CRITICAL ISSUES AFFECTING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON PERSONS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

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REPORT

Determine what impacts at least three (3) of the critical issues have on the individual’s personal development. Rank these issues from 1-3, with one being the most important.

In an attempt to assess the ways in which a hearing impairment (defined as, “a full or partial decrease in the ability to detect or understand sounds”) would affect the life of a child, Arthur Sant, his mother, as well as his teacher, were interviewed. As such, one was able to elaborate on four issues specified, namely: Self-esteem, Education, Social life and Recreation, as well as Assistive Devices and Technology.

SELF-ESTEEM

In firstly considering self-esteem, one had to examine the extent of Arthur’s hearing loss, and as such, referring to what was stated in “PROFILE 3,” Arthur has moderate hearing loss in the right ear, and severe hearing loss in the left ear. This was the diagnosis given by experts at the Diagnostic Research Educational and Therapeutic Centre for the Hearing Impaired (DRETCHI) association. It was due to this diagnosis at the age of two, that experts at the association advised that he be sent to a mainstream school, because he was not seen as “Deaf,” and could use a hearing aid to lessen the effects of his impairment. This belief was aligned to the social model which considers the constraints of society and overcoming them, rather than accepting a medical model, which sees only the disability.
On being sent to nursery school, and even in the earlier part of the Princes Town Roman Catholic School, children there noticed that Arthur lacked little knowledge of self-awareness, that is, he had little awareness of how he looked and behaved as a result of his impairment. In addition, his speech production was affected by the hearing loss and, therefore he had distorted speech sounds, and showed very little ability to monitor volume and intonation. He had to concentrate more than the average child, on what was being said in a conversation, and at times would have been excluded and called names.

This caused Arthur to sometimes get into fights and in a sense act like a bully. According to Baron, et al, in the book Social Psychology, “bullies are more subject to the hostile attributional bias…they attack others because they perceive them to be potentially dangerous,” in addition, “bullies tend to be lower in self-esteem than other persons. As a result, they often attack (others) …to build up their own self-images.”

As time lagged on however, the same children in Arthur’s class moved with him progressively to the other classes and so, they learnt to be more sensitive to his impairment. Arthur’s mother professes that he has never had trust issues and that she treats him in the same manner that she treats her other children (she has seven children). He goes on every family outing, participates in every game and outdoor activity, and is neither given worse nor preferential treatment. His teachers say that he has many friends and participates with the children in all activities and games. He is a bit quiet compared to the other children at school though, and this may indicate that on some level, he still does not feel adept in the communication process, and takes his cues from others in the conversation.
EDUCATION

Arthur’s teacher, said that due to the nature of the child’s impairment, the classes have to be extremely quiet in order to facilitate Arthur’s learning. She therefore adjusts teaching methods, removing social constraints (social model). Emphasis must be put on speaking in turn when there is discussion, to allow him to participate and hear what is going on in the class. Arthur’s attention must be drawn to the speaker, be it the teacher or student and at times, when he is not listening, due to the fact that he has to put extra effort into the learning process or perhaps it is simply him being a normal child one has to draw his attention. This might be embarrassing for him, as was indicated by one of his teachers but it is the only way to ensure his full attention.

Many visual aids must also be utilized in classes and Arthur needs to sit up front since he as well as his teacher, does not use sign language, but Arthur lip reads, and has a hearing aid. When physical education activities are organized, teachers are and must be cognizant of the fact that more individual activities must be undertaken rather than group activities which require a lot of instructions. In considerations of seating arrangements and distances employed in games, proximity is an issue of importance to maximize Arthur’s existing abilities.

In considering Arthur’s overall academic performance, his teacher noted that he is of average intelligence and he is always willing to learn. He at times has problems with reading, due to the fact that a lot of reading skills come from imitation of sounds, for which hearing is prime importance. Coupled with his speech impairments this makes it
more difficult for Arthur to produce sounds and quality reading for a child of his age. However, his mother works arduously to ensure that Arthur develops his reading skills.

SOCIAL LIFE AND RECREATION:

Arthur is only ten years old, and so his social life revolves around his activities in school, and his interactions with his family. As mentioned before, he goes wherever his family members take him, and his mother said that he is a big fan of cricket and any sporting activity. He plays with his father and siblings every weekend. Teachers said that, at school he plays with all the children and at times, still acts extremely assertive in the games he believes he can dominate.

It was also noted that Arthur, is quiet compared to the other children in his class and so this can hinder his social interactions. He has not developed a high level of competence in conversational situations, as a result of his impairment. This may be due in part to him being unable to understand all that is being said if persons are talking very quickly.

ASSISTIVE DEVICES AND TECHNOLOGY

Arthur only uses a hearing aid in the ear that has a severe impairment and although this assists in hearing, it does not correct the hearing loss. In addition, he is able to lip read.
**Ranking of issues**

In ranking these issues, I would say that assistive devices and technologies would have been the issue of primary importance, for without this, Arthur would not have been able to go to a mainstream school, and participate in all the activities of ordinary life. Secondly, self esteem would be ranked, as this enables the child to function assertively and competently in every environment. Thirdly, education and all its implications is also of vital importance as it would allow Arthur to access a greater quality of life later on, and empower him to face the challenges of life. Finally, social life and recreation is last on the list as it is interconnected and related to all the issues ranked before. It is a product of the other issues.

**Compare these findings with those cited in the literature regarding persons with disabilities.**

**SELF ESTEEM**

Self-esteem as conceptualized by Baron et al, “is the individual’s overall attitude toward the self.” It may be determined by family experience, overall success and competence, as well as self-concept which includes physical appearance, physical ability, and peer acceptance. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People, RNID’s survey, “Breaking the Sound Barrier,” from 1999, found that 71% of deaf and hard of hearing people felt isolated because of their hearing loss and had low self-esteem.
In the case study involving Arthur Sant, it was found that his mother gave him the same opportunities afforded to his other siblings and at school, teachers did the same with respect to his other classmates. This is contrary to what is reported by many hearing impaired persons, who state that their parents are overprotective and do not allow them to actively participate in life. His mother appeared to be very supportive of him and as such, fostered a good sense of self-worth. She encouraged him to form good self-evaluations of himself, giving him the confidence to form friendships (peer acceptance). He was reported to have many friends and engage in all activities in school (physical ability).

As such, this particular case study does not provide ample evidence to support the findings of RNID’s survey. In the instance of bullying when Arthur had started school, this is a small indication of low self-esteem and in a limited way, does support a correlation of the hearing impaired and low-self esteem but the fact that the child overcame this aggressive behavior, should be considered.

In addition, Arthur does not isolate himself from his peers, he may not understand everything being said in a conversation, but he still attempts to communicate with others. He is therefore trying to develop his competence in communicating.

**EDUCATION**

Conrad (1979) puts the reading age for deaf school leavers being no less than nine years. Powers and Gregory, (1998), concluded that there has been no overall improvement in the achievement of deaf and hearing impaired students since Conrad’s
1979 survey. Arthur, though encountering some difficulties with reading is capable of reading and understanding without help but only needs assistance if words are to be read out loud. It should be remembered that, Arthur is just ten years old and similarly, some of his peers also have trouble with reading. According to Richardson et al in the Journal of Educational Psychology, “students with a hearing loss were remarkably similar to students with no declared disability in their perceptions of academic quality and their overall satisfaction with their courses.”

It has also been noted that children suffering from hearing loss adopt social behavior almost like other children, but a child’s ability to develop social skills depends on his or her degree of hearing loss, age time of diagnosis, treatment and personality. These findings are consistent with the case study under discussion. Arthur’s teacher says that he acts like all other children, but in some ways he is inhibited by his overall moderate hearing loss. Since he was diagnosed at an early age, he has learnt to accept his disability and the implications of his impairment and has shown considerable resilience in the face of difficulties, as in the instance where children at school called him names.

In addition, according to Christine Cadena, (2008) in an article entitled, “Positive parenting: Conduct Disorder in the Hearing impaired child,” “hearing impaired children are believed to have a 50% risk of developing a conduct behavior complication.” This was shown to be true for Arthur, in the beginning of his schooling but has since been dealt with.

Cadena also said that, “hearing impaired children, when educated in settings outside of the traditional school setting, tend to experience greater likelihood for conduct behavior
complications.” It is therefore implied that the traditional or mainstream setting produces a better child. He would as in Arthur’s case, be able to adjust to real life situations better and develop a higher sense of competence and by extension, self-esteem.

**SOCIAL LIFE AND RECREATION**

In the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, (2004), in an article entitled, “Emotion Recognition or Understanding Ability in Hearing or Vision-Impaired Children: Do Sound, Sights, or Words Make the Difference.” The implications of being unable to hear all verbal cues, be it pitch, pattern, volume and emphasis are considered. It is shown that persons with hearing impairments make the most use of facial expressions and how that helps in emotion recognition. This is exactly what Arthur uses to communicate with his family members and peers. There is a belief that persons who are disabled and specifically those who have hearing and speech impairments are unable to communicate effectively. However, the Journal listed within this section claims that, “children with mild to severe hearing loss almost always develop a language that can be understood (by all).”

Arthur’s use of language, lip reading, and recognition of facial expression and associated moods help him to function in social situations and enjoy recreational activities such as sports.

**ASSISTIVE DEVICES AND TECHNOLOGY**

According to the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, in the same article previously cited, “without hearing assistance it can be extremely difficult for children
who are born with severe hearing impairment to learn how to read, write and speak.”

Arthur’s mother and teacher agree with this statement, considering that without his hearing aid, the child under discussion would not have been afforded the opportunity to attend a mainstream school, and experience everything perhaps not in the same way, but in a similar way to his peers and family members. He would have been isolated and might not have developed the social skills, self-esteem and competence he has acquired.

**How are these issues being addressed in society? Who is addressing/ who should address these issues?**

When considering how these issues are being addressed in society, one must firstly look at the role of the government in providing the infrastructure for all other societal institutions. The government had firstly drawn up the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities, which looked at:

“The establishment of a certified body of sign language interpreters to develop a National Sign Language Programme, the provision of adequate sign language interpreters in all learning institutions at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, development and implementation of sign language programmes to teach basics of sign language to children with hearing impairments, their families and communities, and streamlining of telecommunication services to ensure adequate access to information, including electronic information and the internet.”
It was from this policy that a National Coordinating Committee on Disability was established, and by extension, The Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired. The main objectives of the Association previously mentioned, included all the objectives of the National Policy, and in addition, according to the Legal Supplement Part A to the “Trinidad and Tobago Gazette,” Vol. 39, No. 193, (2000);

“Diagnosis and research, employment, investigation of the incidence of hearing impairments, counseling, psychological support, and courses where the hearing impaired would work alongside hearing persons.”

These objectives seem to be realized at this current time, at the Diagnostic Research Educational Therapeutic Centre for the Hearing Impaired (DRECHI). It is at this organization, according to Angela Pidduck, in 2008, that there were, “intervention programmes for teaching young children to speak and interact with their hearing counterparts with an aim to integrate those children into normal schools. Free testing and hearing aids were being provided, and skills were being taught, such as printing, plumbing, tailoring, dressmaking, and woodwork.”

It should also be noted that based on the extent of a person’s disability and the level of assistance being received by family members, a person could also be eligible for a disability grant. Aaron, the child in the case study, was not receiving a grant. It should also be noted that, non-governmental organizations such as churches and mosques, assist disabled persons financially and in acquiring a job.
The family, another social institution, and its role, was seen in the case study with Arthur Sant. The family provides support, social exposure, helps in the development of self-esteem and competence.

The issues described in this report are therefore being dealt with in society but in a limited capacity, DRETCHI, for example is based in Port of Spain, located in the North of our country, and children in the South of the country, with disabilities, have to be taken to these institutions by their parents. As has been noted in the literature, there is a direct correlation between persons with disabilities, and poverty. It is therefore quite expensive for these individuals to commute to and from this organization. In addition, many of the objectives of the specific organizations, policies, and so on, have not yet come to fruition.

These issues need to be dealt with more seriously in schools and perhaps teachers should make a greater effort to learn sign language to facilitate all children, regardless of their abilities.

What recommendations do you offer to address these issues in order to improve the lives of persons with disabilities (particularly persons with hearing impairments)?

FAMILY

In a family with a disabled person, every attempt should be made to educate all children and parents about sign language. This would allow all individuals in the family to
communicate with the person with the hearing impairment, guarding against social exclusion, and helping the child to develop self-confidence and competence in social situations. This would also foster a nurturing and supportive environment. In addition, the child should be included in all activities reinforcing the fact that he or she is part of the family.

SCHOOL

Teachers in school should be educated in sign language, and by extension sign language should be part of the school curriculum, so as to develop a learning environment that is inclusive of all students. This would also make students and teachers more comfortable around the child with the hearing impairment and minimize mistakes that would be made in the transmission of information.

Counselors and Psychologists should also be provided at all levels of education, and in an accessible way to deal with problems that might be faced by parents with children with disabilities, as well as the disabled person. Safe guards should also be in place to ensure that persons with disabilities are treated as normally as is possible, and other students are not suffering as a result.

Technology which emphasizes more visual aids and is geared toward the hearing impaired should also be utilized. Teachers should also try to maximize activities that would develop a child’s social complexity.

Often times, persons with disabilities are often only identified with that disability, and as such, teachers and family members must try to help the child become involved in wide range of activities. In this way, a child would develop many roles and selves, so if
there is failure in one role, or dimension of life, according to Baron et al, “failure in one domain is less likely to affect how one feels about one’s self overall.” This is necessary as the child might see himself or herself as lacking in typical abilities, when they compare themselves to their peers and thus, engage in upward social comparison. They must then hone their other skills, be it with respect to intellectual abilities, or physical abilities.

**GOVERNMENT**

Grants should be given to all persons with disabilities, to invest in technology, in order to improve their educational levels and competence in the workplace. Technology could enable them to become involved in social settings via internet chat rooms, and perhaps form support groups, and share experiences with persons, from different parts of the world, who have the same disability.

Community support groups should be set up to allow disabled persons to establish support groups and foster solidarity among persons with similar experiences. Programmes should be effectively implemented to ensure better development of persons with disabilities. Programmes should also incorporate a wider scope for the curriculum, recognizing that persons with hearing impairments rarely have intellectual limitations, except for the fact that they cannot hear.

The Government therefore needs to refocus from the medical model, where there emphasis is on the disability, to the social model where they should focus on how society puts constraints on the disabled person. Persons with disabilities need to be given a fair chance to compete in the world of work and doing craft work does not give
them that chance. As such, emphasis should be placed on quality education to produce empowered individuals who contribute to our economy. This would help dispel myths of the Charity and Tragedy Model that suggests that persons with disabilities should be taken care of, and pitied.

Baron, R. , Byrne, D. and Branscombe Social Psychology. Boston, United States of America: Pearson.


