

**Outcomes of a Cross-Cultural Seminar on Increasing the Perceived Self-Efficacy of Teachers in Tahiti**

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When educating international special education teachers, teacher self-efficacy should be evaluated to better understand the effectiveness of training and the delivery of services to students with disabilities. Professionals in the field of disability services, from the United States, conducted a five-day seminar with special education teachers in Tahiti. Participants were self selected teachers from the islands of Tahiti. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the self-efficacy previous to and after the five-day seminar. Teachers self-efficacy was determined through self-reported surveys. Results proved that cross-cultural seminars are beneficial for increasing the self-efficacy, as well as the knowledge base of international teachers in Tahiti. In addition, findings add to a limited research base for education of international teachers as well as the data collected in French Polynesia.

Being a teacher is a universal concept where there is a sharing of information or knowledge between two parties. The way information is distributed can look similar or significantly different when compared across different countries and cultures. When working with individuals with disabilities, the work of a teacher can vary based on cultural perspectives, education of teachers and the infrastructure created by the education system in each respective community or country. Although differences among teachers are expected across different countries and cultures, identifying characteristics of success is imperative. The purpose of this paper is to provide insight into the self-efficacy of teachers in Tahiti who participated in a cross-cultural seminar.

Looking at the varied experiences of teachers in different cultures, standardization of information shared and skills varies. According to Scroggs & Mastropieri (1996), The Council for Exceptional Children (1996) developed and validated a common core of minimum essential knowledge and skills for entry into professional practice in special education, which included: 1. Philosophical, historical and legal foundations of special education; 2. Characteristics of learners; 3. Assessment, diagnosis and evaluation; 4. Instructional content and practice; 5. Planning and managing the teaching and learning environment; 6. Managing student behavior and social interaction skills; 7. Communication and collaborative partnerships; and 8. Professionalism and ethical practice. The literature also indicates that classroom teachers are required to use instructional strategies such as multilevel instruction, differentiated instruction, activity based learning and individualized and adaptive instruction to facilitate special needs students' learning. If we look at this as a foundation for the instruction of teachers of individuals with disabilities in classroom settings, it is essential that teachers, who have not had a traditional education experience, including higher education, be provided with training and development opportunities to increase their ability to utilize multiple instructional strategies. In addition to classical institutional education, teacher self-efficacy, personal experiences, personality traits, and cultural perspectives play a vital role in the delivery of education to individuals with disabilities (Coates & Thoresen, 1976).

### **Teacher Self-Efficacy**

A teacher's efficacy is shaped by his/her self-efficacy, or perceived success as a teacher. A teachers' efficacy is his/her "confidence in their ability to promote students' learning" (Hoy, 2000). Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization, they are more persistent and resilient when stressful situations arise, and they are less critical of students when mistakes are made (Jerald, 2007). Overall, teachers who have high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to have students who learn and thrive in their

classroom (Shaughnessy, 2004). A teacher develops his/her self-efficacy during his/her student teaching experiences when mastery of strategies is most prevalent (Hoy, 2000).

In order to achieve high levels of self-efficacy, a teacher must be provided with training opportunities to learn and develop new skills. Teaching teachers how to teach is comprised of two components. First, the behavior of teaching must be clearly defined, so that teachers understand the expectations and how to make improvements when necessary. Second, training and development are key components to ensure that teachers understand how to teach various skills to their students (Freeman, 1989). Finally, a behavior skills training approach is beneficial in the modeling, rehearsal and feedback, in order to ensure that target skills are achieved (Gianoumis, Seiverling, & Sturmey, 2012).

### **Current State of French Polynesia and Special Education**

The French Polynesian culture on the island of Tahiti is deeply rooted in the history of the island, therefore the family and sense of community is very dynamic. The theoretical framework used in this research is based on the Social Model of Disability, which sees societies' attitudes as the main problem for people with impairments, promotes participatory and emancipatory research (Priestly, 1998). On the contrary, societies that welcome individuals with disabilities without expectation that they will conform to be more like the general population, are in fact engaging in less discriminatory behaviors; however, this may be perceived as a lack of knowledge or inclusion of individuals with disabilities within a society or culture. This lack of awareness among the population could be caused by four reasons, including (1) the cultural beliefs among individuals that having a disability comes with stigma and discrimination; (2) the lack of funds available to individuals to seek treatment for non-medical purposes, such as those that improve function; (3) lack of education and knowledge for the individual with disabilities, as well as a lack of awareness of disabilities for greater society; and (4) the promotion of individuals with disabilities to seek government assistance over independence and quality of life (Kusumastuti, Pradanasari & Ratnawati, 2013). The Social Model of Disability is an appropriate framework to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of individuals with disabilities in Tahiti. Based on the current perceptions of individuals with disabilities in Tahiti and societal structure of education, the rich culture of French Polynesia lends to a very loving and nurturing community. This perspective can both support and "handicap" an individual with a disabilities' ability to effectively be included in society or within the culture.

Within French Polynesian culture, the family system is at the foundation of the cultural structure in society.

The family forms the primary structure for the functioning and ongoing stability of all human societies (Brown & Brown, 2003). In Tahiti there exists multiple perspectives that the individual with a disability is still viewed as a burden or a curse to the family based on societal and cultural perspectives. However, in other families and communities on the island, a person is valued for their abilities and is considered valued in their home. The family perspective of individuals with disability influences the cultural perspective of disabilities. Within some families, individuals are not given access to the community and are not considered contributing members of society. The limited exposure of individuals with disabilities that the society experiences further stigmatizes individuals with disabilities. It was not until 2007 when the French Government enacted the “Law of 2007” that began the plight or civil rights movement, congruent to the Americans with Disabilities Act in the United States, for individuals with disabilities in Tahiti. Although the law went into effect in 2007 there are still many barriers that exist both at the attitudinal, architectural and program level in the country. It is with the tireless work and diligence of the Federatino of Handi-sport and Adapti-sport that sports and recreation has gained the momentum to serve individuals with disabilities in Tahiti.

According to Metrople (2007), there are approximately 259,596 people residing in Tahiti. Reflecting that population, the Ministrer del al Solidarite Polynesie Francaise (2009) found that 11,266 individuals have a disability, either intellectual or physical. The collection of data reflecting the number of individuals with disabilities did not take place until 2007. Therefore this estimate of the population could be significantly lower because the population of individuals with disabilities is not accurately represented due to cultural perspectives. Personal communication and observation while on the island established that individuals with disabilities are segregated in the educational system according to their disability (i.e. a school for individuals with Down Syndrome, a school for individuals with Cerebral Palsy, etc.). Based on these special schools, individuals receive care and varied education based on the cultural perceptions of the capability of the individual and his/her ability to communicate. The delivery of education to individuals with disabilities varies greatly by school based on disability and verbal communication. Within each school, staffing systems vary based on the needs of the individuals and the perspective of the culture for the students with disabilities ability to learn.

Taking into consideration teacher education and training in Tahiti, it is possible that teachers in Tahiti have not had formal instruction on the concept of self-efficacy; however, even without a precise definition of the concept, the teachers of Tahiti are incredibly proud of their work and currently utilize concepts of self-efficacy without a

working knowledge. Reflecting the current education system of teachers who work with individuals with disabilities in Tahiti, there is a deficit in the body of knowledge and perspective, outside of intuition, in this area of research. Thus a new and extended body of knowledge and skills could influence teachers in Tahiti to measure consistency and a minimum level of competency across the island.

### **REACHability, Adaptive Sports and Recreation, Tahiti Education Project**

After completing a thorough review on the literature, research about disability internationally in the global south is recognizably lacking (Singal, 2010; World Health Organization [WHO], 2011). From a historical perspective, the research has included quantitative approaches focusing on identification of impairments or evaluation of services usually with a health focus (WHO, 2011). Recently, there has been increased interest in qualitative studies of structural aspects such as relationships between disability and poverty and/or gender (Ghai, 2002; Grech, 2011). Therefore this research focused on a qualitative approach to explore the shared experience of special education teachers who attended a five-day training at the Institut de la Jeunesse et des Sport de la Polynesie Francaise in Tahiti.

A non-profit organization, the REACHability Foundation, with a mission of bringing education and empowerment to individuals about disabilities and interventions, made personal contact with government officials in Tahiti during a previous trip to the island. The REACHability Foundation was commissioned by government officials to work with professionals from the Handisport and Sports Adaptes, Polynesie, who run sports and recreation activities for individuals with disabilities throughout French Polynesia.

In collaboration with professionals from Handisport and Sports Adaptes Polynesie deficits in disability awareness, behavior interventions, adaptations of sports and recreation, and sensory needs of individuals were identified as areas of need for teachers supporting individuals with disabilities. The framework for the formal training was decided on the basis of the perceived needs of the teachers as reported by the Handisport and Sports Adaptes, Polynesie. Cultural biases and perspectives were considered during weekly meetings, as well as current best practices within each field of expertise.

The education team from the REACHability Foundation, traveled to Tahiti with the goal of providing educators of individuals with disabilities with increased knowledge about disability, service delivery and adaptive activities and resources. The education included gross motor developmental norms, disability awareness and adaptability skills, functional behavior analysis and antecedent interventions, and sensory dysfunction identification.

Team members included: Dr. Jamie Hoffman, Kristen Cummings, MS, BCBA, Heather Hallam, MA, Eric Amundson, and Joclynn Benjamin. Team members were self-selected or selected by co-founders of the REACHability Foundation, Eric Amundson and Joclynn Benjamin. Three out of the five-team members had previously traveled to Tahiti in April 2014 to provide education to a small, independent school for children with disabilities.

Curriculum for the week was prepared by team members in English and translated into French for the presentation. All presentations consisted of a PowerPoint slide show and each participant of the conference was given a workbook with copies of the slides and additional materials. Curriculum included information on disability awareness, introduction to adaptations of sports and recreation, introduction to Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), functions of behavior, sensory systems and dysfunction, child development and gross motor development. The education/training was presented simultaneously in English, by the expert presenter, and translated in French, by Eric Amundson, a native speaker of both French and English.

This study explored the shared experience of special education teachers who attended a five day education/training at the Institut de la Jeunesse et des Sport de la Polynesie Francaise in Tahiti. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a five-day seminar on increasing the self-efficacy of special education teachers in Tahiti.

## **Methods**

### **Design and participants**

This was a qualitative study of perceived efficacy of teachers who work with individuals in French Polynesian on the island of Tahiti. Forty-six individuals who are teachers of individuals with disabilities in Tahiti participated in a five-day training. Teachers were chosen or self-selected to participate in the training and program based on the school and population with whom they work. The Handisport & Sports Adaptes Polynesie Organization provided teachers details of the education. The education of the participants of the five-day education/training varied from a high-school diploma to higher education comparative to a Master's degree, including kinesiotherapists, teachers, physical education teachers, psychologists, and sports professionals. When asked their profession, all participants self-identified as teachers.

The sample was conveniently obtained by providing participants with three different colored note cards. REACHability Foundation collected data on the perceived efficacy prior to and post education/training. Exploratory

research design conducting a cohort analysis utilizing secondary data collected by The REACHability Foundation during a five-day education/training at the Institut de la Jeunesse et des Sport de la Polynesie Francaise in Tahiti. The REACHability Foundation did not collect demographic characteristics of participants.

### **Procedure**

The REACHability Foundation collected data on the first day of the education/training and on the final day of the education/training. Participants were given two different cards on the first day of the education/training. The blue card was identified as a place for the participants to write things that were “not working” for them in their current working environment. They were asked to write down aspects of their job that were most difficult or challenging when working with individuals with disabilities in their working environment. Participants were then given a pink card to write down things that were working in their working environment. Participants were asked to identify things that they believe they did well or procedures that they were proud of in their work with individuals with disabilities. The directions for both cards were open-ended and did not specify examples of procedures or a set number of concepts to write down. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the perceived current status, identifiable strategies and programs that currently work in the educational setting for teachers who work with students with disabilities in Tahiti?
2. What is the perceived current status and identifiable challenges that currently exist in the educational setting for teachers who work with students with disabilities in Tahiti?
3. What is the perceived outcome and knowledge gained from participating in a five day training program at the Institut de la Jeunesse et des Sport de la Polynesie Francaise in Tahiti?

Day one of the conference provided the learners with information on gross motor developmental norms. Participants were provided with a copy of the Test of Gross Motor Development-2 (Ulrich, 2000) a gross motor assessment tool, which included 12 basic gross motor skills, including throwing and catching a ball, dribbling a ball, hitting a ball, jumping, hopping, skipping, leaping, galloping, running, sliding and horizontal jumping. Each participant was taught how to assess a child using the assessment tool and each participant was given the opportunity to be assessed by their peers using the tool.

Day two consisted of disability awareness training and an adaptive sports and recreation overview. Simple adaptations to rules and equipment were introduced. In addition, participants were exposed to different types of adaptive sports and recreational activities. Participants were given the opportunity to engage in disability simulation

activities, including completing a task with visual impairment simulation goggles. This training also included an activity analysis by breaking down tasks within a recreation activity and focusing on things that participants can do, rather than what they are not able to do based on their disability.

On day three of the conference, participants were introduced to sensory concepts covering the human vestibular, proprioceptive, and tactile systems. Participants were taught to assess their client's sensory needs using the Sensory Checklist (Biel & Peske, 2005). Three different checklists were provided to participants based on the communication style of the client, Child/Teen Sensory Tools Survey, Parent Sensory Tools Survey, and Teacher's Sensory Preferences. Based on the results of the sensory surveys, participants of the conference were taught to best meet the needs of their clients.

Day four provided participants with a basic understanding of the four functions of behavior, based on Applied Behavior Analysis. Participants watched videos and practiced identifying the functions of different behaviors when using information on the preceding variables (antecedents) and immediate consequences. Participants were supported in conducting ABC observations by watching simulations of children with disabilities. Participants were taught to use the functions of behavior to design alternative replacement behavior plans. Participants were also given insight to antecedent interventions in order to reduce the opportunity for problem behaviors to occur.

On day five, participants were taken through the assessment from start to finish. Participants were asked to consider all variables of the assessment and the assessment results when designing a program for their clients. The week ended with a culmination project where participants were grouped with their peers and presented a set of goals based on a factious participant and given assessment results.

At the end of the five-day seminar, the REACHability Foundation asked participants to write down on a yellow card the aspects of the education/training that were most useful and that they will likely utilize in their work with individuals with disabilities. Participants were not given specific instructions on what to write, nor were they asked to write a specific number of concepts that they found valuable from the education/training. Participants were presented with a certificate of completion. With the distribution of the certificates the participants showed their pride and were very excited to celebrate the knowledge gained and accomplishments of one another.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Data were collected before the start of training by the REACHability Foundation. Participants were instructed to write down what they were perceived to be working in their current jobs on a pink note card. In addition using a blue colored index card, participants were asked to write things that were not working before they began the training/education program. Data were collected at the conclusion of the five-day training and education. Participants were given a yellow index card and asked to identify what they learned from the training/education. The number of concepts identified as working, not working or valuable from the seminar varied across participants and were not specified by the REACHability Foundation.

The REACHability Foundation collected data directly from the participants whose native language was French. A reliable translator translated the cards from French to English. The translator had no affiliation or bias associated with the data collection or research study. The French translator is a native French and English speaker. After the translation, the secondary data were given to the researchers for analysis and thematic review.

### **Results**

#### **Effective strategies and programs – pink cards**

1. What is the perceived current status and identifiable strategies and programs that currently work in the educational setting for teachers who work with students with disabilities in Tahiti?

Reflecting the themes of the teachers' perceived effective strategies and programs in their educational setting, one can identify that the themes are recreationally-based in nature and do not have a foundation in traditional academics. The data were analyzed for all 33 responses and themes were identified as representative of the data. Themes included: the use of the pool and swimming – 9%; equestrian center/hippotherapies – 6%; cultural aspect including the respect of authority and boundaries – 9%; socialization – 18%; percussion studio, music and singing – 9%; project for activities – 9%; community trips – 18%; adaptive sports – 18%; improved activities – 4%.

Interesting and noteworthy of the collected perceptions of what teachers identified as working are those that are culturally based and not reflective of a traditional education curriculum in a typical educational setting. The teachers provided little information on the status of the educational or vocational programs of participants, and focused more heavily on recreational programming. This finding speaks to the expectations that are placed on individuals with disabilities in Tahiti.

#### **Challenging strategies and programs – blue cards**

2. What is the perceived current status and identifiable challenges that currently exist in the educational setting for teachers who work with students with disabilities in Tahiti?

The data were analyzed for all 35 responses and themes were identified as representation of the data. Themes included: physical weight and transferring of people – 9%; difficulties with communication and socialization – 11%; lacking the knowledge of how to work with different people based on their disability – 26%; contact with the public is limited – 3%; how to work with parents and get them to do what you ask them to do after school – 6%; lack of accessibility, and difficulty including individuals with different disabilities into activities and sports – 45%.

Educators most commonly expressed their frustration for the lack of inclusion and accessibility for individuals with disabilities within the larger society of Tahiti. Similar to that the responses of what teachers identified as working, teachers did not identify educational or vocational skills as an area of need. Responses surrounded themes of program logistics and inclusion.

#### **Knowledge gained – yellow cards**

3. What is the perceived outcome and knowledge gained from participating in a five day training program at the Institut de la Jeunesse et des Sport de la Polynesie Francaise in Tahiti?

The data were analyzed for all 45 responses and themes were identified as representation of the data. Themes included: learned different ways to adapt to different problem behaviors – 20%; learned better preparation for work – 9%; how to work with people with gross motor and fine motor problems – 7%; how to work professionally – 9%; how to work with parents – 7%; how to adapt recreation activities for many people – 28%; the exchanges between the Americans and our association – 11%; awakening – 9%.

At the conclusion of the five-day education/training, teachers identified adaptations of recreation activities and adaptations of teachers to different problem behaviors, as the greatest areas of learning. Comparing the perceived challenges identified by participants prior to their week of education to the identified outcomes after training, participants identified adaptations of recreation activities and sports as the most challenging prior to the training and as the area of greatest gain after the week of training. Other areas of comparison show that participants gained greater knowledge of program logistics including interactions and collaborations with parents, increasing professionalism in the work place, and increased preparation for work. Teachers also identified “awakening” as an area of knowledge gained, which has not been explicitly defined; however, taking into consideration the culture of

Tahiti, the awakening of the teachers is likely associated with their increased knowledge of individuals with disabilities and their potential in recreation.

### **Discussion**

Taking into consideration the content of the education/training program provided during the five days the data collected clearly identifies the outcomes and increased perceived self-efficacy of the teachers who participated based on the reported data. Before the training one participant stated, “J’aimerais avoir des méthodes pour pouvoir mieux travailler avec les parents concernant l’handicap de leur enfant. » Translated to: “I would like to have tools to better work with parents concerning their child’s handicap.” Another participants stated, “exemple, tu fais un travail avec l’enfant et que tu demandes aux parents de continuer, ils ne vont pas faire ou ils dissent qu’ils sont fatigues. » Translated to: “this is not working, for example, you work with the child and ask the parents to continue, but they will not do it or they say they’re too tired, this is a problem.”

The findings presented show the unique cultural perceptions and perceived efficacy of special education teachers in Tahiti. The participants of the study universally accepted the findings and there are some idiosyncratic cultural issues, which should be taken into account when studying a different culture. For the Tahitian population specifically, their focus on an individual’s awareness is central to the Tahitian culture.

The differences in language between the expert speakers and the participants throughout the week should be considered a limitation of the work completed in Tahiti. As observed by the researchers, throughout their work in Tahiti, literal interpretation of material could influence future explanations of content. As an example, when a teacher in Tahiti is given a ball, the use of a ball is to bounce or kick and explanations were needed to identify alternative adaptations or activities that could be perceived as sport or play, specific to individuals with disabilities. Without a literal translation, a barrier is created limiting the creativity of equipment for the use of sport and recreation, as well as the teacher’s expansion of knowledge. Although experts in each field were present to provide the educational topics, they were all English speakers who utilized a translator to convey the information and questions between participants and experts. It is likely that there was some level of interpretation made by the translator when communicating with the audience. It is possible that the interpreter, based on his own personal knowledge and perspective, altered questions of the audience. In addition to the language barrier when working with and teaching individuals in a different country, an additional limitation is the ability of the individuals being served

to answer the question of what is not working. It may be difficult for teachers to provide comprehensive and sufficient information on what is not working because one cannot identify something that is not within their realm of existence. For this reason, the answers of teachers to the question of “what is not working” may not be comprehensive and sufficiently answered.

### **Limitations**

A core limitation of any training program is the funding and cost associated with the presentation. For this project, no funding was acquired and therefore the associated expenses were split between the REACHability Foundation and the Institut de la Jeunesse et des Sport de la Polynesie Francaise. This model is not sustainable for the REACHability Foundation to continue providing education and trainings. In order to continue providing international trainings, the REACHability Foundation must identify and secure future funding opportunities.

As with any qualitative study the question of external validity must be examined and goes beyond the scope of this paper. The results presented here are based on the responses of a small group of special education teachers who participated in a five-day education REACHability, Sports and Recreation, Tahiti Project. That said this research is representative of that small group and not of the entire population of Tahiti. This study is the beginning of further research related to international perspectives of perceived self-efficacy of special education teachers. The study results can provide a starting point based on the diverse perceptions and the cultural perspectives of disability in Tahiti. Future research may be beneficial to teachers in the traditional education system within Tahiti, not primarily for special education teachers. Additionally, to increase the use of inclusive learning environments where children with disabilities can be integrated into the school system, instead of excluded from a traditional educational opportunity.

The specification of teachers and the population that they serve should be further examined in future research to determine their scope of practice and knowledge base before and after a comprehensive training seminar. Furthermore, research should capture a basic understanding of international diagnostic processes and the impact on education of both the teacher and the individual with a disability.

In an effort to create autonomy while training international schools and organization servicing individuals with disabilities, the REACHability Foundation would benefit from the creation of a menu of various education topics. This menu of topics could be presented during an initial consultation when determining the needs of the organization. The current week of education topics were selected based on the REACHability Foundation’s

strengths and knowledge, as well as perception of the needs in Tahiti, based on a previous two-day training that was provided for one school on the island six months prior. The training presented was based on a variety of factors that were related to the needs of the special education system as a whole, but especially for increasing teacher self-efficacy. The REACHability Foundation should also consider furthering the training options provided to teachers of individuals with disabilities and combine formal training seminars with practical application of knowledge gained in the training to enhance the learning process. Without the direct observation and feedback for the teachers, the full scope and understanding will not be fully attained.

### **Conclusion**

As the population of individuals with disabilities on the islands of Tahiti continues increase, the need for well-trained teachers who are confident in their skills is prominent. The challenges that these teachers face can be supported through educational opportunities to increase their self-efficacy in working with individuals with disabilities.

The primary purpose of this research was to examine the effectiveness of a five-day seminar on increasing the self-efficacy of special education teachers in Tahiti. Based on the current research, the results proved that a cross-cultural seminar was effective in increasing the self-efficacy, as well as the knowledge base, of teachers in Tahiti. The findings of this study make important contributions to current work in international teacher training, as well as self-efficacy of teachers. The positive outcomes anticipated may serve to improve the awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities in Tahiti and opportunities for funding to educate teachers in Tahiti.

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