We Like to Keep Learning: An inclusive research approach to exploring the educational experiences of people with intellectual disabilities

by The Centre for Disability Studies Inclusive Research Network
Affiliate of The University of Sydney, NSW, Australia

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What is the Centre for Disability Studies Inclusive Research Network?

- We are a group of co-researchers with intellectual disabilities, their supporters and university researchers from CDS, Sydney. We do research together.
- We have been working together since 2010
- Our members have changed over time but we are still very keen to do research together

“Nothing About Us Without Us”
Some of Our Inclusive Research Network Members
Developing Research Skills

- Workshops and monthly meetings over 3 years
- Beginning skills in
  - Developing research questions
  - Ways of gathering information
  - Research ethics
  - Developing interview guides
  - Interviewing skills
  - Analysing the interview information (data)
  - Preparing presentations
What is our research about?

- We wanted to do research about the rights of people with intellectual disability.
- We learned about the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- We were interested to find out what are the everyday experiences of people with intellectual disabilities of the rights covered in the Convention.
- We learned that not a lot of research has been done in this area.
Rights to Education

- We have looked at peoples’ rights in the areas of health, housing, education and employment.

- This presentation looks at one of these rights – that of education.

- Article 24 of the Convention says that people with disabilities have the right to education and the right to realise this without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity.

- Our research question is “What are the experiences of people with intellectual disability around their right to education?”
How we did the research

• We decided that individual interviews were the best way to get the information we needed.

• So we developed a series of questions on rights around education and learning.

• One co-researcher with intellectual disability and one without conducted the interviews with 24 people with intellectual disability.

• The study was approved by the University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee.
What we found out
People Learn in Different Ways

- Lifelong learning – learning all the time

- Formal and informal learning
  - Formal learning – TAFE, accredited online courses, traineeships, industry based courses
  - Informal learning – learn by being and doing with others, e.g. radio club, knitting with friends, volunteer work

- All learning experiences are valued
Experiences of Education

1. Hopes for the future
2. Getting going
3. Finding out what it’s like
4. Staying the course
1. Hopes for the future

To finish a course and movies.

So I’ve been a teacher’s Aide for two and a half years. I’m hoping to combine sports Coaching and teacher’s aide Work and hopefully one day I’ll be working in a mainstream School doing both jobs.

Would really like to do a photography course

A radio course...I want one of those jobs.

And my goals, well, basically to attempt to create a game with what I know. My knowledge. Gradually build upon it, extend it. Who knows. I might become famous!
2. Getting going

No, not yet, but I’d like to go there to have a look at it. I’d like to have a look at that course.

I haven’t done the course …. They (the staff) don’t know much about the course...need information

I’ve done the computer course, but I don’t know about any other courses

Want to calm down first....in my head

Some courses are very hard for disability people to do

I’m still just trying to figure out how to clean my home properly
3. Finding out what it’s like

Learning is hard
Some courses are very hard for disability people to do.
Too fast, can’t keep up

Never been taught
To read and write

Want to learn to
Read and write first

Having the opportunity to try the course first

They cost a bit of money – and I don’t have much to spare…….
It’s dark when it finishes … don’t like the trains then

There was a good teachers aide who helped me

The staff at my house help me practice
4. Staying the course

At school, I had been in situations of bullying. That was mainly during primary school...

People not understanding your day-to-day life, your disability...I don’t want to deal with this person. Being negative towards a person with a disability.

I met some good people and I formed good friendships with them. I’m thankful for that. It’s just that I felt overlooked by certain...students

...At first I might find it nerve-wracking, but to get to know who everyone is, and the teachers, but I find it very...well...scary
Reflections on Our Work

- Participants told us:
  - People with an intellectual disability want to learn and to keep learning
  - They learn in formal and informal ways
  - But learning is hard for many. So good information and support is needed
  - Good experiences with others in the course is also important. They want to feel part of the group
  - And under the Convention, they have a right to education
More Reflections on Our Work

- The lived experience of rights
- The broadening of the research family
- Recognising and valuing the diversity of expertise among the group
- Working within the traditional research system
- Additional time and resources needed in inclusive research efforts

- But a challenging and exciting journey lies ahead!
Thank you for your attention
Members of Our Group

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