

Chapter 8

Concluding Remarks Related to the Study

Abstract This chapter presents a condensed view on the results and points at limitations, further possibilities and open questions in the analysis of the data collected. This includes an examination of terms like disability and their global applicability. The second part of the conclusion explores future possibilities of analysing the data and addresses questions that have not been answered yet. Regarding the vast body of data collected, there is still the need and the possibility to proceed in the analysis by referring to additional aspects that could not be considered so far. In addition, further comments are included in the last part of the conclusion, regarding topics that go beyond the research question and that were addressed earlier in the book.

Last but not least, this chapter involves current international discussions regarding disability/diversity and education as well as classification systems. This supports the aim of putting the research results into a broader global framework. By referring to studies from other countries, I elaborate links and differences and consequently implications for other cultural contexts. In doing so, the presented theory gets accessible to a broader scientific community.

At this point of the book, I would like to present a condensed view on the results and point out limitations, further possibilities and open questions in the analysis of the data collected. In addition, I include further comments regarding topics that go beyond the research question and that were addressed at the beginning of this book.

Overview of the Results

The outcome of this research is a rather complex concept of the effects that *feeling like a family* can have in school environments on the people involved. The major effect that could be observed was the “development of a sense of belonging”, which had to be interpreted differently for children, parents and teachers.

The theory of “developing a sense of belonging” has to be seen as a result that reflects only one aspect of the field under study. Thereby, those participants who developed a *feeling like a family* are in the focus rather than those who didn’t, even

though the latter were part of the whole analysis as well as the results. The different categories that emerged in relation to the interviews with the children, parents and teachers revealed processes taking place in each of these groups related to different conflicts that the participants had to deal with. From a macro-system perspective, negative societal and/or cultural attitudes towards disability and the low social reputation of the teaching profession formed basic conflicts for all of the participants. The teachers and parents seemed to solve these conflicts only on a micro-system and not on the macro-system level. By developing a *feeling like a family* mainly between parents and teachers, a “compensatory community” was established at school. This provided them with a feeling of belongingness which gave rise to positive aspects like respect, value and acceptance that might not always be given for them in the greater society. Yet, these processes could only unfold because the respective persons overcame their micro-system conflicts of changing negative attitudes and feeling ashamed of their child with a disability (parents) and taking on responsibility for quality education for the children with disabilities despite a lack of support, teacher training and material (teachers).

The children on the other hand could develop the necessary basis within school to solve their conflict of finding a place of belonging in the macrostructures of the greater society. This necessary basis was an improved or positive concept of self that was established through the highly valued access to school. The *feeling like a family* that was identified in relation to the children’s interviews thus referred to their capability of supporting the family economically, which was expected to be reached by receiving education. The children’s conflict, lying in the future, was not solved in any way. Realities in Addis Ababa predict a rather negative picture of the possibilities for people with disabilities on the labour market. However, expert interviews pointed at positive – although still slow – developments in Addis Ababa and beyond and an “atmosphere of departure” regarding changes in awareness and changes of negative attitudes towards disability in the society.

The theory of “developing a sense of belonging” describes the dependencies between micro- and macrostructures of the participants regarding their problem-solving strategies (*feeling like a family*). The model furthermore explains these strategies that were chosen by the different actors to deal with emotional stress related to disability and education on the school level. Last but not least, the consequences and results of choosing such a strategy are identified. “Developing a sense of belonging” can hence be understood as a model that makes processes in an educational environment visible that refer to different ways of constructing disability and dealing with the consequences in a majority world context. The advantage of this model is the inclusion of three different perspectives and the integration of micro- and macro-level structures. This makes it possible to compare and reflect on three different approaches towards – and effects of – dealing with disability in an educational environment in a country of the South.

When embedding these results in the cultural and societal environment that can be found in Addis Ababa, it became clear that the influence of a collectivist culture enforces the meaning of *feeling like a family* as well as “developing a sense of belonging”. Furthermore, the aspects of religion and ethnicity received special

attention, as these aspects added complexity to the process. Last but not least, the culturally valued aspects of family and community emphasise the importance of children with disabilities to develop a sense of belonging.

I want to conclude this overview with a quotation from Singal and Muthukrishna:

[...] [I]t is important to note here that in the South, the individual with disabilities cannot be simply disassociated from the family or other collective units. Rather, disability has a cascading impact on these units as a whole, to a greater or lesser extent. Thus, in order to understand a person with disability, we need to also take into account his or her familial positioning, role, and so on. (2014, 295)

Possibilities and Open Questions

This part of the conclusion explores future possibilities of analysing the data and addresses questions that have not been answered yet. Regarding the vast body of data collected, there is still the need and the possibility to proceed in the analysis by referring, e.g. to the single cases (child–parent–teacher) and compare the situations of children with different “kinds of disabilities” which were identified as such by the surrounding. Thereby, the geographical locations and hence special environmental circumstances of the schools can also receive more attention.

Another point that could not be elaborated further in the scope of this book is the question about the differences and the supporting systems that enable parents from poor backgrounds to organise school visits more often and to develop meaningful relationships compared to the parents from poor backgrounds who were not able or not willing to do so.

A further important aspect is the meaning of friends for children with disabilities and their social integration at school through building up friendships there.

Last but not least, one analytical step while working with the codes led towards the question about the children’s responsibilities. There were certain aspects in the data that pointed into the direction that children actually took on a lot of responsibility for their own education (e.g. convincing their parents to come to school). The hypothesis in this context was that children from families who did not develop a *feeling like a family* had to take on comparably more responsibility for their education than others. It is clear that especially aspects related to the participants who were not involved in *feeling like a family* must be examined more closely in future analyses of the collected data.

Further Comments

Regarding the claim of this book to provide contributions that go beyond answering the research question – as addressed in the first part of the book – this last part is devoted to satisfying this claim involving four different topics:

- Future research (beyond the scope of the data collected)
- The aspect of culture
- Models of disability
- Patterns of orientation

First, by being basic research, this study can have implications for **future research** studies. The results indicate that the implementation of inclusive education is not happening satisfactorily for all parties involved in Ethiopia up to now. However, certain strategies are used to deal with problems that the people involved face on a daily basis at school. It would be interesting to find out how those already developed strategies (e.g. *feeling like a family*) could be used for supporting the development of making schools and the school climate inclusive. Additionally, knowledge about possibilities of community-based support regarding schools and an inclusive environment would be valuable, as it is often the communities and neighbourhoods that are very meaningful to the people. Furthermore, it became evident that strategies have to be developed that support people with disabilities on the labour market with the goal of making it accessible and inclusive. This includes first and foremost supporting institutions and potential employers by developing inclusive environments for people with disabilities. Research could be done also in this area to identify where support would be most effective. At the same time, research on the situation of the labour market itself regarding access for people with disabilities is an important issue.¹

Second, the **aspect of culture** was included with special emphasis in the book. As became clear throughout the book, culture is a nonstatic term and difficult to grasp. However, it has major influences in a society especially on topics like disability. The problematic stigma that people with disabilities usually experience in many cultures could also be observed in Ethiopia and Addis Ababa. The construction of disability depends very much on religious beliefs. Additionally, important factors such as family and society and widespread attitudes as well as awareness play a special role.

Third, the question about the prevailing **model of disability** was posed. It was observed that very often a medical model of disability seems to exist especially regarding educational institutions. For instance, teachers in the study often learned about the causes of disabilities in their special needs course at the teacher training college rather than receiving tools and ideas about how to manage the classroom. In the greater society however, according to the experiences that the interviewees talked about, a charity model seems to constitute the dominant perspective on disability.

Fourth, the aspect of identifying **patterns of orientation** was raised in relation to Nieke's concept of culture (2008). The point there was that the lifeworld of a person or group is mainly constituted by the patterns of orientation which are used in the respective environment. With respect to the results of this research, the

¹ Research in this area can be found, e.g. in the project RESPOND-HER (<http://respond-her.univie.ac.at/>).

cultural patterns of orientation for the children with disabilities are first and foremost the importance and the value of family as such as well as the valued contributions to the community and society. In other words, these specific values serve as a pattern of orientation. They provide the children with a point of reference of what is valued in their society and hence what is expected from them as part of this society. This finally seems to give them the potential to deal with disability in their macro-system and become a part of the greater society. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that the *feeling like a family* also provided the parents and teachers with a pattern of orientation related to the cultural value of family which at the same time served as an anchor point that made it possible for them to deal with disability in a positive way within their micro-systems.

References

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