

# SAHK

Citation: Cheng, C. Y. K. (2007). *A Holistic Model in Supporting Integrated Education for Children with Physical Disability*. Paper presented at The 10<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference, International Association of Special Education (IASE). Hong Kong.

## **Session Objectives:**

- To analyse the special needs of children with physical disability in mainstream schools;
- To present the result of a 3-year project in supporting integrated education for children with physical disability;
- To present the theoretical background of the holistic model of support in this project;
- To arouse the awareness of the unmet needs of children with physical disability in mainstream schools.

## **Session Description:**

- Oral presentation of the problems beyond physical barrier that children with physical disability face in mainstream schools will be given with case illustrations. A holistic model providing support to the integrators, their classmates, teachers and parents will be described theoretically and pragmatically together with feedback from the involved parties as a reflection of the effectiveness of the model.

## **Summary**

Children with physical disability but no significant learning difficulties are known to be more readily accepted to the mainstream schools. However, integrated/inclusive education is more than physical co-existence of the SEN students and the non-disabled peers. In an earlier pilot project at the Jockey Club Marion Fang Conductive Learning Centre of the Spastics Association of Hong Kong, 5 children with cerebral palsy graduated from the special childcare unit of the Centre and integrated in mainstream primary schools were followed up for their adaptation to the school life. Using standardized batteries of assessment, we kept track of their self-concept and physical ability each for three years. The results showed that the children demonstrated a declining self perceived physical capabilities which did not match with the objective assessment of their physical ability. There was also a concomitant decline of self concept of peer relationships. The result revealed that students with physical impairment have been facing a three-folded barrier of integration – environmental or physical barrier, attitudinal barrier and internal limitation. These barriers are the resultant interactions among the integrators themselves, their non-disabled peers, the mainstream teachers and the parents.

The finding prompted the formulation of a holistic model of support which took into consideration of the need of the integrators, their non-disabled peers, the mainstream teachers and the parents in order to achieve integrated education for the benefit of all parties concerned. The model was piloted and run for three years from September 2003 to August 2006 with a funding support. 34 children majority with cerebral palsy or spina bifida enrolled in this project. They were between 5 and 12 years of age at the time of enrolment. The schools involved in this project included kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools.

The model was founded on the principles of Conductive Education (Tatlow, 2006) and empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995). The model included:

1. Four areas of supports - for the integrators, the teachers, the parents and the school peers, coordinated into a seamless whole
2. Four coherent goals encompassing:
  - i. the empowerment of the integrators for improving self-confidence and self-esteem;
  - ii. the empowerment of parents for improving parenting skills, parent-child relationship and parent-teacher collaboration;
  - iii. the empowerment of teachers for improving differential teaching skills to meet the special needs of the integrators and the cultivation of inclusive atmosphere among all students, and to work with parents;
  - iv. the empowerment of peers for improving the understanding of and interaction with the integrators in contribution to inclusive culture in school.
3. Four core content of support covering:
  - i. The training on physical and social aspects of the integrators
  - ii. Collaboration with teachers on PE lessons, homework and examination adaptation, communication with parents and integrated activities for integrators and peers
  - iii. The training on parenting and negotiation skills as well as the concept of inclusive/integrated education for parents.
  - iv. Disability awareness training and integrated activities for non-disabled peers with the integrators.

The model had distinct features on the following aspects:

1. Trans-disciplinary team approach – a team of rehabilitation professionals including physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, nurse, social worker and childcare worker formed a transdisciplinary team who followed the two founding principles of the holistic model of this project. One of the members of the team acted as coordinator to work collaborative with other members in assessing, planning and implementing the model to ensure an integrated and consistent support to the students, peers, teachers and parents.
2. All-rounded approach – the physical, psycho-social and academic development of the integrators were taken into consideration as a whole and the support for parents, teachers and peers were coordinated.
3. Early introduction of the concept of inclusion to the integrators, their non-disabled peers and parents, as early as the integrators being at the kindergarten level
4. Special attention was paid to the transitional stages, including from kindergarten to primary one and from primary six to secondary one.
5. Periodic review of the status of integration and adjustment was made as required for individual cases.

Positive feedback through questionnaires from teachers and parents were obtained, with particular indication in improved self-acceptance of their own impairment among the integrators, improved peer-acceptance of the integrators among the non-disabled peers, increased teachers' awareness of the needs of integrators with physical impairment and improved parent-teacher communication. At the end of the project, 90 to more than 90% of the teachers expressed the project has offered help to them in knowledge in the problems and needs of the integrators, helping the integrators to integrate in school, positive attitude to the integrators, knowledge of inclusive education and method to carry out inclusive education; more than 80% of the teachers expressed an improved acceptance towards inclusive education.

## References

- [1] Tatlow, A. (2006): 'Conductive Education for Children and Adolescents with Cerebral Palsy', (Ashfield Press Publishing Services, The Spastics Association of Hong Kong).
- [2] Zimmerman, M.A. (1995): 'Psychological empowerment: issues and illustrations', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol.23:no.5, pp. 581 - 599.



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