

Lessons on Inclusion from Uganda

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Inclusive education

EmbraceKulture trains Ugandan teachers to develop the skills of students with disabilities, and more importantly, to believe in their capacity to learn.

“If you do not *believe* your students can learn, how can they learn?”

This is a core question animating the work of [EmbraceKulture](#), an Uganda based non-profit whose goal is to create a more inclusive world where all children are embraced for what makes them unique.

EmbraceKulture trains and equips teachers to help students with disabilities graduate with the skills that will help them become contributing members to their communities. It also works with community members to not only recognize the need to include these children but to believe in their capabilities and be involved in helping them achieve the bright futures they deserve.

Teachers must believe

Students with disabilities are more likely to excel when their teachers believe in their capability to learn. All too often, in Uganda, the teachers of students with disabilities enter into the schools with a fear of their students and an assumption that they cannot make progress.

EmbraceKulture’s teacher training begins with a fundamental lesson on “viewing each student as an individual with the capability to learn”. When teachers believe in their students, they become more invested in helping each of their students achieve success. EmbraceKulture trains teachers to adapt the existing curriculum and help each individual student achieve their own goals. Breaking long-term goals into shorter-term objectives helps the teachers and students alike to see what they have the ability to achieve.

When EmbraceKulture is able to prove to the teachers that their students are capable of learning, there is an increase in interest among the teachers and they begin to look for more ways to work with their students. EmbraceKulture recognized this increased interest but also saw that it was difficult for the teachers to access the information they were looking for so they created a tool they call “eKulture”.

eKulture is [a mobile phone based platform](#) that allows teachers to use their own simple phones to access locally relevant, disability specific information and train themselves on different disabilities their students have, as well as strategies to help them achieve their goals. If a teacher has a student with autism they can go through online training to learn more about autism and learn how to work with that student in a more effective way.

Inclusion Committees

In Uganda and many countries in the developing world, every individual is expected to pull their weight within the community. Children with disabilities are often [hidden away or deemed invalid](#) because the community sees them as incapable of pulling their weight. As soon as teachers, headteachers, and others in the community recognize their capability, their perceptions change and they quickly help the individual reach a point where they can be working and contributing to society.

A key part of making sure that children with disabilities are accessing the quality education they deserve is getting the entire community involved in the decision-making process by creating an “inclusion committee”. In the past, inclusion committees have been organized at the school level and included teachers, parents, and local leaders to talk about the rights of children with disabilities and their right to education. The schools make the decision to be inclusive and the committee makes the decision to support this inclusion.

EmbraceKulture has taken this one step further and created these inclusion committees at a district level, where disabled people’s organizations (DPOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community elders, shop-owners, and self-advocates join forces in an effort to support the inclusion of children with disabilities into the school systems. For example, the NGOs may know about grants available for funding, the local businesses can provide money towards school fees for the students, and the local government can provide resources not provided at the national level. When other districts see the benefits of the

inclusion of children with disabilities, they will easily be able to replicate this idea into their own communities.

Looking towards an inclusive future

EmbraceKulture has made an impressive impact on the lives of children with disabilities in Uganda. By helping teachers and community members realize the capabilities of these children, providing tools to help teachers continue learning even after training workshops are complete, and getting entire communities involved in the inclusion of children with disabilities, there are many more students achieving goals they never thought possible. This is what inclusive education can and should look like!

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