This would be a profound shift away from current neo-liberal and capitalistic-based school reform that underserve and oppress students with disabilities in Northern countries (Erevelles 2000).

## Conclusion

This project has led us to think about and question the existing segregated and complex Kenyan education system. As a result of this project, we now have a better understanding of how to create more inclusive primary classrooms in Kenya. We would like to further this research by applying certain aspects of the project (e.g. formation of inclusion committees) to under-resourced schools in the United States. Though Kenya and the United States have clear differences between allocation of disability-related school resources, there are many schools in the United States that operate with minimal resources provided to students with disabilities. We hope to extend this project by working within such schools, developing inclusion committees, and initiating sustained discussions on disability rights and inclusive education. On the surface, Kenya and the United States may be dissimilar in how students with disabilities are educated, but we strongly believe that the inclusive practices we developed in Kenya can have significant implications for increasing the number of students with disabilities accessing primary education in the United States.

## Notes

1. Though we use the term 'global South' to describe 'developing' countries, we feel that 'under-developed countries' is a more accurate description of post-colonial nations because such countries have been purposefully underdeveloped by Northern countries to maintain past colonial oppression (Hall 1990; Mwaura 2005; Zembylas 2013).
2. Due to time constraints and physical distance during this study, only Elder analysed the project data. However, throughout the study, Kuja regularly participated in member checks (Creswell and Miller 2000; Lincoln and Guba 1985).
3. Many students with disabilities in Kenya attend special schools that are categorized by disability label which include schools for the Deaf, schools for the blind, schools for students with physical impairments, and schools for students with intellectual disability labels.
4. We use Deaf with a capital D throughout this paper to represent that people at this school identify with and embrace Kenyan Deaf culture.

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