

FIELD RESEARCH REPORT

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Specialization: Children and Youth Studies

Inclu(d)ed: The Lived Schooling Experiences of Children and Youth with Disability in Two Filipino Inclusive Education Schools

Research Paper Summary¹

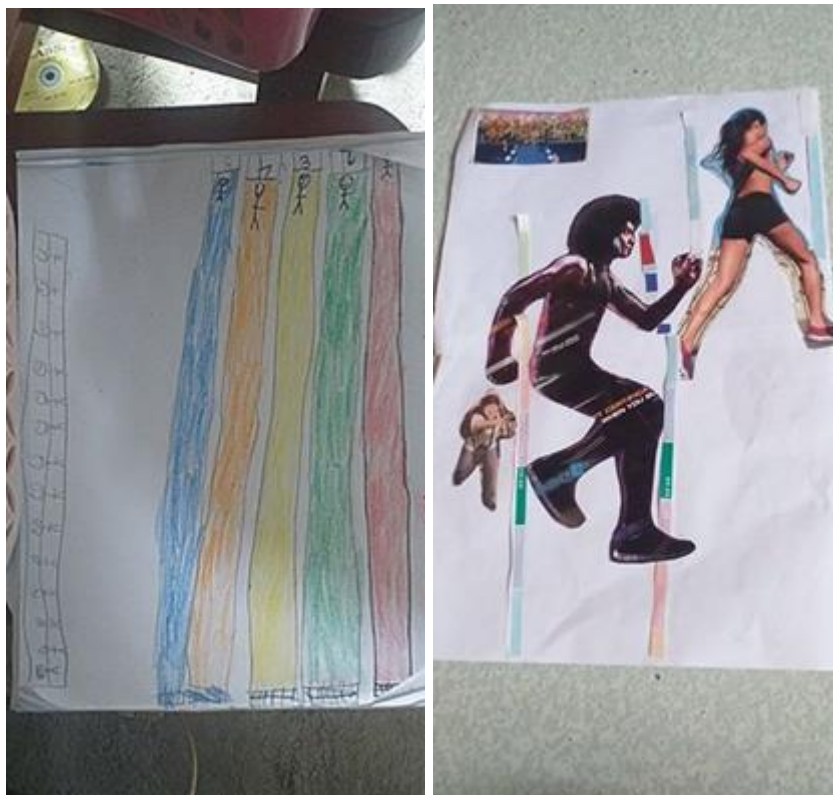
My study aims to understand how children and youth with disability (CYWD) experience “inclusive education” (IE) in the school and classroom settings. I employed a participatory approach to highlight the perspectives of my participants who come from a grade school and a secondary school in the region of Luzon. Three students with intellectual disability from a rural grade school, and seven deaf/mute students and five blind alumni from an urban secondary school engaged in meaningful, reflective conversations with me via *Facebook Messenger* for a period of four weeks.

In June, I started contacting and building online rapport with the students and alumni through the help of my personal contacts. In July, I officially started data collection by first asking the participants to choose activities and prompts that they will do each week which served as triggers for our conversations or reflections on their schooling experiences. The following creative activities account for their varying communication styles: vlogging, photovoice, keeping a written/audio diary, storytelling, collaging, participatory mapping and diagramming. Prompts were either *situational* (reflecting on a time or situation in school they felt sad/proud of themselves/empowered/appreciated/discouraged) or *specific* (what they like most/miss most about their school/who their favorite classmates/teachers are/how they travel/commute from school to home and vice-versa). During weekdays, each participant answered a prompt via his/her chosen activity and worked on his/her output offline. The participants send photos of their artworks by Friday night or Saturday morning and we conduct individual discussions (call/video call/chat via Facebook Messenger) during the weekends to talk about their insights or stories behind their outputs and how it relates to various issues they encountered in their schooling. Data collection officially ended by the end of August, because some participants either became busy or experienced interruptions in the internet that made it difficult to conduct discussions as planned.

In sum, the participants’ accounts point to the “un-inclusivity” of the formal schooling system in the Philippines because policies claim to promote IE, but in practice, IE is merely practiced as the physical integration of the CYWD in regular schools or classes mainly tailored for those without disability. As a result, students with disability feel excluded in many areas of school life. They cannot fully participate in classroom activities because formative assessments do not fully account for their different skills and abilities. Some teachers pre-determine their level of engagement in class and even underestimate them or expect them to eventually underperform. Some students also experienced being bullied by classmates because of their perceived

¹ Names, schools and locations are not disclosed to protect the participants’ identities.

difference from the majority. The participants' experiences therefore underscore the need to deconstruct inclusion and education and demand for more critical discussions on IE in the academic and policy sectors.



Martin's², 10-year old student with disability, illustrates and makes a collage about his proudest moment in school: copping second place in a track and field competition

SPD Fund

I initially wanted to use the fund to go home and conduct the creative task-based methods with the participants face-to-face. However, the number of Covid cases in the Philippines kept rising, and I decided to do everything virtually for the safety of my participants and of my own. The SPD Fund enabled me to provide financial or in-kind assistance to my participants so that they could have stable and engaging online communication with me during the data collection activities.

The fund also enabled me to provide compensation to the teachers and guardians of the students who needed guidance in answering the prompts or doing the activities. One of the SPED teachers served as the sign language interpreter, helping me communicate instructions and questions to the seven deaf/mute participants. Another SPED teacher helped me connect and build rapport with three students with intellectual disability, and another helped me interact with a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Two other guardians helped me in guiding the students with intellectual disability as they work on their creative outputs.

² Pseudonyms are used in the labels of the photos.

The SPD Fund also enabled me to provide mobile data to the participants as most of them do not have fixed internet connection at home. They were able to use the mobile data for over five weeks.

I was also able to have art materials delivered to the homes of four children so that they do not have to go out of their homes to buy pencils, coloring markers and drawing paper they would need in answering the prompts.

Lastly, I was able to hold three collective discussions/final group meetings- two with the blind alumni participants, and one with the deaf/mute students and their teacher or guardians. I had lunch/dinner delivered to their homes as a final token for their participation in the study and also as a way to celebrate the end of the creative activities.



Dina Jane, 11-year old student with intellectual disability, draws the activities she would always do with her most favorite friend, Pearl, also a student with intellectual disability.

Relation to the Major and Specialization

Since the 1970s, major national policies have sought to provide CYWD with access to education, but what is missing in the discourse is how to guarantee that the quality of their learning is not compromised and that their schooling will enable them to fully participate in other sectors of society once they graduate. My study aims to contribute to this discourse by showing that children and youth are able to critically assess the impact of social policies in their lives. Current social policies on IE continue to promote a watered-down conceptualization of inclusion because they have yet to account for children and youth's voices. My study therefore calls for policymakers and educators to not merely listen to CYWD's perspectives but also learn from their firsthand experiences so that there could be improvements in the crafting, revision and implementation of policies that target this marginalized group in the country.



Andrew, 18-year old deaf/mute, illustrates what he likes most about his school: his SPED teacher and six other deaf/mute friends/classmates.