

Educational Environments of Children with Disabilities in Greater Bangkok: Barriers and Facilitators in a Transiting Urban Area Selected Findings from a Cross-Cultural Perspective on Society and Culture¹

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Abstract

This article focuses on the exploration of educational realms of children with visual, hearing, intellectual, physical and multiple disabilities attending school in and around Bangkok. The research is embedded in the context of an international comparative research project in the field of special needs and inclusive education called CLASDISA. Applying a Grounded Theory approach, the children themselves, their parents and teachers, as well as further experts in the field of education and disability – such as monks, school administrators, representatives of DPOs/Disabled People's Organizations, political stakeholders and academic experts –

¹ This article is part of the work that lead to the author's work on her PhD thesis which focuses on the educational environments of children with disabilities. The research for this article was partially funded by the Empowering Network for International Thai Studies (ENITS), Institute of Thai Studies, Chulalongkorn University.

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were invited to share their experiences regarding education in the course of interviews and focus group discussions. Special instruments had been prepared to investigate perspectives of those children who were unable or preferred not to speak. Sign Language interpreters were provided and picture cards made available for the children to express their opinion non-verbally or in an alternative way. This article focuses specifically on qualitative data that was collected during four phases of field research in the course of almost three years. All steps were coordinated and conducted in collaboration with a local Thai research team. This was to guarantee language/culture-related competency and sensitivity at all stages of the research process, as well as a broad perspective on factors that facilitate or restrict education. The research focuses on how these factors are influenced or shaped by cultural or societal conditions and considers how the latter might differ from other countries or places in Thailand. Currently, data is being analyzed employing the qualitative data analysis (QDA) tool ATLAS.ti. This article focuses on the description of the study design, its international contextualization and the discussion of first preliminary findings.

Background – Glimpses at the Project Design and Methodology

Data collection for the PhD thesis at hand was embedded in an international comparative research project on special needs and inclusive education called ‘Classifications of Disabilities in the Field of Education in Different Cultural and Societal Contexts’

(CLASDISA).³ CLASDISA is based on Grounded Theory,⁴ thus employs a rather open approach to the field of interest. The aim of this project, involving mixed-methods⁵ – with a clear focus on qualitative data – is to identify *barriers* and *facilitators*⁶ for education and in everyday school life of children with disabilities mainly at primary school age⁷ in three highly differing capitals: Bangkok (Thailand), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Vienna (Austria). Not only do these countries differ in their human development,⁸ but also with regard to their very specific approaches to understanding disability and schooling as such.

Perceptions about schooling of children with special needs in different parts of the world vary widely,⁹ although one might assume that they are rather negative. Intentions to develop a universal approach towards a classificatory system of disabilities¹⁰ seem to be far from achieved.¹¹ Therefore, it was agreed that it made sense to include those who can be perceived as real experts in the field to gain firsthand accounts: children with disabilities,¹² their parents/legal

³ Latest developments and more detailed background information on the project can be obtained from the following website: <http://classifications-of-disabilities.univie.ac.at/>. The project is funded through the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), project number P22178. The following publications offer further insights into the project design: Proyer, “International Perspectives on Barriers for Children with Disabilities”; Proyer, “CLASDISA”.

⁴ Birks, *Grounded Theory*; Stern, *Essentials of Accessible Grounded Theory*; Bryant, *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*; Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*; Rarcharneeporn, “Maintaining Caregiving at Home”.

⁵ Creswell, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*; Tashakkori, *Handbook of Mixed Methods*.

⁶ *World Health Organization (WHO) International Classification*.

⁷ But also beyond as some of the children start attending school later because of their disability or attend classes that may not correspond with their age as a result of (perceived) developmental delays. Therefore, the study’s focus includes children between 6 and 14 years.

⁸ UNDP, “Measuring Human Development”. Refer to UNDP’s publications on the Human Development Index (HDI) for more.

⁹ Simeonsson, “International Classification”; Mc Laughlin, “Cross – Cultural Perspectives”.

¹⁰ *World Health Organization (WHO) International Classification*; Chapireau, “The Environment in the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health”.

¹¹ Üstün, *Disability and Culture*.

¹² Morrow, “Using Qualitative Methods to Elicit Young People’s Perspectives”.

guardians/caregivers/relatives and teachers. Those and some additional stakeholders in the field of disabilities and education (members of NGOs and DPOs,¹³ etc.) were invited to share their opinions. It is of central interest to the project to understand, analyse and describe how culture (e.g., beliefs) and society (e.g., social attitudes) in the different countries shape barriers and facilitators. The intersection between disability and culture has been recited in detail,¹⁴ but a clear understanding is missing and methodologies for comparison seem to be lacking in adequacy in the area of special needs and inclusive education. The project aimed at broadening the view of international comparative research in the field of special needs and inclusive education by describing and analysing the culture – and society – bound differences that emerge from data collection at the three locations. One PhD thesis per city will emerge from the research activities within CLASDISA in relation to qualitative findings and an additional thesis will be concerned with the comparison of the quantitative findings. A final project-report will focus on the comparison of both qualitative and quantitative results. Where possible, findings will be presented to all participating educational institutions.

This article will focus on research activities in and around Bangkok where the author acted as research coordinator. Preliminary findings that emerged from the ongoing data analysis for the PhD thesis focusing on the Thai sample will be described.

Focus on Bangkok

Within the CLASDISA project, Bangkok represents an urban space with ‘medium human development’.¹⁵ As for the other two cities involved, Thailand’s capital shows little or no history of either being a colonising force or being a colony (in the ‘classical’ sense and over a long period). Despite some foreign influence in its later stages

¹³ Disabled People’s Organisations.

¹⁴ Ingstad, *Disability and Culture*; Groce, “Disability in cross cultural perspective”; Riddell, *Disability, Culture and Identity*; Hatton, *Cultural Issues*.

¹⁵ UNDP.

of development, the (special) school system has a distinct culture and specific history.¹⁶ This makes the system special and distinguishable from other countries in the South-East Asian region and the rest of the world.

Data in Bangkok was collected in the course of a series of field trips.¹⁷ The first research phase in June/July 2010 focused on establishing contacts with schools and educational institutions. The following three in October 2010 to January 2011, January and February 2012 and June/July 2012 focused on data collection.¹⁸ All research activities were conducted in cooperation with a local research team from Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok. The team consisted of two staff-members from the Department of Special Education at the respective university and two former students who had obtained their Master's Degrees in special education. Research instruments for data collection – quantitative¹⁹ (two questionnaires for parents and teachers) and qualitative (interview guidelines, informed consents, material for interviews with children and information leaflets) – were developed by the Vienna based team (four PhD students and two senior staff members) and then discussed, translated and adapted in the respective country-teams in Thailand and Ethiopia.

The Scope of Research in and around Bangkok

In addition to observing lessons, screening documentation of children's development, doing appraisals of school compounds and learning about specific legal educational frameworks in Thailand, qualitative data collection mainly focused on interviews ranging from semi-structured to narrative in style.²⁰ Children with disabilities

¹⁶ Mounier, *Education & Knowledge in Thailand*; Howard, "Standardizing respect in Northern Thai classrooms"; Sermsap, "A Model for Inclusive Schools in Thailand"; Carter, "Development of Special Education Services in Thailand".

¹⁷ One of which was co-funded by receiving an ENITS scholarship in 2013.

¹⁸ For more details on the initial research phases refer to: Proyer, "International Perspectives on Barriers for Children with Disabilities".

¹⁹ The rest of this article will focus primarily on the qualitative data, as the quantitative data collected within the project will not be a subject of the author's PhD thesis.

²⁰ Holstein, *Inside Interviewing*.

attending different types of schools – ‘inclusive’ schools, special schools, parallel classrooms and specialized outreach programs – their teachers and parents/legal guardians/caregivers/ relatives²¹ were invited to participate in interviews, focus group discussions and narrative exchange up to three times within a period of around two years between 2010 and 2012. Participation was voluntary, data is being treated anonymous and participants were asked to fill in an informed consent (IC) and received detailed information on the project, as well as a small reward (a souvenir from Austria and/or a small financial compensation) for their support. The informed consent consisted of four sections:

- Confirmation of having received information about the project.
- Consent to participate in being interviewed (repeatedly).
- Consent to being taped and photographed. Consent that this material and everything derived from it may be stored and used for academic purposes.
- Consent to the child’s participation.²²

The routine of having to fill in an IC went hand in hand with a series of challenges. Although the IC was in Thai, some of the research participants were not able to understand it. On the one hand, this was because some of the parents were not able to read some or all of the text. On the other hand, many interviewees had never heard about an informed consent before and could not understand why they had to fill in this form. This caused a very formal interview setting and insecurity among many of the research participants.

Most of the interviews were conducted in Thai by the Thai research partners. The author of this article acted as research coordinator and was around during every interview. At a later stage, the taped interview material was partly transcribed into Thai or directly translated into English.

²¹ Where possible, the focus was on the person playing the main role in provision of education aside from educational professionals. In more than two thirds of the cases these were mothers or grandmothers.

²² Only during the second research phase a specialized IC for children had been developed and handed to the children.

Based on a Grounded Theory Approach, interview guidelines were open and subject to constant rearrangements depending on the individual case studies (one case consisted of at least one child, a parent and teacher each).²³ A first set of interviews conducted in late 2010-early 2011 referred to aspects derived from the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health – Children and Youth Version’s (ICF – CY) *Environmental Factors*.²⁴ Questions that focused on certain aspects, such as social attitudes, availability of school materials and accessibility of classrooms, were rather structured in nature. During the consecutive research phase, focus group discussions were additionally used as sources of information with parents, teachers and children. During the second phase of research, interview guidelines became more individualised (semi-structured) or disappeared completely to give way to more open conversations. The Bangkok-based team tried out some narrative methods and conducted four life course interviews with one teacher and three parents.²⁵ In particular, the interviews with children with disabilities had a series of challenging issues in store,²⁶ including:

- Almost all the children displayed shy and ‘cautious’ behaviour during the interview sessions that lasted between 10 and 30 minutes and took place at school. This seems to be due to the passive role children normally play in educational settings in Thailand,²⁷

²³ Yin, *Case Study Research*.

²⁴ World Health Organization (WHO) *International Classification*; Chapiro, “The Environment in the International Classification”. The ICF-CY refers to the bio-psycho-social model of disability. Thus issues such as accessibility and social attitudes play a major role in the lives of persons with disabilities as these factors either enable them to participate or prevent them from leading independent lives. The ICF-CY is a coding manual that has been developed by the WHO to create a profile of a person’s levels of functioning on different levels. The manual, which comprises medical, as well as environmental factors, refers to activity and participation and can be used to describe the severity of barriers or impact of facilitators.

²⁵ Priestley, *A Life Course Approach*.

²⁶ Lewis, “Research and pupil voice”; Eder, “Interviewing Children and Adolescents”; Lewis, “Accessing, through research interviews”; Davis, “Disabled Children, Ethnography and Unspoken Understandings”.

²⁷ Howard, “Standardizing respect in Northern Thai classrooms”.

which they, despite efforts to explain the setting, perceived the interview situation to be. Furthermore the head of the Thailand based research, an Austrian, did not have much time to get to know the children and vice versa which might have added to the perceived reservation of the children.

- The Thai research partners and some teachers were surprised that the research design also included interviews with children with learning disabilities. In their understanding such children were thought to be unable to add to the findings because of their restricted intellectual abilities.

- The interview setting and procedures were irritating for some of the children as most of them had no distinct concept of research or could not distinguish this setting from an educational (screening) one.

- Most of the teachers and a few parents were surprised to learn that children were supposed to be interviewed alone.

- Some of the children who participated in the study had been chosen by their teachers because of their high academic achievements (see the next chapter on diversity of the sample for details). They were eager to show off their knowledge and seemed kind of disappointed that we invited them to share their personal accounts instead.

The Thailand based team discussed these issues thoroughly and adapted materials that had been prepared in Vienna. These included culture-specific cue cards, a hand puppet, puppets, paper for drawing and writing and a disposable camera to take pictures of important places. Interview settings with children were piloted and adapted over the course of time (e.g., in one case moving from the table to the floor during the interview) as information on the project got more comprehensive. It was found that most of the children enjoyed the researchers' presence in their classrooms and recognised us when we came back at a later point in the research process for another interview or another observation.

Research Process and Details on the Sample

As has already been elaborated above, field research consisted of four main phases between one and three months. In between these phases of activities in the field, data analysis (using the software

ATLAS.ti)²⁸ was started and instruments for data analysis were developed further. Two international workshops where all research partners from the three countries and two additional experts participated were held in Vienna in 2011 and 2012. These meetings enabled all members of the research project to get to know each other and exchange information on the field work and preliminary findings. Two shorter visits to Bangkok took place in May and August 2013 to discuss and present findings. More meetings were arranged throughout the year 2014.

The research process in Bangkok can be characterized by high levels of motivation of all actors involved. More than 25 educational institutions and disability associated organizations in and around Bangkok were willing to cooperate. As a number of interviewees mentioned institutions that are located in a suburb of Bangkok, the research team decided to broaden its geographical scope to Greater Bangkok as Grounded Theory enabled the Thailand based research team to act independently. Furthermore, the team refrained from only including schools and educational institutions offering formal education as it was found that a number of children with severe and/or multiple disabilities are unable to access these facilities in and around Bangkok.²⁹ Reasons are manifold and often involve socio-economic restrictions of the respective families.³⁰ Therefore, NGOs offering services for those children, as well as orphanages for children with disabilities, were invited to participate and agreed.

CLASDISA's initial research design intended to bring about at least eight case stories consisting of a child, one parent and a teacher. The children's sample was to include: one boy and one girl between 8 and 12 years from each of these categories: visual disability (VD), hearing disability (HD), physical disability (PD) and intellectual disability (ID). Due to the amazing level of participation among the Thailand based research team and interviewees, as well as contact teachers and other supporters, data on 24 cases has been collected so

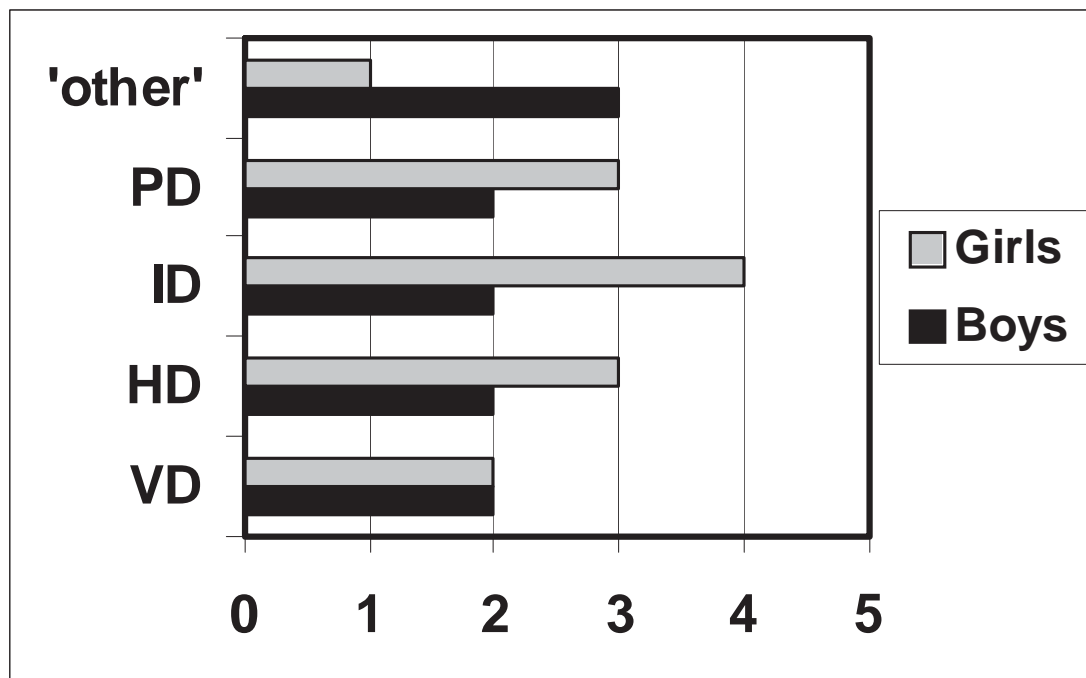
²⁸ Lewins, *Using Software in Qualitative Research*.

²⁹ Tavee; *Rights, Equality, Educational Provision*.

³⁰ NSO, *The 2007 Disability Survey*.

far, with more than 150 interviews. The distribution of the sample is illustrated below:

Table 1: Overview of the sample data generated in and around Bangkok.



The category 'other' reflects one of the dilemmas the research team had to face. As has been reported earlier, there are no clear categories/labels of disability that could be applied universally and, therefore, the idea of 'assigning' children to certain categories did not work out. This fact can be summarized as one of the first outcomes of the project. Due to the methodological base of the project – Grounded Theory – it was no problem to adapt the sample and still guarantee diversity. The same holds true for the age and gender of the children.

Translations are being corrected, finished and randomly back translated to ensure contextual accuracy.³¹ A pressing issue in the course of the write up of the PhD was that of minimizing data and selection of data for further analysis within the comparative part of the project and the PhD thesis.

³¹ This process can mostly be found within quantitative research (Van de Vijver, *Methods and Data Analysis for Cross-Cultural Research*).

Preliminary Findings

As far too many aspects within the huge amount of data can be considered as important at this stage of the still ongoing analysis process, only a selection can be highlighted here. Findings will be assigned to the research process and design on the one hand and contents of data collection/analysis (emerging topics) on the other hand.

Research Process

Grounded Theory

The application of Grounded Theory Methodology enabled a rather free and flexible research process. As has been described above, the first phase of field research enabled the collection of basic information on the educational situation of children with disabilities in Bangkok. These experiences led to the development and evolvement of further research steps, instruments and methodologies, e.g., focus group discussions, narrative interviews, tools for children's interviews. The exchange within the international research teams also enabled reflection of findings on a constant basis. Without a flexible design that is open to sometimes challenging cultural differences,³² research under the given conditions (restrictions in time and money) appears to be close to impossible.

International cooperation and teamwork

One of the main aims of the PhD research and the project, as such, was and remains to explore the cultural and societal basis that influences the educational realms of children with disabilities in Bangkok. In this context it is considered crucial that all activities related to data collection were coordinated and developed in cooperation with a team of local researchers. This is even more true as preparation outside of the respective cultural setting and with limited resources has severe limitations.³³

³² Rarcharneeporn, "Maintaining Caregiving at Home".

³³ Vollaster, "Conducting Field Research in Asia".

Language and Comprehension

Language-related issues played a central role within all aspects of the research process. Materials had to be translated into different languages – German, Turkish, Serbo-Croatian, Thai, English, Braille and Sign Language – concepts had to be explained and made comprehensible, etc. The interviews with children with disabilities, their parents and teachers, as well as experts in the field of education – e.g., monks, philosophers, school administrators, representatives of DPOs – have mostly been conducted in Thai and are being translated and transcribed into English. It became obvious that this process led to the loss of crucial, culture-specific information, such as when parents described how they felt as they got to know about their child's disability.³⁴ The solution to this problem was joint translation within the international research team (e.g., watching video footage of focus group discussions) and the decision to leave and transcribe some essential passages in Thai to preserve their original meaning.

Emerging Topics

As the research process employs the Grounded Theory Approach and analysis was ongoing at the time of writing,³⁵ the following list of central topics is to be seen as selection of preliminary findings and subject to change. One of the topics, disability at the intersection with Buddhism, will be exemplarily elaborated in more detail in order to illustrate possible further steps in analysis and theory generation.

³⁴ Nikander, "Working with Transcripts and Translated Data".

³⁵ Proyer, "Educational Environments of Children with Disabilities in Greater Bangkok".

Effects of low socio-economic status/poverty

Interestingly, a very important topic is not included in the ICF-CY's list of Environmental Factors: that of the impact of socio-economic factors. Within the coding manual it is pointed out that these cannot directly be considered as health-related aspects.³⁶ As some authors point out, this can be referred to as a severe lack of classification.³⁷ Despite Thailand's ranking within the HDI category as 'medium human development', the majority of the parents interviewed raised issues in reference to their precarious financial situation. The need to accompany their children to school and take care of them more often than not prevents parents or other relatives from regular employment. The intersections of disability and poverty have been widely discussed and mostly summarized as a vicious circle.³⁸ Nevertheless, mostly these accounts invariably refer to 'developing' countries or countries of the South (an alternative expression used for 'developing' countries as an alternative to directly referring to levels of development). Exploration of the situation of families with disabilities in 'middle-income' countries seems crucial in order to fully understand the interrelatedness of disability and poverty.

Questions of accessibility in relation to the precarious traffic situation

Endless traffic jams in Bangkok are described as constant companions on the way to school of most of the children. This issue has apparently been left out from the ongoing academic discourse so far. Missing transportation in 'developing' countries, and the necessity to cover long distances by foot, have been subject to discussion. Once again the impact of fast-forward urbanisation and infrastructure that lags behind, phenomena often encountered in newly and recently industrialized countries, have not been considered in detail. Nevertheless, the precarious conditions can be perceived as severe barriers. Parents reported a loss in income because of the impossibility to travel to work after taking their children to school given the long time it would take them to travel to a possible work place. Some schools for

³⁶ World Health Organization (WHO) *International Classification*.

³⁷ Proyer, "From International to Universal Document".

³⁸ Elwan, "Poverty and Disability".

children with disabilities are not easy to reach, being located either in the outskirts of the city or areas that belong to the central business district.

Although the 2008 Educational Provision for People with Disabilities Act should enable acceptance to any (public) school,³⁹ not all schools accept children with disabilities. So the educational choice is limited and stays confined to a small number of special schools. This is only one of the reasons why children and parents – or whoever takes the child to school – have to engage in time consuming travels every day. Children, parents and teachers report travel times of up to two hours and in some cases even more. Out of the 24 cases interviewed, only two own a car of their own, with most others having to use taxis, motorcycle taxis or public transport.

Care giving, coping, Buddhism and belief in Karma

One of the main topics that emerged after only a few interviews was the essential role Buddhism plays in the lives of the interviewees. The ‘coping’ processes for parents when learning that their children are disabled are strongly related to their religious (non-) practise. Further steps in the development of their relationship with their children can often be associated with a (non-) belief in Karma.⁴⁰ This also holds true regarding the future educational biography of the children. The motivation of teachers to work with children with disabilities often mirrors their ideal of being a ‘noble’ person. Some pointed out that they believe that caring for those with disabilities is something they do because they feel sympathy and pity for them. Many report that they could never have imagined teaching children with disabilities when deciding to become a teacher, but that they felt they had to go for it soon after that. It can be summarized that caring and care-giving play an essential role in the lives of persons living and working with children with disabilities.⁴¹

³⁹ Sermsap, “Inclusive Education in Thailand”.

⁴⁰ Schumm, *Disability and Religious Diversity*; Engel, “Globalization and the Decline of Legal Consciousness”; Miles, “Disability on a Different Model”.

⁴¹ Sethabouppha, “Caring for Seriously Mentally Ill in Thailand”.

Some of the children shared experiences of performing religious practise and how they learn to be good Buddhists at school. Reflecting on the roots of the Thai school system that lies in monastic teachings,⁴² this still prevailing impact of religious tradition despite high-speed modernisation due to Western influence in Thai culture seems of special interest. Additional interviews with an academic (philosopher) and two monks teaching at schools brought up a number of important additional issues and will be subject to a more thorough analysis.

In the course of the Grounded Theory based analysis, perspectives constantly change and flexibility is essential. Nevertheless, the above mentioned intersection of disability and Buddhism has proven to be pivotal and will be subject to further elaboration and discussion. Only a few details can be found in current publications, apart from the fact that a strong association can be drawn between Karma and disability. The intersection's peculiarity stays subject to speculation and further research. Sharing the parents' stories about why they think their children have a disability will be one of the main foci of the PhD at hand.

Conclusion or Questioning Inclusion as a Universally Applicable Term

This overview of an ongoing research process in the field of comparative special needs and inclusive education aims at clarifying and underlining the need to consider local and cultural peculiarities about the perception of disabilities. Different countries and cultures approach disability in highly varied ways. This explains why definitions and approaches towards inclusion in the field of education vary broadly from country to country. Depicting these in an intercultural research setting proved to be an ideal approach to understanding barriers and struggles related to inclusion of children with disabilities in educational mainstream settings in Thailand. There are two international documents depicting the global – Western-based – concepts of disability and inclusion:

⁴² Mounier, *Education & Knowledge in Thailand*.

- The United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities draws a picture of a Western-based understanding of (full) inclusion.⁴³ People with disabilities should be enabled and free to utter their opinion, speak out for themselves and be heard, have equal rights at all levels and not be discriminated in any area of livelihood.

- As has already been pointed, out the ICF-CY underlines the importance of identifying barriers imposed by the environment of children with disabilities, rather than focusing solemnly on the medical features of the disability. These include factors such as societal attitudes, lack of resources in medical, as well as educational, institutions, lack of information on rehabilitative services and financial support options, religious tradition and issues related to accessibility.

In Thailand, the research team encountered a mostly medically based perception of disability, implying that the child's disability is seen as the centre of the problem. When asked what teachers and parents perceive to be the main barrier regarding education of children with disabilities, most agreed that it was the child itself.

Some of the Thai schools that were visited in the course of the research offer parallel classrooms for children with disabilities. These schools are referred to as 'inclusive'. This leads to a set of questions: Should they really be called 'inclusive' if children attend the same school but separate classrooms? Who is there to judge? Who is to say that this is only inclusion in the making or far from inclusion? Does a model of inclusion as the Western world perceives it really exist? Could it fit with a mostly medically and pity-based approach⁴⁴ towards disability as encountered throughout Thailand, a model that is deeply linked to local tradition and societal structures? What is needed to change the current perception of disability and education and advance developments? The PhD thesis gives some answers by providing a more culture-sensitive model to disability.⁴⁵

⁴³ UN, *CRPD*; Meekosha, "Human Rights and the Global South".

⁴⁴ Bhensri, "Pity and pragmatism".

⁴⁵ Proyer, "Educational Environments of Children with Disabilities in Greater Bangkok".

All these questions and many associated ones seem unanswerable without fully understanding – or at least trying to get close to – local conditions and experiences. Asking parents whether their children with disabilities should be included in mainstream schools leads to a variety of interesting answers, some of which put Buddhist principles⁴⁶ or values of Thai society in question. Parents are afraid of their children being left behind in an overburdened public school system, children are afraid of being bullied, teachers dread more administrative efforts, lack of resources and competence. Only by understanding local conditions can these fears be tackled and culture-specific strategies towards inclusion for and equality of all persons with disabilities in education and all areas of life be achieved.

The work that still needs to be done beyond the PhD thesis is referred to throughout this article and far from being completed. First steps seem to have been made by learning about and understanding some of the factors that shape perceptions of disabilities within the sample and acknowledging that others will remain subject to speculation or require a deeper understanding of Thai culture, if that is possible at all. The main aim of the research activities within this PhD research and beyond is to learn more about what influences the education for children with disabilities in one of Southeast Asia's megacities. Additionally, another aim is to explore how these influential factors are shaped by cultural and societal conditions and in how far these differ from other cities and rural areas in Thailand. This will add to research in Thai special education as this study is mainly based on quantitative studies so far.⁴⁷ Above all, it is important to make these findings accessible to a broad academic and non-academic audience and, thereby, add to a more systematic approach to international research within the field of special needs and inclusive education which can lead to a unique understanding of the importance of including children with disabilities at all levels of education/life.

⁴⁶ Defining this term and the underlying comprehension of Theravada Buddhism is impossible and a flexible approach as the one defined by McDaniel, *Buddhism in Modern Thailand*, is currently being considered and reflected on by the author of this article.

⁴⁷ Tavee, *Research on Disability in Thailand*.

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