

Chapter 1

The Nature of Inclusion in the Asia-Pacific



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Abstract This chapter will introduce the concepts and policies of inclusion and inclusive practice from a historical and ideological background across the Asia-Pacific region. Inclusion in its broadest and narrowest forms will be examined within the context of the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. While the region is unique in many ways, it has also been subject to influence from other countries around the world. Inclusive education policy has generally developed in the Asia-Pacific from other international contexts, and although it may be prescriptive, the actualisation of policy is often problematic for schools and educators. Countries within the Asia-Pacific region vary greatly in regard to where they are in the journey towards inclusion, with some having great success with inclusive practice and others struggling against seemingly overwhelming barriers. There are many affordances and barriers that are experienced on this journey, and these will be examined in greater depth.

Historically, ideologies which lead to the acceptance of others have struggled to become mainstream, and some of the reasons for the difficulty in changing attitudes towards inclusion will be examined. Attitudinal change can be very difficult, particularly when it is working against inbuilt cultural stereotypes and norms. Cultural norms within the Asia-Pacific region may include issues of ownership of classroom spaces, infrastructure issues, poverty, and cultural beliefs around those with disability. Strategies to address some of the difficulties in changing attitudes towards those who are marginalised will be examined. The chapter will conclude with discussion of future directions for inclusion in the region.

Keywords Asia-Pacific · Cultural beliefs · Inclusion · Inclusive education · Policy

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Introduction

While this chapter provides a general overview of education and inclusion in the Asia-Pacific region, consideration needs to be given to the incredibly diverse range of countries across the region which range from those with extremely low gross domestic product (GDP) to those with high GDP which are relatively wealthy (OECD, 2020). While GDP is an indicator of a country's overall wealth, it does not mean that this wealth is equally distributed. The emergence of a global health threat (COVID-19), during 2020, has also had an impact on many country's growth. Potential impact on social unrest should also be considered in the context of ongoing efforts in the area of education, among others (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2020; UNICEF, 2020). It is acknowledged that generalisation across the wide range of countries in this region is not possible and individual country contexts will dictate the situation in that country. Specific examples of inclusion processes and policy in selected countries will be provided as examples of practice across the region.

The Asia-Pacific Region

The Asia-Pacific region is a geographic area which comprises of approximately 53 countries incorporating East-Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Oceania region including Australasia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies [APCSS], 2020; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], 2018a). The exact number of countries comprising the region varies according to the context and source of information. Some of the countries in the region include those noted by the World Bank (2020) as having lower middle-income economies (i.e. Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal, the Philippines), some who have upper middle-income economies (i.e. China, Indonesia, Malaysia), and a few who have high-income economies (i.e. Australia, Hong Kong SAR, Macao SAR, New Zealand).

The population in this region totals over four billion people across a wide variety of cultures. According to the UNESCAP (2018a), around 690 million people in the Asia-Pacific region identify as having a disability, and many are disadvantaged in the areas of education, employment, and social and community inclusion as a result of their disability. Perceptions of people with disability as being 'less' or having severely limited abilities are common in countries where disability is viewed negatively.

The region boasts great diversity of culture and language, which is often evident between and within countries. Some countries and territories identify as having predominantly Western-style cultures and others as Asian or Eastern-style cultures with the differences between the two demonstrating the breadth of approaches throughout the Asia-Pacific region in areas of religion, freedom of choice, traditional approaches, and education (see Table 1.1; Michelini, 2020). Some countries have a

Table 1.1 Common differences between Eastern and Western culture and education (adapted from Michelini, 2020)

Area	Predominantly Eastern-style	Predominantly Western-style
Religion	Examples include Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam	Examples include Christianity, Judaism, Islam
Individual choice vs family considerations	Decisions often made by the family for the person	More flexibility for making individual decisions
Liberal vs conservative approach	More traditional – taboo topics (sex, childbirth, illness), feelings contained (not displayed). Little compromise on customs and traditions	Less based on tradition—more open in conversation, feelings expressed openly
Education	Often passive receivers of information. Required to work hard to achieve. Teacher has the authority. Less interactive	Creativity is given prominence. Individual, interactive approach to learning; critical thinking is encouraged
Education of children with disability	Segregated education—students are often excluded from mainstream classrooms (considered logical)	Inclusion in mainstream education is a right. Strong efforts made to include all students

multicultural population leading to elements of both Western and Eastern approaches being evident in daily life. When discussing educational opportunities for people with disability, this diversity presents both benefits and barriers, which will be explored further later.

Cultural Norms

A focus on collectivism in some countries can have an impact on the inclusion of people with disabilities in the community, both positively (everyone has a role) and negatively (some roles are not available to all). The roles undertaken by each member of the community are often defined based on traditional roles (i.e. wife, mother, labourer, provider), and people who are not able to fulfil these roles may not be valued. Some families and communities believe a child with a disability brings negative stigma and bad omens, and, thus, they keep the child within the home, rather than have them access the community. Landry et al. (2015) describes research undertaken in Sri Lanka that examined mothers' experiences of having a child with a disability. In response to a question about the origin of their child's disability, many mothers reported that the child was disabled as a result of sin committed by the mother, father, or child (often in a past lifetime), with one mother indicating that looking at a person with a disability while she was pregnant was related to her child's disability. Similar descriptions have been provided by mothers in Bangladesh, including their child being possessed by ghosts (Maloni et al., 2010) which accounts for their unusual behaviour.

In China, similarly, many families hide children with a disability, rarely taking them out of the home, to avoid coming into contact with those who may be derisive of the family (Chiu et al., 2013). Chiu et al. (2013) describe stigma that exists in China in regard to the character of the individual (such as having weak morals), the person being punished for poor behaviour in a previous life, and failing to carry out duties to one's ancestors. Specific foods such as mutton and rabbit are seen to have a negative effect on the development of the child and any disability that may be evident. In addition, eating inappropriate foods during pregnancy can be described as a cause for disability, and many cold foods, such as ice cream, cold drinks, and watermelon, and wet-hot foods, such as pineapple, mango, and shrimp which may affect the body's qi (harmony), are avoided for this reason (Teh, 2017). Much of the stigma relating to people with disability have origins in the teachings of Buddhism and Confucianism.

There are many cultural norms regarding education that are apparent within the Asia-Pacific region. These norms may include issues of ownership of classroom spaces, infrastructure issues, and cultural beliefs around those with disability (Landry et al., 2015). These issues may impact significantly on the acceptance of students with disability in mainstream classroom settings in some countries.

Teacher's Authority

Uncertain ownership of curriculum and classroom spaces, along with direct challenges to the teacher's authority, can lead to conflict and resentment in the classroom which is not productive for the teaching and learning in that space (Forlin, 2019). The teacher's presence in, and ownership of, the classroom may be challenged by the employment of additional staff who are often required to support the needs of students with disability, or assist the teacher, within the classroom. In countries where the class sizes can be very large (e.g. India, Bangladesh), the teacher is generally considered the person 'in charge' who holds the knowledge and has high status. To have this authority usurped by an additional person in the classroom is seen as unacceptable or as a reflection that the teacher is not coping with the demands of the classroom, leading to possible loss of the face and shame.

Infrastructure

In some countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, legislation requires that school infrastructure must meet the requirements of all students who attend the school, including students with sensory and physical impairments. Appropriate infrastructure in these countries may consist of lifts and ramps for students who use wheelchairs, tactile paving for students with vision impairment, and sound-field systems for students with hearing impairment. Effective school infrastructure and

design have shown to improve educational outcomes for students and consists of building both infrastructure (Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2014), environmental design (New South Wales Government, 2018), and classroom design (Finley & Wiggs, 2016). In countries such as Australia and New Zealand, there has been a move away from teacher-centred classrooms to student-centred classrooms. This approach is less evident in other countries in the Asia-Pacific, many of whom rely on a teacher-centred approach to classroom instruction and, therefore, classroom design which facilitates this approach.

In lower-income countries, there tends to be less emphasis on school infrastructure and more emphasis on accessing an available space, student school attendance, and ensuring teachers are available, although the teachers may have only rudimentary qualifications (if at all). The reduced emphasis on school infrastructure is often due to a lack of funding for education and the internal country infrastructure (i.e. roads, transport; Gurara et al., 2018). As a result, students with disability may have difficulty accessing schooling due to an inability to get to the school (poor transport, long distances), inability for the family to pay for schooling due to other medical costs (poverty), and inability to navigate the school environment itself (Landry et al., 2015). These infrastructure concerns do not take into account the classroom environment or curriculum adaptations that may be required for students to be successful learners (Barrett et al., 2017).

Cultural Beliefs

Cultural beliefs and perceptions around students with disabilities, including the capacity of students to learn, particularly students with an intellectual or cognitive disability, impact on the acceptance and inclusion of students in mainstream classrooms (Munyi, 2012). Often these perceptions arise from misunderstanding of the disability or prior cultural beliefs that the person with a disability is unable to be a productive part of society (or even in some cases that they are evil or possessed), and should not be allocated, sometimes scarce, resources (Maloni et al., 2010). In addition, there is often much less emphasis on individuality in some Asian societies, with a greater focus being placed on conformity with the group, and group wellbeing (Thomas & Thomas, 2002).

Brief History of Disability Services over Time

Historical perception of disability and provision of services in the Asia-Pacific for people with disability has been similar to descriptions of ancient Greek times, where people with disability were seen as being diseased, imperfect, or possessed by demons and babies born with deformities were often left to die (Peterson & Hittie, 2010). People with obvious disability at that time were generally shunned and

rejected by society at large. A few scholars demonstrated an interest in ‘curing’ the person with a disability, although this interest was not always altruistic. There was often fear associated with people with disability as it was not known why they were ‘different’ and what could not be explained (even inappropriately) was often rejected (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011).

The middle ages in Europe (approximately fifth to the fifteenth century) were a time of contradiction, as individuals with disability were treated very poorly, with treatments such as trepanning (drilling into the skull to release evil spirits) being commonly used along with rejection from the society, while at the same time people with disability were often the recipients of care provided by the Church (Irvine et al., 2013). During this era, the priest, who may have been the only person in the local area who could read and write, was seen as an authority figure and had great influence on how people with disability were treated, which could vary considerably. Due to the significance of the Church at this time, the period is often known as a time of the ‘religious model’ of disability (Eyler, 2010). Miles (2000), in his fascinating discussion of disability over the millennium in South Asia, suggests that around the same time, there were a number of ways that people with disability were treated, some of which align with the European experience. For example, he states that there were a number of different responses to disability, ranging from care provided by the women in the family to the development of charitable institutions for people who were poor or disabled and to people with disabilities being provided with tasks in the community appropriate to their ability (i.e. collecting firewood).

Medical Model of Disability

In the nineteenth and twentieth century, throughout both Europe and across Asia, the scientist and doctor became the person who often dictated to parents how their children with disability should be treated. The focus at this time was on physiological factors and impairments, with medical treatment and scientific research being the primary responses to disability (Hogan, 2019). This model of provision is known as the ‘medical model.’ Around this same time, there was an increase in institutions for people with disability and mental health issues, and parents were often strongly encouraged to place their child in an institution, forget about them, and have other children. In Asia, there was also an increase in aid and organisations (often from Europe or America) that aimed to provide medical support and treatment for people with disabilities, although this was often implemented without consideration of the indigenous peoples’ prior history or knowledge and with little integration of cultural aspects (Miles, 2000).

In many regions throughout the Asia-Pacific, the medical model remains as the approach taken towards people with disability, with the disability seen as an impairment or a negative characteristic that needs to be cured (Kuansong, 2010). In 1980, the World Health Organization (WHO) released the *International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps* which focused on providing

information for professionals to consider the long-term impact of disability and to promote early identification and prevention strategies to address environmental and societal barriers for people with disability. Further iterations of the classification framework have emphasised the functional aspect of disability and illness. The *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF; WHO, 2021a) makes some attempt to bridge the medical model and social model of disability through the inclusion of information about environmental factors and context that impact on disability and health. In order to assess restrictions resulting from an impairment or disability, the WHO (2021b) developed an instrument known as the *World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule* (WHODAS 2.0), which uses responses from people with disability to determine the nature of the disability and impacts on their functioning. These tools have been used in the Asia-Pacific, along with other regions, to determine links between disability and quality of life as well as inform public policy (Federici et al., 2009).

Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability found favour in the 1980s in many Western countries and was a reaction to the stigmatisation and medical nature of approaches to disability, which often failed to address the social impacts on the person (Hogan, 2019). Proponents of the social model of disability (which is a prominent model in some countries in the Asia-Pacific, but not all) state that disability resulted from an impairment as a result of the society not accommodating the needs of the person. The school of thought underpinning the social model of disability is that disability is a social-political construct and as such is imposed on the individual by society (Hogan, 2019). This view separates the impairment from the disability and has implications for including people with disability in society at large.

Rights-Based Model

Further movement in human rights has seen rise of the rights-based model of disability, where people with disability are deemed to have a right to access fundamental freedoms on the same basis as people without disability (Asia Pacific Forum, 2018). While the social model highlighted the social and discrimination barriers for people with disability, the rights-based model attends to the right of each individual to access education, services, and communities, providing guidelines for progress.

Inclusion and Disability

As previously noted, cultural norms and traditional approaches to supporting people with disability across the Asia-Pacific region may have led to the exclusion of many people (Chiu et al., 2013; Landry et al., 2015). This exclusion meant that people with disability found it difficult to access services, if any were available, and were often not welcome in public places. An attitude of pity and revulsion towards people with obvious physical disabilities was not uncommon and may still be evident in some societies.

The UNESCO (2006), in *Guidelines for Inclusion*, describes the movement from exclusion of people with disability in community life (and at times all aspects of care) through the processes of segregation and integration to inclusion of people with disability in all facets of life and community. In order to study the development of inclusion, an examination of how it developed as a concept is important. In broad form, inclusion refers to all people being a part of the community and culture of a country, regardless of their background or ability. This understanding of inclusion refers to diverse individuals who may have been denied opportunities to access society on an equal basis, due to their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, disability, or a combination of these characteristics (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2014; Forlin et al., 2009; Forlin & Chambers, 2017, 2020). Inclusion as a concept is a relatively 'new' way of approaching disability when viewed in a long-term historical context.

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) announced *the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which aimed to build upon the work of the previous Millennium Development Goals and, of particular relevance, also aimed to build inclusive societies and protect human rights (UNICEF, 2020). The journey to fulfil the aims of the Sustainable Development Goals is aspirational, although fraught with challenges. While many of the challenges are not insurmountable, they will require specific effort and determination on the part of individual countries in the Asia-Pacific region to work towards the goals, particularly in regard to resourcing education for all students, including those with disabilities, but also including learners from other marginalised groups. Sustainable Development Goal 4 '... aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all', and Section 5 specifically details the necessity to '... by 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations' (UNICEF, 2020, para. 5).

Specific to the Asia-Pacific region is the *Incheon Strategy* developed in 2012 (UNESCAP, 2018a) which was to guide *the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022*. It built on *the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) and provided a set of 10 specific development goals, 27 targets, and 62 indicators '... to track progress towards improving the quality of life, and the fulfilment of the rights, of the region's 690 million persons with

disabilities, most of whom live in poverty' (UNESCAP, 2018b, p. 3). *The Beijing Declaration*, including the action plan to accelerate the implementation of the Incheon strategy, was further adopted in 2017, midway in the decade of persons with disabilities (UNESCAP, 2018b). The declaration made clear the policy actions that governments and other stakeholders should take in alignment with strategic guidance. *The Incheon Strategy* and *Beijing Declaration* together with the Sustainable Development Goals and the CRPD promote effective development of people with disabilities in all facets of society, including education (UNESCO, 2015).

Special Education

While the focus of this chapter is on inclusive education, it should also be acknowledged that in some Asian-Pacific countries, special education or the provision of education for students with disabilities outside of the mainstream classroom is routinely provided. Mizunoya et al. (2016) noted that approximately 85% of primary-aged students with disability in low-income countries have never attended school; therefore, initial access, even in the form of separate education, may be an initial consideration for these students, and a movement towards further inclusive practice may be more tenable as a result.

Inclusion in Education

In a narrower form, inclusion has become synonymous with the placement and provision of education for students with disability. The historical actions and events which have been described contributed to the emphasis on increasing inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in all facets of society, including education (see Fig. 1.1). As with any psychosocial construct, inclusion has a variety of meanings and definitions (Berlach & Chambers, 2011), and it is often viewed through a specific lens particular to individual cultures and societies. Definitions of inclusion vary across countries, along with the understandings that these definitions bring to the practices and procedures employed in schools. According to Florian (2014), inclusive education is seen as an equitable approach to education for all students, including students with disability. The UNICEF (n.d.) describes inclusive education as an effective way to ensure that all students are provided with learning opportunities and that it '... means all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools. It means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded' (para. 5). This definition of inclusive education is not adopted by all countries with varying interpretations found in government and educational documents throughout the Asia-Pacific.

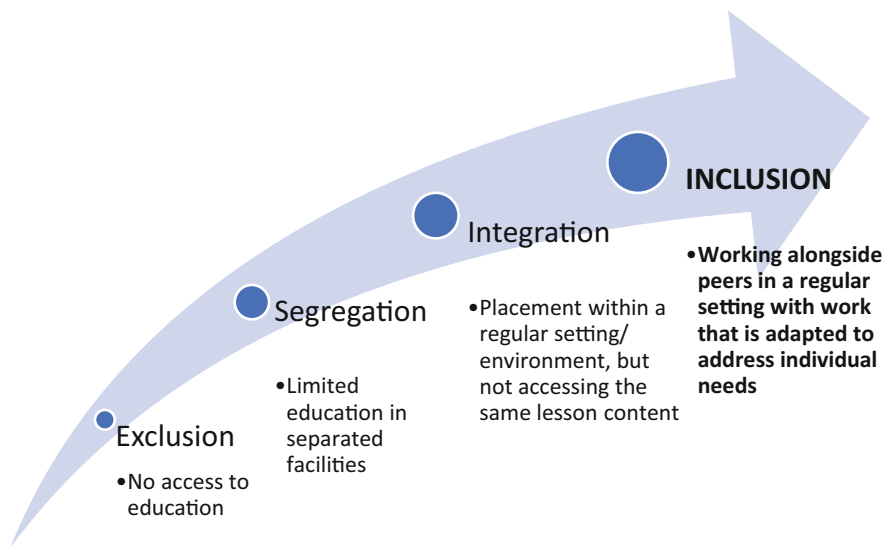


Fig. 1.1 Process of inclusion over time (adapted from UNESCO, 2006, p. 24)

Exclusion

Exclusion of students with disability meant that children remained at home and were not provided with access to schooling or community support. This practice may still be evident in some countries or within specific communities in the Asia-Pacific. It is not until the 1950s that access to education for students with disability was routinely offered in many countries, albeit in settings that were separate from their peers (Sharma & Deppeler, 2005; Sharma et al., 2019). Historically, students with disability in the Asia-Pacific region may have been excluded from education, for a variety of reasons, including perception of inability to learn, poverty which is exacerbated by disability and vice versa, and lack of understanding of impairment and disability. Education when it was provided in these contexts may have been in a segregated context, where the student was not a part of the general education system, but was provided with some educational services in a separate setting (often known as a special school or school for those with a specific disability—i.e., School for the Blind).

Normalisation

In the 1970s, movement away from segregated settings for people with disabilities (including separate educational facilities, institutions, and asylums) began, with strong impetus from the concept of ‘normalisation’ (ensuring people with disability

had access to as ‘normal’ a life as possible; Wolfensberger, 1972) and the increasing social justice movement which was intensifying in many Western countries (Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2014). The emphasis on social justice, which underpins the rights-based model of education, meant that individual rights and human rights for all became a stronger focus for many countries in the Asia-Pacific, some more rapidly than others (Asia Pacific Forum, 2018).

Access to Education

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO) was released in 1994 and was immediately effective in drawing attention to the schooling needs of students with disability around the world. Many countries in the Asia-Pacific recognise the Salamanca Statement as a pivotal point in the education of students with disability. Inclusive education policy and legislation have been developed by many countries in the Asia-Pacific which relate specifically to the inclusion of students with disability, generally consistent with other international contexts and their responsibilities as signatories of the United Nations Convention and Recommendations. Of particular significance is the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD; United Nations, 2006). Article 4 of the CRPD details the obligations of countries who are signatories (and who have ratified the convention) to ensure that the rights of people with disability are provided and maintained. Respect for difference and freedom for all are inherent in the convention, and respect for the dignity of individuals is paramount. Article 24 highlights the need to ensure people with disability have equal opportunity to access education, including lifelong learning opportunities, to ensure they are able to develop to their fullest potential. This article highlights that students with disability should not be excluded from general education systems, but should be provided with an inclusive, quality primary, and secondary education.

Legislation and Policy Development

To address the CRPD and preceding UN documents, some countries, including many in the Asia-Pacific region, responded by developing or consolidating legislation and policy. As there are numerous countries in the Asia-Pacific, a few examples of this legislation will be provided here. In Australia, for example, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Australian Government, 2005) articulate the measures that all education providers must meet to accommodate people with disabilities in learning. These standards sit under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Australian Government, 1992), which cover a wide range of areas relating to the elimination of discrimination against people with disability in work,

accommodation, and education and regarding the provision of goods and services. This legislation is rights-based and seeks to promote the rights of people with disability.

Similarly, legislation in India has been enacted to support the country's ratification of the CRPD. *The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016* (RPWD; Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016, Chap. 3, Sections 16 and 17) state that all educational institutions should provide inclusive education to students with disability. For students with disabilities, this provision includes admission to schools without discrimination, accessible facilities, reasonable accommodations, and modifications to support their needs and appropriate transport to access schooling. While the legislation is in place and appropriately incorporates the sense of the CRPD, there are still many students with disability (or who live in poverty) who do not access appropriate education in India, often due to poor teaching training and lack of resources (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013). Singal (2019) discusses the need to ensure that context is considered when addressing education facilities, as inclusive practices cannot '... be implemented in the same manner, in different social, cultural and economic contexts' (p. 836).

In 2009, the Philippines initiated a strategy, *Inclusive Education as A Strategy for Increasing Participation Rate of Children* (DO 72.s), to address the educational needs of the 2.2 million children with disabilities, many who did not have access to education and who lived in rural areas. This strategy guaranteed the right of these students to receive an education in an appropriate educational setting (Republic of the Philippines, Department of Education, 2009). Subsequent to the strategy, a number of legislative documents, including Senate Bill No. 1732, *Inclusive Education for Children and Youth with Special Needs Act* (Congress of the Republic of the Philippines, 2018), have been introduced into the parliament but have yet to be accepted. These bills address the need to support children and youth with disability in accessing inclusive education. Currently, one in seven students in the Philippines has a disability, with access to education being very limited (UNICEF, 2018).

Many students with disability, nevertheless, have never attended school, and a report by Mizunoya et al. (2016) based on data from 15 countries around the world found that disability was more of a barrier to education than any other factor. While many countries in the Asia-Pacific have adopted the terminology of inclusion, some are implementing integrative practices (placement in a classroom), rather than truly inclusive practice, where the child is fully incorporated into the curricular and social environment of the school and classroom. Low-income countries have been reliant on international funding to support education, inclusive education in particular (Carrington et al., 2019; Forlin, 2019; Sharma et al., 2019), and may struggle to continue to do so due to a reduction in funding as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially impacting on progress made to date.

While there are some uncertain times ahead, countries such as India, Cambodia, Australia, New Zealand, Macao, and the Philippines strive to ensure that appropriate knowledge and practices are used to support students within the confines of the education systems. This author has had the privilege of travelling to these countries to provide some guidelines and training for education systems and universities

around inclusive education while always being conscious of the country-specific situation, legislation, training opportunities, and potential constraints on resources and to not impose a particular view or solution. While the training and conversation are always received well, questions from participants often focus on practical ways to include students, given individual circumstances. Where possible, a problem-solving model is suggested which incorporates the available resources and the issue and assists the person to arrive at an appropriate solution while still taking into account the rights of the student with a disability. It is important that teachers and other staff who are in the situation take ownership of any solutions and inclusive practices and make them their own; otherwise, they will not be utilised effectively.

Teacher Training for Inclusive Education in the Asia-Pacific

Countries within the Asia-Pacific region vary greatly in regard to where they are in the journey towards inclusion, with some having great success with inclusive practice and others struggling against seemingly overwhelming barriers. A number of international organisations and researchers draw attention to the barriers which may be experienced by some countries in the Asia-Pacific region in relation to providing appropriate practices to support students in accessing inclusive education (Carrington et al., 2019; Forlin, 2019; UNESCAP, 2018a; UNESCO, 2019).

A major issue across the Asia-Pacific is the challenge faced in providing teachers with the skills needed to implement effective inclusive education. The need for effective preparation of teachers is critical if they are to implement effective and sustainable inclusive education. In low-income countries, though, a lack of suitably trained people to execute inclusive education is particularly prohibitive. In many instances, teacher training institutions do not have teacher educators who themselves have experience or practice in inclusion. This situation compounds the need for countries to implement suitable training programs for teachers such as a program initiated in Vietnam which aimed to embed a train-the-trainer model for teacher educators across the country to support a national core curriculum and pedagogical framework on inclusive education (Forlin & Nguyet, 2010). In the high-income countries across the region, most countries have introduced requirements into their professional standards for qualifying teachers to ensure they meet minimum standards in being able to support learners with disability or special education needs.

Analysis of research from 13 Asia Pacific countries concluded that ‘... a lack of well thought out policy, few resources, and limited understanding of inclusion seemed widespread in the Asia Pacific region’ (Sharma et al., 2012, p. 3). The review found further that special education and related service expertise, together with a lack of appropriate teacher education for inclusion, was inhibiting teachers from working inclusively. In summary, the review concluded that:

The lack of suitably qualified and prepared teachers, poor and/or limited teacher education, somewhat negative attitudes, and an ad hoc approach to preparing or up-skilling teachers was evident in almost every country in the region. Teacher education for inclusion was

sparse and generally ineffectual with an over reliance on external “experts” who have limited local knowledge and with little evidence of the teacher education being used to help establish localised programs that could be more sustainable. (Sharma et al., 2012, p. 14)

Across all jurisdictions, though, teachers continue to maintain that the training they receive during their pre-service course is insufficient to prepare them for inclusive education, citing that it is tokenistic at best and nonexistent at worst (Forlin, 2019). Even in regions where inclusion has been introduced for many years, teacher education remains insufficient to meet the demands in practice (Malakolunthu & Rengasamy, 2012), and ensuring positive attitudes towards inclusive education is vital.

Attitudinal Change

Changing attitudes of teachers and school leaders can be very difficult (Forlin, 2019). Considerable research has been undertaken across the Asia-Pacific regarding the impact of teacher and leader attitudes on inclusive education. Changing attitudes of teachers and school leaders can be exceedingly complicated, though, particularly when this involves working against inbuilt cultural stereotypes and norms, such as those described previously in this chapter (Forlin, 2019; Miles, 2000; Parker, 2001). This difficulty is exacerbated further when the inclusion of learners with disabilities in regular classes has not been the norm (Forlin, 2018). To ensure that learners with disabilities are welcomed and accepted in regular schools, it is vital to address any preconceived negative attitudes and expectations about their capabilities.

Successful inclusion requires not only preparing teachers with skills and knowledge but also ensuring that they have appropriate attitudes towards their role in enabling inclusion (Dally et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2019). In order to build teacher capacity, in-service training is recognised as a key element and must provide teachers with ‘. . . a positive attitude toward diversity and the acquisition of practical strategies and tools to foster inclusion in the classroom and the school more broadly’ (UNESCO, 2019, p. 13). Appropriate conceptualisation and measurement of inclusive practices can aid in recognising areas of need and addressing these effectively (Loreman et al., 2014).

Future Directions

Future directions for inclusive education in the Asia-Pacific region are multifaceted and will require increasing resources and supports for education systems, teachers, parents, and students. Attitudes towards people with disability are improving but still have some way to go to achieve the aims of the rights-based model, which is to

ensure that all people with disability enjoy fundamental human rights, including the right to an education. Along with the change in attitude, teachers need to be provided with appropriate training and material supports to ensure that inclusion, rather than integration or segregation, becomes the norm for students with disability.

In the Asia-Pacific region, there is great scope for collaboration between countries and the sharing of resources and information around practical and culturally sensitive practices for inclusive education. One country's experiences should not be held up as the only way to proceed but can be shared to promote further engagement and conversation around inclusion and the way forward. Progress in inclusive education can move slowly as it requires '...change at all levels of society' (UNICEF, n.d., para. 8), but without a push, nothing will move at all.

Advancing inclusive education in the Asia-Pacific will require consideration of the extreme diversity across the region and how this diversity can be harnessed to enhance knowledge and practical strategies to support people with disability, in whatever form is appropriate for the context. It is important that concerted efforts are made at all levels of governance, with strong interagency collaboration providing wraparound supports for people with disability. For countries in the region to develop their own processes and procedures, less reliance on external experts is needed, along with capacity building in the educational sector, so that local cultural considerations play an important role in the provision of services. Although policy is often aligned with international conventions, many countries are still struggling to implement appropriate support structures, through both infrastructure (buildings, transport) and human capital (qualified staff, teacher assistants). In some cases, the divide between urban and rural populations is particularly significant, with students in rural regions missing out on schooling due to the lack of available appropriate placements. Once impetus to achieve schooling for students with disability is in place, individual countries need to also consider how they will measure progress in inclusive education, possibly through the use of progress indicators. While these issues may appear to be overwhelming, with persistence and perseverance, progress has and will continue to be made.

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