

## THE QUEST FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE CASE OF PAKAME HIGH SCHOOL

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### ABSTRACT

This research notes that there are concerted efforts towards inclusive education at Pakame High School, in Shurugwi District of the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. Interviews, questionnaires, and the observation technique were used in the data gathering process. Interviewed were the visually handicapped, the brailist, the teachers both current (10 out of 30) and past (2), current students (6) and ex-students (2) and ancillary staff (5). We believe the wide spectrum of interviewees involved gives a fair reflection of the attitudes and opinions of the Pakame High School community in as far as inclusive education is concerned. To augment the interview questionnaires were used one specifically for the school administration and the other for the teachers (10). It does not require a homo-sapien endowed with extraordinary mental faculties to conclude that the use of more than one data-gathering instrument is better than one, hence the multi-pronged approach in data generation. The researchers note that in order to fully and meaningfully assist visually impaired or any 'special pupils' the ordinary teacher should be equipped with appropriate skills and attitudes with which to deal with the inherent challenges of inclusive classes. Expecting the conventional teacher to miraculously handle students with special needs using the same resources and same skills can be described as misplaced trust. The research also calls for total inclusion to avoid a situation where there is de jure inclusion and de facto exclusion-a situation where the pupil is physically in the classroom but not fully catered for educationally.

**Keywords:** Inclusion Education; Visual Impairment

### WHAT IS VISUAL IMPAIRMENT?

Some renowned authors on the subject succinctly describe visual impairment thus: "When glasses or contacts do not correct vision to within normal or near normal limits, students may be considered to have a visual impairment that may require special education services..." (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 1997).

Several definitions are used to describe visual impairment. The two main groups are low vision and blindness. Low vision refers to a level of visual impairment where vision is still useful for learning or the execution of a task. Blindness refers to not having a functional use of sight (Smith, 1998). Blindness can be divided into two major categories namely congenital and adventitious blindness. The former refers to an inborn visual impairment while the latter refers to loss of sight after birth, especially after age of two. Such people retain some memory of what they would have seen while they were sighted (Smith, 1998). Causes of visual impairment includes: diseases such as glaucoma, cataracts and retinopathy; trauma or injury and

refractive errors (Vaughn, Bos & Schumm, 1997). The term ‘visual impairment’ will deliberately be used loosely to encompass partial sight, low vision, and blindness. In short, the term will refer to the condition whereby because of one’s vision or lack of it one ends up needing the services of a special school or an ordinary school with special accessories.

### **WHAT IS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?**

Inclusion refers to maximum integration of students with disabilities into general classrooms (Sailor, 1991, in Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1995). According to Buttlar (1990), inclusion occurs ‘where students with disabilities are educated in the company of their regular age peers to the fullest extent possible...’ Inclusion is ‘a value that is manifested in the way we plan, promote and conceptualize the education and development of young children...in inclusion programs, the diverse needs of all children are accommodated to the maximum extent possible within the general education curriculum...’ (Salisbury, cited in Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1995).

Inclusive education has six major components namely:

1. All students receive education in the school they would attend if they had no disability.
2. A natural proportion of students with disabilities occur at each site.
3. A zero-reject philosophy exists so that typically no student will be excluded on the basis of type or extent of disability.
4. School and general education placements are age-and grade- appropriate so that no self-contained special education classes exist.
5. Co-operative learning and peer instruction are the preferred instructional methods.
6. Special education supports exist within the general education class and in other integrated environments. (Sailor, cited in Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994).

Inclusion means that all children are taught subjects as other children and generally in the same manner. They also interact socially with many different people making them better prepared to take their places in society when schooling is completed. Educating visually impaired students with their sighted peers was advocated by Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe in 1866 when he declared that ‘with a view to lessening all differences between blind and seeing children, I would have the blind attend the common schools in all cases where it is feasible...’ (Gearheart, Weishahn, & Gearheart, 1988)

The Salamanca Declaration, under Article 6:11, to which Zimbabwe is a signatory, underscores the inclusive education thus:

Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercises of human rights. Experience in many countries demonstrates that integration of children and youths with educational needs is best achieved within inclusive schools that serve all children within the community. (Salamanca Statement Article 6).

### **BRIEF BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE SCHOOL**

The mission school is run under the auspices of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe situated on a mission farm 88 kilometers from Gweru and about 9 kilometers off the Gweru-Zvishavane road and to the south of Shurugwi town opened doors in 1982

operating for years offering tuition up to 'O'-level. In 1995 the school was upgraded to 'A'-level status. Inclusive education began at Pakame in 1986. Pakame and her sister school Waddilove are the two Methodist Church in Zimbabwe institutions offering inclusive education. The latter enrolls both primary and secondary pupils while the former only has visually impaired pupils at secondary school level. Although Pakame High School also enrolls students with other forms of disability such as the albino and wheelchair users the study will focus mainly on the visually impaired a form of disability that is considered very grave or the gravest in many societies.

#### **A NOTE ON RESEARCH DESIGN: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Qualitative research procedures were mainly used to collect and analyze data. In particular the Case Study was used.

*In a case study the investigator attempts to examine an individual or unit in depth. The investigator tries to discover all the variables that are important in the history or development of the subject...*(Ary, Jacobs, & Razaciek, 1990).

This research design, like any other belonging to the qualitative paradigm, is concerned primarily with the process rather than the product, looks at meaning, that is, how people interpret their experiences, views the researcher as the main data-gathering instrument in the field (the researcher(s) physically go to the people or site to observe behavior in its natural setting) and is descriptive as well as inductive (Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The qualitative paradigm is concerned mainly with the process hence the detailed descriptions characteristic of write-ups of researches done with such a philosophical position in mind, the current one included. Since it is very much dependent on the researcher(s) as the main data-gathering instrument(s) the three researchers had to immerse themselves in the thick of things, through fieldwork, in order to 'study real-world situations as they unfold naturally...' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) and witness the goings-on first hand hence the decision to visit the school and talk to all concerned: the visually handicapped, the brailist, the teachers, both current and past, current and ex-students, ancillary staff, and visit the resource centre to observe. Qualitative research is thus seeks the insider's view as opposed to its quantitative counterpart, which is etic, or detached. When information is finally gathered, the qualitative paradigm demands a detailed descriptive account of what was observed before inductive conclusions are made. The goal of qualitative research is "to portray the complex pattern of what is being studied in sufficient depth of detail *so that one who has not experienced it can understand it*" [emphasis added] (Ary, Jacobs, & Razaciek, 1990). The main data gathering techniques were interviews, observation and open-ended questionnaires; as much detail as possible will be supplied.

#### *Interviews*

The following were interviewed the visually handicapped, the brailist, the teachers both current (10) and past (2), current (6) and ex-students (2) and ancillary staff (5). Teachers included both those who teach and those who do not teach visually impaired students. The reason why the latter group was included is that inclusive education is more than the teacher-pupil contact in the classroom setting but includes 'the hidden curriculum'. This also explains why the researchers deemed it prudent to include pupils who do not have visually impaired colleagues in their classrooms as well as the ancillary staff such as the matron and boarding master. Inclusive education should be seen as holistic not just in terms of what is taught but also

on the social environment on which what is taught is supposed to be used and useful. The Salamanca Declaration thus notes that:

*While inclusive schools provide a favorable setting for achieving equal opportunity and full participation their success requires a concerted effort, not only by teachers and school staff but also by peers, parents, families and volunteers.*

(Salamanca Statement Article 6).

At a boarding setting like Pakame High School teachers and the ancillary staff act in loco parentis while the other students are the invaluable peers. We believe the wide spectrum of interviewees involved gives a fair reflection of the attitudes and opinions of the Pakame High School community in as far as inclusive education is concerned.

### *Questionnaire*

To augment the interview questionnaires were used one specifically for the school administration and the other for the teachers (10). The questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions most of which required the respondent to elaborate/give reasons. Focus here was on how language, the main carrier of culture, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and etc were used. The writers view what respondents produced, be it speeches, or written work as transcripts of the minds of their minds. Also of interest to the researchers was how the information gathered from the interviews and questionnaires would not just corroborate but also complement each other especially bearing in mind that no one instrument can be said to be flawless. It does not require a homosapien endowed with extraordinary mental faculties to conclude that the use of more than one data-gathering instrument is better than one.

### *Observation*

The researchers tried, to capture the minutest of details of the proceedings of their interaction with the human and non-human environment they came across, details of which will be vividly painted in words and a sprinkling of figures in accordance with the research's naturalistic bent. This is in line with what Patton, cited in Best & Kahn (1993) espouses thus:

*The data from observation consists of detailed description of peoples' activities, actions and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience...*

To provide as much detail as possible the researchers will report on most of the key individuals' responses. Having a generalized analysis was perceived to have the potential of leaving out some of the nuances, which might be key in the understanding of inclusive education as run by the institution.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Statistics on enrolment of the visually impaired pupils from 2004-2008:

| 2004         |          |          |          |   |          | 2005 |              |   |          |   |   | 2006     |          |              |   |   |          |   |   |          |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|---|----------|------|--------------|---|----------|---|---|----------|----------|--------------|---|---|----------|---|---|----------|
| Form         | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4 | 5        | 6    | Form         | 1 | 2        | 3 | 4 | 5        | 6        | Form         | 1 | 2 | 3        | 4 | 5 | 6        |
| Female       |          | 1        |          |   | 1        |      | Female       |   |          |   |   | 4        | 1        | Female       |   |   |          |   |   | 4        |
| Male         | 1        |          | 1        |   | 4        |      | Male         |   | 2        |   |   | 2        | 4        | Male         |   |   | 1        |   |   | 2        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>1</b> |   | <b>5</b> |      | <b>Total</b> |   | <b>2</b> |   |   | <b>6</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>Total</b> |   |   | <b>1</b> |   |   | <b>7</b> |

| 2007         |   |   |   |          |   | 2008 |              |   |   |   |   |          |   |
|--------------|---|---|---|----------|---|------|--------------|---|---|---|---|----------|---|
| Form         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6    | Form         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5        | 6 |
| Female       |   |   |   |          |   |      | Female       |   |   |   |   |          |   |
| Male         |   |   |   | 1        |   |      | Male         |   |   |   |   | 1        |   |
| <b>Total</b> |   |   |   | <b>1</b> |   |      | <b>Total</b> |   |   |   |   | <b>1</b> |   |

Statistics provided by the school administration

### Analysis of enrolment by sex

| Year         | Number of visually impaired female pupils enrolled | Number of visually impaired male pupils enrolled |
|--------------|--|--|
| 2004         | 2  | 6  |
| 2005         | 5  | 8  |
| 2006         | 4  | 3  |
| 2007         | 0  | 1  |
| 2008         | 0  | 1  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>11</b>  | <b>19</b>  |

## OBSERVATIONS

The observations that were made are as follows.

There is evidence of an erratic enrolment pattern for both male and female visually impaired pupils. Enrolment is one thing and retention is yet another. Institutions such as Pakame should strive to enroll and retain up to completion such special students.

Enrolment over the past 5 years is skewed in favor of males in spite of the fact that females make up about 52% of the national population which follows that there should be more female visually impaired children than males in the country which also follows that more female visually impaired pupils should be enrolled compared to their male counterparts, *Quod erat demonstrandum!*

There is a worrying decline from 2005 when 13 visually impaired pupils were enrolled to 7 in 2006, down to 1 each in 2007 and 2008.

All the 30 visually impaired pupils over the past five years have been boarders. The ideal is, as recommended by Sailor (1991), to have all visually impaired pupils receiving education in the school they would attend if they had no disability not removed from the peers and community they normally live with. The boarding environment may provide a 'safe' but artificial haven for the child who may continue to be discriminated against in real life in his or her real environment.

### **THE RESOURCE CENTER**

The Resource Center was a spacious classroom with offices, which also double up as store rooms and mini-libraries. The classroom has special desks that have facilities for storing braille paper in front of the candidate where it is easily accessible. Outside the classroom along the verandah is a rail to assist pupils in their mobility. The classroom is very large for ease of movement and has large windows for ventilation plus more importantly to allow as much light as possible needed especially by the pupils with low vision who use large print texts as well as braille books when studying.

The resource center acts as a mini-library where the visually impaired students come to do their studies when free from lessons. It also acts as a link between the subject teacher and the pupil in that:

- i. The subject teacher sets a test or exercise
- ii. The specialist teacher or brailist converts the test or exercise to braille and returns this to the subject teacher.
- iii. The subject teacher administers the test. The student with visually impairment is given a brailled version.
- iv. The subject teacher collects all the students' responses and gives the responses from the student with visually impairment to the specialist teacher or brailist for transcription that is, changing the brailled exercises to the graphemes understood by the ordinary teacher. This involves writing what the pupil would have actually written, including the errors made, just below the braille version of the pupil.
- v. After transcription, the work is given to the subject teacher.
- vi. The subject teacher marks the work and writes comments and the mark and sends the script to the specialist teacher or brailist for transcription of comments and the mark.
- vii. The specialist teacher or brailist returns the script to the subject teacher.
- viii. The subject teacher returns work to all the pupils.

Some teachers detest this long process and in fact advocate extra remuneration for teachers who might not be specialists but who handle 'special students' arguing that if there are 'A'-level teaching allowances why can't there be a special teaching allowance for them? They further argue that the specialist teachers at secondary school level are not allocated any subjects to teach because they are primary trained but only transcribe-the real burden, they argue, is carried by the unsung hero/heroine, the subject specialist. This explains partly the selective amnesia cited by some respondents-for instance some of the respondents had this to say:

- i. *'forgetting' the presence of such a child in my lesson'.*

- ii. *' sending in exercises and tests to the brailist for transcription' (as challenges in response to question 5a.)*
- iii. *'the needs of such pupils are sometimes forgotten'*
- iv. *'preparations for the specific material for the visually impaired is usually forgotten. Giving notes was relegated to the other pupils to assist...'(ex-teacher, who had worked at the school for 24 years and rising to the position of Acting Deputy Head and now based at another school)*
- v. *' preparing work in advance in order to send it to the resource centre for transcription was a challenge.'* (ex-teacher, now based at another school)

## **CURRENT TEACHERS' VIEWS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

### **Interview with Mr. M, the ex-superintendent**

Mr. M is the Senior Teacher, the third in the school hierarchy and has low vision. He used braille at Gokomere High School and the University of Zimbabwe where he did part of his schooling. He is a respected Divinity teacher- this may have helped to demystify visual impairment hence the cordial relations reflected in the interviews and questionnaires. He has been with the school since 1989 and was the boys' Superintendent for nine years up to 2005. The school has two superintendents, the boys' and the girls', who should be teachers according to government regulations and to whom the matron and boarding master directly report.

He said that as students arrive for the lower sixth form a deliberate effort to pair them with the normally sighted (sixth formers stay in pairs while the lower forms usually will be six to eight per dormitory and amongst these there is a deliberate effort to integrate them). This applies to other disabilities such as the wheel chair bound. There is a general orientation at the beginning of each school year which includes the school administration, Head of Departments, the Boarding master, Matron and the Guidance and Counseling teacher. He reported 'normal friction' between and among students at Pakame, which should be expected amongst any group of children anywhere. Mr. M also stated he was against specialist schools since they are isolating and segregating. Society, he argued, is inclusive hence inclusive education should be the norm.

Visually impaired students pay normal fees. (\$500 billion at the time of the interview) There has been donor fatigue and as a result less visually impaired students are currently enrolled. Most students come from a poor background and depend on donor assistance for fees. Donors according to him are overstretched and may not see the payment of fees as more pressing than the provision of food, for instance. If they continue to assist they only concentrate on the few exceptionally gifted pupils. As observed by the Nziramasanga Commission, The [Zimbabwe] Education Act (1987)

*lacks clarity on education for the disabled and hence it had been taken as a charity issue, and not as a right. It resulted in a situation where there is inadequate provision of equipment and materials for Special Needs Education (Nziramasanga Commission, 1999:217)*

No visually impaired students have been appointed prefects in the over twenty years of 'inclusive education' by the school. Asked to comment on this scenario, the ex-superintendent felt that the school administration thought that they would be overburdening the visually impaired students but the administration has not tried it.

### **The interview with the computer teacher**

The interview with the computer teacher revealed that computers were introduced in 1997. Computers are currently offered from Form 2 as Computer Appreciation and are currently offered at 'O'-and 'A'-level as an examinable subject. In spite of the fact that computers have been at the school for over a decade, housed in one of the best school computer labs in the country no computer appreciation programs have been run for students with visual impairment. Asked to comment on this anomaly, the computer teacher stated that the computer input devices for the visually impaired are very expensive and are usually donated. On the issue the Senior Teacher said that computer education should start with the teachers who should be equipped with skills of operating the special computers used by the visually impaired pupils. The computer education issue is a classic example of what one can call 'exclusion in inclusion'-computers are available at the school as pointed out earlier but they are not accessible to the visually impaired because certain accessories have not been purchased or donated. Twenty first century life can be said to be wound around computers and Information Technology in general and denying pupils the opportunity to access such basic skills is unfortunate. Computer skills would make the students less dependent on 'Good Samaritans' during their studies and in accessing information and news even after leaving school. The Salamanca Declaration Article 29 has the following recommendation concerning curriculum flexibility:

*Children with special needs should receive additional instructional support in the context of the regular curriculum, not a different curriculum. The guiding principle should be to provide all children with the same education, providing additional assistance and support to children requiring it. (Salamanca Statement Article 29)*

This does not seem to be the case at Pakame in as far as computer education is concerned.

### **The interview with Mr. T**

Mr.T has been a teacher for 14 years and 13 of these have been spent in the service of Pakame High School where he teaches Geography and Divinity up to 'A'-level. He said that he had taught inclusive classes for ten years. Like the ex-teacher, he cited preparation of teaching and learning materials for the special needs pupils as challenges. He particularly said:

*The visually impaired pupils face challenges in subjects that require demonstrations with the use of diagrams and charts. The needs of such pupils are sometimes forgotten.*

He also pointed out that the visually impaired pupils require more time allocated to them to accomplish tasks. In spite of the challenges he found teaching inclusive classes enriching as it 'gives me the opportunity to explore various teaching methods that I would otherwise not use'.

He found visually impaired pupils' commitment to work very impressive especially if the teacher showed compassion and a positive attitude since they showed a marked sensitivity to the slightest inkling of discrimination. Mr. T observed that the visually impaired pupils compare very well in languages, History, Religious Studies and Commerce and were poorer in Sciences, Geography and Accounts. Mr. T., over the years, has observed warm interpersonal relations between visually impaired and sighted pupils. However, he pointed out that some tended to take advantage of their condition if given a lot of sympathy. If he had a visually impaired child he said he would send him/her to a special school during the formative years to



learn braille and survival skills and later send him/her to an inclusive school so that the child would learn/be taught to integrate.

### **Ms. C's views**

Ms. C has been teaching Shona at the school for 18 years. Like all the other teachers with the exception of the specialist teacher, she never trained or was staff developed to handle special students. She revealed that she has not met any major challenges save for the fact that the visually impaired pupils' work took a bit of time to be transcribed and sometimes they would take time to finish reading set books. She also pointed out that invigilation of the examinations for the visually impaired was quite taxing. In the past the pupils were given 25% more time than their sighted counterparts (the extra time has been increased to 100% according to the Senior teacher). This means that if an 'A'-level paper (most are 3hours long) is penciled in for 14.00 hours the invigilation will go on up to 20.00 hours. This does not go down well with the invigilators hence the call for extra remuneration by non-specialists doing specialist duties.

She said that most students showed a positive attitude towards their work. In fact she pointed out that at one time she had two visually impaired pupils who scored As in her subject at 'O'-level. Ms. C expressed the view that inclusive education should be encouraged and financially supported at more schools as it adequately prepares the visually impaired pupils to integrate and also 'educates' other people around the special pupil such as the teachers, the other pupils and ancillary staff about disability often resulting in correction of misconceptions and preconceptions.

### **Home Economics teachers' views**

According to the two female teachers who have been working at the school for a combined period of 36 years, (17 for the Food and Nutrition and 19 for the Fashion and Fabrics), they have not had any visually impaired pupils in their subject areas because of 'the nature of their subjects'. Asked to elaborate on this they said that Fashion and Fabrics for instance requires pupils to perform certain activities which are so sense of sight dependent such as threading a machine which is quite difficult for the visually impaired pupils. Food and Nutrition similarly calls for an intensive use of that sense.

Both teachers expressed more or less the same sentiments shared by the rest of the staff and students on such aspects as commitment to work, discipline and interpersonal relations however the Food and Nutrition teacher said that she would rather send her child to a special school than an inclusive one because there she/he 'would benefit more because they would be treated equally and receive the same treatment from their teachers'. This coming from a former girls' superintendent should be taken seriously. The Fashion and Fabrics teacher though in support of inclusion as currently practiced at the school 'with its flaws' because of its benefits which outweigh its shortcomings felt that the non-specialist teachers concentrate on the sighted sidelining the visually impaired pupils a practice which needs to be addressed to make inclusive education meaningful.

Another teacher who has been with the school for 6 years also supported the principle of inclusion although he felt that many ordinarily trained teachers felt that they had been thrown at the deep end. Many teachers as a result struggle to cater for the

major ability groups namely the fast, average and struggling. The addition of the special student in the class, though socially beneficial and humane in that it is integrative and not segregating may prove to be just nominally instead of being meaningfully inclusive. As a result he said he would send his child to a special school ‘because I think there are specialist teachers who know best the special needs of such pupils...’

### **Ex-teachers’ views**

*Ex-teacher 1.* Mr. Mz an Agriculture teacher, now based in Masvingo Province, was chosen by the researchers because he had been with the school for 24 years rising through the ranks to become Senior Teacher and Acting Deputy Head for long periods of time. Before teaching at the school he had taught at a special school (Copota) as an Agriculture teacher. This again fascinated the researchers as well. Mr. Mz has been a teacher for 31 years and many students both sighted and visually impaired have passed through his hands and the researchers wanted to tap from this veteran teacher’s wealth of experience.

As an ex-teacher of the school, Mr. Mz was perceived by the researchers as a source of invaluable and unbiased information—as an ex-teacher of the institution he is no longer answerable to that administration. In a way he can reminisce without looking over his shoulder to check if anyone else was listening to him. During the interview and in the questionnaire Mr. Mz revealed that he had not been trained to handle special students.

Challenges he encountered as a subject teacher and administrator include:

- Lack of equipment
- Preparations for the specific material for the visually impaired pupils which are often forgotten by the ordinary teachers as a result such pupils often rely on the benevolence of ‘Good Samaritans’ in the form of sighted pupils to fill in the gaps.
- Lack of motivation on the part of conventional teachers who seem to think that such ‘demanding’ students were imposed on them from the top.
- Poor remuneration for teachers who find any extra load put on their already underpaid services as rubbing salt into the wound.

To overcome the challenges he worked in liaison with the specialist teacher and made an effort to prepare work in advance for the visually impaired. He also encouraged colleagues to give their best even under the not so pleasant working conditions. Given a choice he said that he would prefer an inclusive to a special class because:

*The world of work and adults is one, so where there is a chance integration is a better choice...*

He found visually impaired pupils no different from the conventional—there were excellent pupils from the group who even way surpassed the sighted. There were also others, however, who were struggling academically. On interpersonal relations he had this to say:

*They related well and they got attached to certain individuals who helped them and generally they were well accepted, others however felt pity or sorry for the visually impaired.*

The veteran educationist felt that inclusive education is a good idea and he would not hesitate to send his visually impaired child or dependent (if he had one) to an inclusive school 'so long as the school is well equipped and staffed because they integrate /mix better as adults'

*Ex-teacher 2.* Another ex-teacher, Mr. Mn who taught inclusive classes at the school for five years expressed similar sentiments when he justified his choice thus:

*...an inclusive school is more reflective of the society where the pupil will lie/lives. However the inclusive school should be well-equipped and teachers should be in-serviced to equip them with skills to effectively teach special students and resources should be availed to assist such pupils learn with ease...*

### **Interview with J. M.**

The 20-year-old student is doing Literature in English, Divinity and History. He attended Wananui school from grade 1 to 3 and Chedonje School from grade 4 to 7 at while staying at Jairos Jiri, Kadoma. He was one of a few visually impaired pupils who were sent to the conventional school because the Jairos Jiri (Kadoma) School authorities felt that he and the other few students would be 'competitive'. The student feels that this was very good for him and as a result he obtained 8 units at grade 7, the best from Jairos Jiri (Kadoma) School based pupils that year. As a result he was awarded a bursary by Jairos Jiri (Kadoma) School to go to study at Pakame where he has been since Form 1. He said that during early days some new students had problems. He particularly singled out what he overheard some pupils saying: '*Unoziva here kuti mukomana uyo ibofu?*' (Do you know that that boy is blind?) as particularly hurting and 'killing' to the self-esteem.

In terms of equipment he complained the braille machine not being at its best in terms of its performance, tapes, though invaluable in his studies, have not been easily accessible as well as braille paper. On average eight tapes are required to record a set book. As a result he is depending on sighted friends to read him the set books while he listens. The student has not been playing his favorite sport, goal ball due to unavailability of resources and lack of players.

Some of the problems the student is facing may be attributed to the fact that the specialist teacher was forced to transfer to Masase High School in Mberengwa because the numbers of students with visual impairment had dwindled to below the specified level of 1:10 according to The Secretary's Circular Number 3 of 1990. The brailist has been assigned to the accounts department to assist in clerical work because it is felt she is also being underutilized.

At 20 J.M. can be considered to be quite old as a lower sixth student. The four lower sixth students interviewed ranged from ages 17 to 18 years. This shows that many in J.M's position go to school late or are forced to suspend schooling due to financial constraints and only rejoin to find they are two or three grades or forms behind if they are lucky to find sponsors.

### *Interview with current students*

Students interviewed included B, J.M's best friend who has been helpful since they started to learn at the school as Form 1s five years ago. The two first met at Pakame and just 'clicked' as friends. Together with other sighted pupils they read for J.M.

while he listens although B is doing sciences. Besides reading for the visually impaired, the sighted students like B also act as guides during sports for the disabled. All the students interviewed were unanimous in their view that inclusive education is the best form of education and that they had benefited much by interacting with their visually impaired counterparts.

### **Interview with the matron**

The current matron has been with the institution for 26 years. In fact she has been a matron to students who themselves have since sent their own children to her. She has not been formally trained but has attended numerous workshops and has a Red Cross First Aid certificate. The scenario that obtains in the boys' section also obtains in the girls', that is, there is a conscious effort to integrate the students even outside the classroom. She said that she has not detected any friction between the two groups of students pointing that the visually impaired students are also assertive and do not want those around to feel pity for them. For instance she recalled that in the Dining Hall their table be integrated declaring '*Hatidi kudya toga.Munoda kuti mugozoti table yemablinds*'(We need to share the table with the sighted otherwise other pupils will describe it as the 'blinds' table).

She commended the visually impaired students who have been under her care for being smart even 'when they are on their menses'. This is only one of the examples, she said, she chose to show how they compare with the sighted. In fact in 1998 a visually impaired student by the name JZ was voted the smartest male student and got a prize for this on Prize giving day and the best A-level student in 2000 was completely without sight. The matron was asked if she would you send her visually impaired child or dependent (if she had one) to a 'special' school or an inclusive one she chose the latter because that would adequately prepare the child for life.

### **Interview with ex-students**

#### *Ex-student 1*

The 24 year old final year student teacher at Masvingo Teachers' College was a student at the school from 1998-2003. Having come from a non-inclusive primary school he said he was surprised to find visually impaired pupils in the hostels and classroom and pitied them. He even, like many other sighted students, tried to assist although the visually impaired students insisted on doing things on their own and only tolerated assistance only when it was absolutely necessary. After the initial shock students seemed to 'forget' about the impairment and interact normally.

He described the interaction between students as cordial. For instance the sighted would read for their colleagues while they listened, tape recorded, or typed on their braille machines. Blindfolded the sighted would also play goal ball with their visually impaired counterparts. In athletics the sighted acted, as guides-they would run holding the hand of the visually impaired athlete who would determine the speed by indicating to the guide to slow down or accelerate. The ex-student like many others joined their visually impaired counterparts in the formation of musical groups which would sing at assembly (from Tuesday to Friday between 06.30 and 07.10 in the church) and at other functions. He particularly singled out two groups, Masaisai and Willing Laborers, not just because of their inclusiveness, but because of their popularity in the cultural

life of the mission community. In both groups the visually impaired pupils took centre stage in their formation, recruitment of musicians and playing of musical instruments.

The interviewee was a prefect in 2001 when he was in Form 4 and again in 2003 when he was in Form 6 during which he did not have any problems with the visually impaired. Asked whether during his six-year stay at the school he had worked with visually impaired prefects or class monitors he said none had been elected (by pupils in the case of monitors) or appointed (in the case of prefects by the staff members). Asked to comment on this anomaly he said that since prefects are meant to police the naughty among the student population these would have a field day because the ‘police’ won’t be in a position to see them.

Asked if he would you send his visually impaired child or dependent (if he had one) to a ‘special’ school or an inclusive one he chose the former because he felt that many learners with visual impairment are left behind not because they are weak intellectually but because the conditions in the conventional classroom will not be conducive enough. In fact he insisted that learners with visual impairment are left by the ordinary overworked teacher who hopes and even encourages the student affected to get assistance from the other students. A special school would ensure an appropriate pace and adequate lesson preparation on the part of the teacher and less frustrating on the part of the learner.

### **Ex-student 2**

The other ex-student interviewed is a 22 year old Midlands State University student who also did all her six year secondary schooling at the school and said that her best friend was visually impaired. The student expressed similar sentiments like the previous one. She was however not very happy with the attitude displayed by some teachers who in the quest to complete the syllabus perceived the visually impaired as impediments:

*‘some were so fast in order to cover the syllabus, yet the students wanted more assistance. If a blind (sic) ask, some teachers reply in a harsh manner (sic).But others were helpful...’*

Both interviewees have valid points on the de facto exclusion. However their solution may be seen as escapist-instead of transforming the learning environment including educating the educator to make him/her sensitive to learners and equip him/her with the prerequisite skills, they choose, like many others who may even be high placed, to bury their heads like the proverbial ostrich and send the visually impaired students to secluded schools.

### **Interview with the brailist**

The brailist has been working at the school for 19 years. She trained at Murehwa Mission and further improved her skills with the South African Council for the Blind. She pointed out that one of the biggest challenges at the moment is lack of students. Other challenges include servicing of equipment and accessing braille paper. Braille machines used to be serviced at the Council for the Blind. This has since stopped because of shortage of qualified staff there.

With the exception of very isolated cases of friction brought to the attention of the specialist teacher or herself over the years, she found the attitude of the generality of the students pleasant. For example when the researchers went to the school 14 electricity pylons had been stripped of their copper wire by thieves thereby crippling the institution's capacity to pump water from Runde River about 10 kilometers away and students were forced to fetch water from boreholes. Some students offered to fetch water for the visually impaired student. In the past during power outages sighted students have always helped in fetching water because boreholes are located in areas where the visually impaired students are not familiar with and where they are likely to face problems. The sighted also serve the visually impaired with food in the dining hall.

### **THREATS TO INCLUSION**

Most pupils with visual impairment in Zimbabwe are of limited financial means and therefore depend on donors for their education (Thembanani in Chimedza & Peters, 2001). This dependency on donors explains the dwindling of numbers of visually impaired pupils at the school in the past few years as a result of donor fatigue and focusing on what they consider to be more pressing needs such as provision of food.

It should also be noted that if schools were all prepared with infrastructural and human resources, there would not be a need for the visually impaired to leave their homes and less expensive local schools to access education hundreds of kilometers away at more expensive privately run boarding schools. This has an alienating effect. Such is the case with those students at Pakame Mission.

Another threat is lack of expertise at school and at support institutions such as Dorothy Duncan a charitable organization in Bulawayo which gives and services Braille machines .Even The Council of the Blind which has offices in major urban areas has also been affected by lack of expertise due to the brain drain which has been on the increase due to the hyperinflation evident in the aforementioned fees of \$500 billion per term for boarding students. Donors have therefore resorted to streamlining and prioritizing areas to support.

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

There are a number of opportunities which can be derived from inclusion. For students, inclusion provides conducive environments where the physically challenged mix and be with other pupils. This prepares them to fit well into the larger society which leads to reduction of stigmatization and stereotyping by 'opening' the eyes of the sighted towards the real capabilities of those living with disability. For staff members inclusive education gives the teachers the opportunity to serve and leave a mark. The teacher is also afforded the opportunity to experiment with different methodologies in order to cater for a more diverse class thereby enriching on the part of the educator.

In as far as the institution is concerned, as a mission school the mission is more fulfilled if it is more encompassing in terms of the spectrum of pupils. Schools should be seen to be opening doors not shutting them. If doors are wide open for all and later space and resources become inadequate then well wishers may see the noble cause and chip in to assist in terms of resources and manpower. The school is also be in a position to produce more tolerant graduates who will walk the talk in as far as inclusion in all facets of life is concerned wherever they will be stationed in society later on in their lives. As for the

community its attitudes to people with disability will undergo a metamorphosis. The Nziramasanga Commission (1999) discovered that ‘many children with disabilities were still being hidden by their parents. Parents confessed that they did not know how to help their children with disabilities...’ Properly run inclusive education will ensure that such attitudes displayed by some parents as recently as 1999 could be transformed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

For meaningful inclusion to take place, all teachers and lecturers should be trained on basics of Special Education at all levels of education. This will equip them with the skills and inculcate positive attitudes towards people living with disability. Special education should be made compulsory to all teacher trainees. This will ensure that pupils are helped at the nearest school. This will be cheaper and more meaningfully integrative. This is contained in Salamanca Statement Article 41:27 which states that

‘Pre-service training programs should provide to all student teachers, primary and secondary alike, *positive orientation toward disability*, thereby developing an understanding of what can be achieved in schools with locally available support services.

Adequate funding is needed from central government for meaningful education to take place as advocated by Salamanca Declaration Article 71:42 thus: ‘Resources must also be allocated to support services for the training of mainstream teachers for the provision of resource centers and for special education teachers or resource teachers.’ Resources such as state of the art equipment, so that visually impaired pupils learn with ease and more quickly should be made available eg. tape recorders, blank tapes, Braille machines, computers with appropriate accessories, solar panels, rechargeable batteries etc. In this quest assistance could be availed to organizations that assist the visually impaired in the form of zero-duty on imported materials and government grants for all activities involving any form of disability. Resources also need to be channeled in other areas of education other than academic to enable meaningful extra-curricular activities for the realization of holistic education and total integration.

There is a need to be more inclusive even in schools where there is inclusion. For example in Computer education efforts should be made to source computer accessories which will make computers accessible to students with visual impairment.

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture staffing should not be too tied down by regulations eg. the teacher –pupil ratio of 1 teacher to 10 visually impaired pupils as stipulated in The Secretary’s Circular Number 3 of 1990 is antithetic to inclusion. If too much emphasis is placed on such policies problems are bound to arise. A school such as Pakame has invested so much in inclusive education. It is sad that the school has lost its specialist teacher to Musume Mission High School but if more visually impaired pupils are enrolled in future the school will be expected to recruit. Doesn’t it make sense to have a specialist teacher whether there are such students or not especially bearing in mind the level of investment done in that direction to date? In the researchers’ view it makes sense to recruit students than to transfer the teacher. In fact The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture should be worried and investigate the dwindling numbers instead of creating another problem by moving the teacher. Matters of inclusion should not be seen as merely economics ones but those of serving. Do

we save/serve by moving the teacher and leaving the infrastructure and abandoning the few visually impaired students? By so doing we certainly save money but not serve people. Related to this is the need to retain experienced staff and motivate teachers, including non-specialist ones who handle such classes by giving them incentives so that they give their best.

Most visually impaired pupils come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds therefore an effort should be made by government to ensure such pupils access and remain in school to the highest level their potential should take them. Making education for the visually impaired free may ensure that more and more such pupils are enrolled.

There is need to enroll students living with other forms of disability in order for the school to be a total community, a microcosmic representation of the larger society and therefore a fitting dress rehearsal for life beyond the classroom. This however calls for high capital and human resource injection. The specialist teacher should be an integral part of the school administration eg. in planning of program and procurement of resources.

Pakame Primary School, which is on the same mission farm and just across the road, should cater for special pupils at primary school level in addition to the conventional. Such an arrangement would see the two institutions sharing resources both human and material for the betterment of education for the visually impaired. This would ensure that visually impaired pupils around and in the mission environs would 'receive education in the school they would attend if they had no disability' (Sailor, 1991, in Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1995) which is one basic principle of the philosophy of inclusion.

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