Social Inclusion Workshop Summary

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What does social inclusion mean? How do we measure social inclusion? How do we recruit community members into a social inclusion research agenda? Participants took up these questions at the DOCTRID IV Social Inclusion Workshop on April 28, 2015 at Queen's University Belfast. Invited speakers—including Jennifer Clegg, Ed Hall, Bronagh Byrne, and Sr. Marian Harte—made opening remarks on the future direction of social inclusion research. They raised questions like: How do researchers collaborate with service providers without over-burdening staff and parents? How do we integrate a social inclusion research agenda with rights frameworks without ignoring relationships? And how do we begin to build new spaces—"places of mutuality"—to promote a real sense of belonging for people with intellectual disabilities and community members?

Participants then broke into four groups. DOCTRID facilitators guided each discussion (Geraldine Leader, Stacy Clifford Simplican, John Kosciulek, and June Chen). Each group also selected a note-taker to record the group's conversation. This summary presents the main themes from their conversations—many of which overlapped into three main themes: (1) identifying important research questions and (2) research methods, and (3) creating an online venue to continue the conversation.

Research Agenda

Participants identified research questions that focused on people with intellectual disabilities, their families, the organizations that provide them with services and supports, the broader community, and how to effect change in the public policy arena. In this way, the participants identified a research agenda that encompasses all levels of an ecological model of social inclusion, which understands inclusion as an outcome of individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and socio-political factors.[i]

Individual Questions
- What are the individual consequences of inclusion? Benefits? Challenges?
- What does social inclusion mean to people with intellectual disabilities? What do they want?
- Can we "trace" a person's level of social inclusion? Particularly for people who have moved out of congregate settings and into the community?
- What does "good" look like? In other words, can we tell a qualitative story that depicts what social inclusion *should* look like?
    - What are the significant factors that contribute to social inclusion in these ideal case studies?
    - What individual skills contribute to social inclusion?

For an incoming researcher, the DOC presents several research opportunities to research these individual questions, such as identifying a group of service users who the researcher can study ethnographically, which would then enable a researcher to give a qualitative representation of social inclusion for adults with intellectual disabilities. Researchers could also identify DOC service users who have moved out of a congregate setting and into community housing to understand if and how the quality of their social inclusion changes.

Interpersonal Questions
- What are the challenges to social inclusion for adults with intellectual disabilities living with their parents in the community?
- How do parents and direct support professionals understand the risks entailed in social inclusion? How do their perceptions of risk affect the quality of social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities?
- How do people in a social network of a person with ID balance the risk of victimization and a duty of care with the dignity of risk and autonomy?

An incoming researcher to DOCTRID has many opportunities to research the interpersonal factors of social inclusion, as many DOC staff workers at the DOCTRID IV workshop expressed an eagerness for inclusion in research agendas.

Organizational Questions
- How can organizations use assistive technology to support, manage, and measure risks associated with social inclusion?
- Why are businesses recruiting people with disabilities? What are the benefits?
- How successful are mentoring/volunteering programs within organizations at promoting social inclusion?
- How do under-resourced organizations participate in research to promote social inclusion?
- What kinds of training packages could researchers develop and deliver to support service providers in their delivery of social inclusion?

An incoming researcher to DOCTRID could partner with different disability-related organizations, such as Peckham Industries in Lansing, Michigan, USA, or the Daughters of Charity Disability Services in Dublin, Ireland.

Community Questions
- How do community attitudes hinder social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities?
- What are the attitudes of community members toward people with intellectual disabilities and social inclusion?
- Can we develop successful training packages for potential employers that enable them to embrace and support people with intellectual disabilities and autism?
- How do researchers and practitioners design attitude interventions to positively effect community attitudes?
    - How do these interventions work longitudinally?
    - What are the factors that make these interventions successful?

All of the groups identified community-level questions as some of the most important. Yet these are also research questions that pose some of the most challenges to incoming researchers. Participants suggested that researchers could partner with primary and secondary schools, as these groups represent one potential area of intervention into community attitudes.

Socio-political Questions
- How do we use research to change public policies toward people with disabilities and social inclusion?
- What explains the gap between positive public policies that promote social inclusion and the gap in practice?

Methodology

Participants identified the need to pursue a research agenda that supported both qualitative and qualitative research methods. Importantly, participants asked, How do we measure social inclusion? Participants also suggested that researchers can help organizations develop scales to measure and implement social inclusion. Researchers should also look at developing longitudinal research agendas, to both measure a person's level of social inclusion over time, and to measure community attitudes toward people with intellectual disabilities.

Community Resources

Participants also identified the need to create online resources that researchers, practitioners, people with disabilities, and families can access. These resources might include a listserv, Facebook page, or webinar. Importantly, these community resources need to be a place that researchers can distill research findings into accessible formats, as many participants identified the fact that frontline staff and parents do not have the time or interest to read long research reports. This seems like a fruitful avenue to combine social inclusion and technology, as technology can help disseminate research findings and build future collaborations between an international group of scholars, practitioners, and families.

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[i] Clifford Simplican, Stacy, Geraldine Leader, John Kosciulek, and Michael Leahy. 2015. "Defining Social Inclusion of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: An Ecological Model of Interpersonal Relationships and Community Participation." *Research in Developmental Disabilities,* 38: 18-29.