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SUBJECT

**Developing Agency in Persons
with Disabilities through
Community Based Rehabilitation
for Sustainable Empowerment
Beyond 2015: Insights from Case
studies**

Definition of Agency

Baltes and Baltes (2010) refers to it as intentional self-maturation consisting of three steps:

- Selection: this relates to choosing opportunities that correspond to one's talents, potentials, or sense of self;
- Optimization: it refers to refining one's skills to enhance successful pursuit of the opportunities related to one's potential;
- Compensation: the action of adjusting to something else in the event that the original plans or wishes are blocked or unavailable.



Components of Agency

- Healthy self concept leading to high self esteem leading to self-approval
- Purposefulness allowing for meaningful engagement
- Pursuit for autonomy and independence
- Directionality leading to personal focus in life
- Resilience in the face of obstacles
- Strong identity that is flexible in unfavorable circumstances



Introduction of the Research

Eight respondent sampled through snowball purposely to select successful PWDs.

- Three had visual impairment, two were victims of polio while one got spinal injuries through a road accident.
- The other two, one suffered from multiple sclerosis while the other has cerebral palsy.
- The respondents ranged from 22-62 years



Respondents Achievements

- All the respondents have different levels of autonomy from their original caregivers.
- Three have postgraduate qualifications, families and property
- Two are graduates, another a diploma holder, and are all employed supporting self and others economically.
- Two students, at diploma and graduate levels


Challenges

- Faced emotional struggles – grief, anger, anxiety/fear, rejection and loneliness
- Disability acted as a barrier to easy access to and limitation of opportunities
- Poverty at home was a threat to access to education
- Transitioning challenges like getting a spouse
- When exam failure threatened their hopes



Perceived Nurturance Elements


- Commitment to caring by parents that communicated that they were valued and accepted.
- Discipline and training by both parents and teachers that required standard behavior.
- Recognition of potentials and affirmation, encouraging its exploitation.
- PWDs acceptance and support by school community.

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- Mentorship by successful disabled persons.
 - Practical interventions like reading for VIs, medical, physiotherapy, parents escorting them to school.
 - Remedial help by teachers where needed.
 - Sponsors, facilitating access to education.
 - Faith in God and use of scriptures to define self.
 - Belonging to a social group.



Outcome of Nurturance

- The respondent gained capacity to drive the agenda of their lives and to pursue autonomy and independence.
- The respondent joined the members of the community in competing for the available opportunities by striving to be competent.
- All respondents displayed self-acceptance and mature self-identity.

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- They were able to associate themselves with certain successes in life
 - They showed resilience and capacity to advocate for self in the face of obstacles
 - Among them are leadership capacities that have been exploited for the good of their communities. One respondent went for and won an elective post.




Implication of the Results

- Results point out that inclusivity is achieved when the individual is developed from within to enable them to drive that agenda.
- There are identified elements in the nurturance process that stimulate development of agency.
- This rehabilitation happens all the time in the hands of all the other agents the PWDs encounters daily.



Conclusion

- There is need to sensitize and train parents and other caregivers of PWDs on including appropriate nurturance elements.
- Such parents can be encouraged by getting to know successful PWDs and sharing in their stories.
- Teachers need to be made conscious so that there is intentionality in their actions.

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- Resources need to be channeled among those struggling with poverty to facilitate access to education for their disabled persons.
 - Enhance affirmative action in job allocation.
 - Successful PWDs need to be projected so that they act as motivating models.
 - Media can be used to influence the public's attitude towards PWDs, thereby making the environment a place they thrive better.