

## **Defining inclusion through the eyes of parents of disabled children in Cyprus**

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This paper aims to present the views of the parents who have a disabled child in their family in Cyprus concerning the complex issue of inclusion. The results that will be presented are part of my Ph.D. work which aimed to investigate the various systems that affect inclusion in the case of Cyprus. One of the major parameters is the parents of disabled children and thus this paper will be focus in this issue. What parents of disabled children name as inclusion is extremely interesting, since their definition is strongly connected to their knowledge and their belief about inclusion. This knowledge and belief will affect the future of the disabled child. The work of Wolfendale (1999) helped me to move forward the discussion surrounding parental involvement. Wolfendale (1999) sets out a methodological framework that places parents in a central and powerful role as research partners. Listening to parents and considering the perspective of parents, are ways in which professionals can support the development of educational provision that are sensitive and effective and that meet the needs of a diverse groups of people.

Having in mind the work of Wolfendale I used semi structured interview in order to collect my data. The results I will present are about ten families with disabled children. All those families have only one disabled child. The age of the disabled child varied among 6-11 years old. The analysis of the data came up from story telling, since I decided that was the best way to present the richness and the authenticity of my data. In Cyprus, according to the findings, as in other countries a gradually increasing number of parents want their disabled child to attend a mainstream primary school that it is in the same neighbourhood school as his or her siblings: they want their child to receive schooling as 'normally' as possible (Meijer, 1994). Hanson *et al.* (2001) interviewed parents to determine their perspective on their children and young people's school experiences in order to identify those factors that influenced inclusive placement decisions. Although the majority of parents valued inclusive placement, concerns about class size, availability of therapeutic services, acceptance of other children and young people, attitudes about the child disabilities, as well as teachers' level of training and experience were expressed. The same results had been found in the case of my research.

What was extremely interesting though, is that there was not a common understanding of what is inclusion, even though the factors that may affect inclusion were almost similar. What must be done for parents of disabled children then is to help them understand the disabilities of their disabled child. The best way to do this is through the use of Parent Panels to organize meetings between parents and educational staff in order to share information and discuss associated issues and concerns (Duckorth and Kostell, 1999). Parents of disabled children need to be supported immediately; they need their voices to be heard loudly, but for the right reasons...