Global Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities
ISSN: 2575-8586

Juniper Publishers
key to the Researchers

Opinion
Volume 5 Issue 5 - January 2019
DOI: 10.19080/GJIDD.2019.05.555671

Glob J Intellect Dev Disabil

The Need for Equitable Educational Provision in S.E. Asia for Children with Disabilities: A Reflection

M J Foster*

Emeritus Fellow, Kingston Business School, England

Submission: December 01, 2018; **Published:** January 11, 2019

***Corresponding author:** M J Foster, Emeritus Fellow, Kingston Business School, England

Keywords: Provision; Pre-School Education; Mental Disabilities; Unwillingness.

Opinion

In a recent paper, my co-authors and I examined issues around the adequacy of both provision and quality of pre-school education in one province of Thailand, Prayukvong, Sornprasith and Foster [1]. As a final conjecture, I wrote (p.264), that, "one would speculate that, sadly, the opportunities and needs of disabled children, be they physical or mental disabilities, are likely to be somewhere rather low down the priorities list of many funders and providers, in a setting of intrinsic shortage. Any evidence to the contrary would be both interesting and a source of hope." The thinking behind this comment was that, even where pre-school education is relatively good in S.E. Asia, prevailing social attitudes and resource constraints will probably mean that those children with disabilities are more likely to face the prospect of exclusion from pre-school and school programmes than are their peers of able body and mind. Other factors which may have traction in this setting along with disability, are gender (being female may be a drawback), being a member of an ethnic minority, or being a refugee, see Slee [2]. Nevertheless, the notion that a child may be denied education, at any level, simply because they have a disability must surely be seen as abhorrent in the 21st century, not least because it is they, more than any others who need help, perhaps specially crafted help, if they are to live a decent life enabling them to have self-respect and to be respected by others.

This seems to me as a Briton to be very obvious, but one knows from personal experience, let alone the empirical reports of others, that negative attitudes to the disabled remain ingrained in many societies. I well recall going to live in Hong Kong in 1990 and being shocked by the negative attitudes towards the disabled casually expressed by many in the local population at that time. Thankfully things have improved in Hong Kong. People are now to be seen propelling themselves around MTR stations in their wheelchairs and social care provision is much improved. But Hong Kong is one of the more advanced parts of S.E. Asia. One of the problems in less developed countries is that many rural peasants are themselves poorly educated and as such may lack the necessary skills to best nurture their disadvantaged children even if they are minded to try to help their children to develop.

Let us briefly consider some more of the detailed empirical evidence of the issue of inclusion/exclusion as it relates to the education of young children in South East Asia. There are a variety of reasons why children may not participate in pre-school education: these include social convention (ideas such as 'parents know best'); ability to pay, given that such education is often not funded by the state; and unwillingness of providers to deal with handicapped children [3-7].

Kim and Umayahara [6] noted that, although pre-primary enrolment has increased substantially in the first decade of the 21st century in the Asia Pacific region, huge disparities continue to exist among and within countries. Countries in the region often do not provide equal opportunities for all children from birth. One key reason for this is the competing demands for government funding from other important areas such as pollution, disease and infrastructure development, Bray [3]. As a result of this funding shortage, one finds in some countries, of which Cambodia is one, that non-governmental funding is the norm for pre-school education, [5]. It should be remembered that even where primary schooling is supposedly mandatory not all rural children find their way to school, Thailand is an example – UNESCO Bangkok [8] provides a brief summary of levels of provision for able and disabled children across many Asian countries. It is still quite possible to find evidence of parents excusing their failure to get their children to school by claiming they can't afford to do so. In some cases, they say the youngsters must help on the family small-holding, while in other instances children are found working in sweatshops. Is one's cheap, cotton shirt in Europe the poisoned fruit of the toil of a little Bangladeshi child, in unsafe conditions, for example?

Children with special needs are a particular cause for concern. Such children need education just like other children,

but these are not always readily provided for. In the context of Brunei, Mundia [9] noted with concern that there was a lack of contact and coordination between special education in schools and school counselling professionals. Even worse, there are no special education teachers or school counsellors at pre-school level in Brunei.

That universal educational provision should be the norm cannot reasonably be doubted but even with that baseline established, Pereira [10] makes an important point. He argues that, while at one level issues faced by S.E. Asian countries (with his exemplars being Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam) are common, solutions have to be tailored to the individual country in line with their differing contextual challenges, be it: the place of religion within education in Indonesia; the tensions between the Malays and other ethnic groups in Malaysia; and again, issues around minority ethnic groups in Vietnam. He also notes that in Vietnam, three quarters of children attend pre-school in urban areas but only about half do in rural areas. Compared to that baseline, Thailand's Songkhla province, the location of the Prayukvong et al. [1] study, was found to be doing quite well but one is assured that provision is not similarly good across all Thai provinces.

In conclusion, we assume in developed countries that all children have the right to and will attend school, primary and secondary. We further avow and assume that the special or particular needs of disabled children will be met, be they physical or mental disabilities. In less developed areas of the world such as S.E. Asia such assumptions cannot be made. This is a problem waiting to be fixed. By whom should the solution be delivered? Fundamentally it should be the governments of the region's countries I should argue but there is also a very obvious role for developed economies. They, or we to make it more personal, can help by judicious use of their overseas aid budgets, helping to deliver specialist guidance perhaps.

References

1. Prayukvong W, Sornprasith A, Foster MJ (2018) Parental expectations of and satisfaction with the services of preschool centres: A case study in Songkhla Province, Thailand. Journal for Multicultural Education 12(3): 249-266.
2. Slee R (2013) Meeting some challenges of inclusion in an age of exclusion. Asian Journal of Inclusive Education 1(2): 3-17.
3. Bray M (1998) Financing education in developing Asia: themes, tensions, and policies. International Journal of Educational Research 29(7): 627-642.
4. de Los Angeles Bantista F (2004) Early childhood care and education in South-East Asia: working for access, quality and inclusion in Thailand, the Philippines and Viet Nam. UNESCO, Bangkok, Thailand.
5. Rao N, Pearson V (2009) Early childhood care and education in Cambodia. International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy 3(1): 13-26.
6. Kim GJ, Umayahara M (2010) Early childhood care and education: building the foundation for lifelong learning and the future of the nations of Asia and the Pacific. International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy 4(2): 1-13.
7. Gangopadhyay P, Bhattacharyay BN (2015) On the economics of social inclusion and protection in ASEAN economies, India and the People's Republic of China. CESifo Area Conference on Employment and Social Protection, Munich, Germany.
8. UNESCO Bangkok (2018) Education and disability: analysis of data for Asia-Pacific countries', Report by UNESCO's Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education. Bangkok.
9. Mundia L (2009) Implementation of inclusive education in Brunei Darussalam: review of possible implications for school counsellors. Electronic Journal of Inclusive Education 2(4): 30.
10. Pereira JD (2016) Equity, access and educational quality in three South-East Asian countries - the case of Indonesia, Malaysia and Viet Nam. Literature Review, The Head Foundation.

DOI: 10.19080/GJIDD.2019.05.555671

How to cite this article: M J Foster. The Need for Equitable Educational Provision in S.E. Asia for Children with Disabilities: A Reflection. Glob J Intellect Dev Disabil, 2019; 5(5): 555671. DOI: 10.19080/GJIDD.2019.05.555671.