

Every Child Can Learn Podcast
Episode 26: Deborah on inclusive vocational education

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Annemaaike: Welcome, everybody to this new episode of The every child can learn podcast. We are very happy to have a new guest today in this 26th episode. We talk so much about inclusion, special needs, about learning difficulties and learning disabilities. But the topic we have not talked about yet so far is inclusion in vocational education in Uganda. My name is Annemaaikemaaik, I am one of the founders of Backup Uganda and also the country director at the moment. And I am very, very pleased to welcome Deborah today. Hi Deborah. You're welcome.

Deborah: Thank you, Annemaaike.

Annemaaike: We are talking online. So for listeners who are wondering why our voices might sound a little bit strange. We're speaking on Zoom. But we are still going to have a very nice engaging conversation. Deborah, it's up to you. Would you like to introduce yourself please, who are you?

Deborah: Thank you very much Annemaaike. I'm happy also to be part of this podcast so that I can share my experiences. My name is Deborah Zawedde Setyabula and I'm the chairperson of the Education Commission Buganda Kingdom, also the director of Dahlia community skills development centre, I am a teacher by profession, that was my first degree. I have competences in IT at a master's level, I also specialised in special needs specifically in sign language interpretation. Also, management of institutions, majorly vocational institutions is one of my qualifications. I am a fashion designer, and I do vocational guidance and counselling. I am married to Mr. Setyabulla with three children. And I do production learning, especially in my company. That is Dahlia Community Skills Development Center. I think for now, that is the introduction I can give about myself. Thank you.

Annemaaike: That's a variety of talents. Thank you very much. I should start asking you more about fashion design.

Deborah: Yeah, true.

Annemaaike: Now, I know from our previous conversations that you have a very strong passion for inclusion in education in general, and especially when it comes to vocational education. Could you tell us a bit more about that?

Deborah: Yes. I say yes, I have the passion for inclusive education. And as a teacher, I realised that we have left out so many of our disabled children, not knowing that they have almost the same capacity as the ones we could call the able bodied. I realised this when I was working with the National Association of the Deaf in Uganda, and I was their principal, the manager of the training institution. I came to an observation that the disabled can do a lot of work, they can do far much than we expect. But we rarely do not give them the opportunity to do it. This is something that I realized as a challenge, and I made my personal recommendations as much as they were not met. But I came up with this community Skills Centre, to see that I can meet what I had recommended to the Deaf institution and allow me to share with you what I realized, as a manager of the deaf people. Personally, I was teaching them ICT and they were very much compliant. They are very fast learners. However, they need some people to move with, they cannot move alone, the ladder of their career, they need someone to move along with them, I want specially to be specific with the deaf, whose language is not known to many of us, to the extent that even when they know something so well, they are skilled and professional in a given area, you realize that people will not trust them because of the language. So this is where I thought maybe the hearing need to be alongside their career development, their jobs, to make that kind of interpretation, to get for them jobs, and then to do negotiation, to find for them market for their products. Those are the issues that I came to realize. And while there, I made this recommendation that we need to do what we call production learning. If the Deaf cannot be independent to work alone in their specific homes, in their specific areas, then we the people who are training them can do what you call production learning, which is so much emphasized in the skilling project, especially Skilling Uganda project, but production learning is where you give the training to the learner and immediately you come up with the products which are sellable, there, we'll see if we can be able to find market for their products. And as they do the production, they are paid a cost of production, as we find market for their product, as we improve on the quality because they are already in the training session, and also doing the kind of production. So this is something that is lacking in most of the vocational institutions, where the learners cannot be independent, as much as I'm talking about inclusivity. But I'm also talking about the other learners who are trained, and like the fact that their ages are still low and their maturity levels are a little low. These are people who need a lot of mentorship, and with production learning, I think it can help them you teach them all the processes of production, right from the beginning the raw material up to the end product, they get used, they get in relation with all the products at all levels, all the processes of production, so that they go up to the finishing level, and then right to the final customer. So I briefly think I have given you my passion for, for inclusivity. And when I started this community Skills Center, I made sure I have many disabled people. I work with some of them on my staff, and I call them my experts, others are trainees. We are inclusive in nature.

And we know we are benefiting because I find them doing very good work that is required. Thank you.

Annemaaike: Thank you very much. That's very impressive. And I remember in a conversation we've had recently, you mentioned something like even if someone isn't able to learn an entire production process, it could still be possible for someone to specialize in specific aspects. Right? Did I?

Deborah: Yes, it is true. It is true.

Annemaaike: Okay. Yeah. Then I do remember that. Well, I remember you gave an example of someone working in fashion, they may not be able to get from the design up to the finishing, but they might be able to get very specific parts of that process.

Deborah: Yeah, yes Annemaaike, I mean, I think I can give you this entirely in an explanation. Yes, in what we call production learning, we identify processes of production. And we realize that depending on a given disability, this learner cannot do certain tasks because of that disability, and you find that they have a special talent of identifying a specific skill or a specific process in production, let me be so specific to the area of fashion and design in terms of making a clothes, you realize that this is a deep support person, maybe with the hands and cannot do the cutting maybe as a first process, but can do the measurement can do all those others. So that person can be good in making straight lines in tailoring. So we can specialize in that. and that person can do the work process of just making the straight lines, another one can be not so conversant with making curves or making good finishing, and then we give them other processes. So whatever you are talking about is really true. That we can specialise, we can have specific elements that our special needs personnel can really work with. And it helps so much in production learning.

Annemaaike: Thank you for sharing that example. Yeah, that's a beautiful way of creating more inclusive spaces. Right? And yes, we have specialists who have no disabilities as well, why would we not allow that? Or why would we not for someone with a disability?

Deborah: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Definitely. Yeah.

Annemaaike: You have already shared a few gaps that you have seen and experienced in inclusion in vocational education in Uganda, would you like to add any others? Or you feel like you've mentioned all of them?

Deborah: So no, I don't think I have completed because in Uganda, I think we are still, we have not unveiled enough about vocation education. We are still lacking, it is still so much in the background. Apparently, I think I understand as an individual, I think I understand what vocational education means. But I realized that many of my other colleagues who with whom we

are in the same same job area, I don't see them fitting very well. Let me give you this example. While I do production learning, I realized that my my learners do specific work to the end market, whatever we work on, in our production in our training, we are looking at the final consumer, we are not looking at something for to just pass through the education, the vocation education itself, we don't take it for granted, but we are looking at the end result. If you come up with a product, are you sure that the customer will be happy with it? And you are the very first customer. I always advise my land owners, that you are the very first customer. If it is not attractive to you, then it will not be attractive to another person. Therefore you have to make something which is sellable, which is marketable, and that means the issue of quality. So in vocational education, we have this gap, that we don't follow our learners to the level of marketable products, we give them the training, and we leave them in gaps. Then the other issue in vocational training, I have realized that the learners that we engage into this training will not have much of what we call it investment capital. In productions of vocational courses, we realize that there is a lot of machinery that is required to complete different processes. So there's our learners, we train and we want them to go out in the world to practice or to find their own jobs, but they cannot have the machines for all the processes. That means they will always have terminated processes in their work. For example, if they can acquire a machine which makes straightening, a straight machine, you will realize that you will need a finishing machine, they will need a cutting machine, they'll need designing one, all those ones, which the learner at their level cannot afford. That is another gap. So when we have production learning, and we have concentrated machines, which make a factory setting in one area, I think we can help these learners. We can have a model where they come and learn after their graduation, they can go back and look for market, then we can give them more spaces to come and operate with us, because we have more machines and they cannot acquire. So, as they bring in their market, they are finding their savings to accumulate more of what will be their initial capital, by the time they become independent, maybe they may have acquired the capital investment that is required. So, that is another area, another gap in our vocational training. Then innovations and creativity is something that we have not touched so much, there is a lot that can be handled in areas of vocational training. And I always give examples of the shoes in Uganda, the shoes that we call "Nigginna". Now, I don't know whether you know them Annemaaiki. Unfortunately, I cannot give you a video. But there are these shoes that we call "Nigginna", all the time you go on market, you find new designs, meaning there's someone behind the thinking of a new design all the time, when this year goes by you realize another is coming in with other designs and they are so exciting. So, our customers always keep to have a choice, I need this one. I have this one that is a role of a fashion designer. So even if we have a specific person in that area, there is need for guidance for these learners, there is need for mentorship along the way till we find them independent. So that is another challenge. We train them, we graduate them and we don't do a track record. We don't know where they are, we don't know what or how they're doing. And it is somehow not helping us so much. I understand the vision of Uganda of scaling the children is to see that we have a bigger, a bigger income generating age or a bigger income generating team or group, but we have not reached the level of having that, the vocational training that is given is

not touching that, the machinery that is required is not accessible by all that go in vocational training. I think I have done so. Thank you.

Annemaaike: Thanks a lot. I hope I understood the shoes but we will talk about that more. Okay. Now in this area, you were mentioning a lot of gaps that can be worked on, have you seen some progress in this in the past few years?

Deborah: Yes, in my organization, I have seen so far much progress. In other schools, which give vocational guidance, I see this gap still very evident. The gap is still there. Many of our learners who go for vocational training, acquire the skills, but they are not helped along the way. So the gaps are still existing. It is only when we have a number, a lot of capacity building and too much benchmarking in different organizations in different countries that can be able to close these gaps. It is very much helpful but it needs new videos or employers or entrepreneurs, who are business focused and they can be able to give the minimum investment that is required so that our learners can be able to close this gap. However, it is still existing.

Annemaaike: Understood. Thank you very much. Now you already talked about capacity building. My next question was going to be what role teachers can play. We have listeners who teach vocational institutes and I'm sure they would be very happy to learn from you what they could be doing to make your vocational education more inclusive.

Deborah: Yes, Annemaaike, we are available. My organization is very much ready. And actually I have started to give what to call vocational guidance and training to institutions. I've started giving this training to secondary schools, those senior four and senior six. This is something that we need to carry on with, because I've seen very many learners, teachers and parents who are stakeholders in this, finding it's something somehow new to them, the vocational guidance and counselling elements. This is where everything has to come in. And maybe something I have not talked about the gap that I've not talked about is that when we talk about the additional education in Uganda, very many of our learners go into over flooded skills, the skills with very many people and many more markets are the skills that our learners choose. So that is where we need vocational guidance. We do not give it to only the learners, but all the stakeholders, parents, teachers, learners and school administrators. Yes.

Annemaaike: Thanks a lot. Do you have maybe an example off the top of your head of particular strategies that you include in that training for teachers in that capacity building, the capacity building that you offer, though, when you were just talking about practical skill sometimes that you share with the people who participate in such training? So I'm trying to think, if you maybe could share an example. Who knows, it might appeal to people who are listening to this episode, and they think, Oh, I definitely have to pull them Deborah and access more of this training.

Deborah: Okay, this is what we do. Um, let me give you the whole process of how I do this. First of all, I have a concept for vocational guidance and training, which concept I go and discuss with school owners, institutions, and I lobby for them to call what we call a parents meeting, where the children are going to be part. So there, I already have four stakeholders in place, the parents who have called for a meeting, the learners who are also part of those that meeting, I know, the teachers will be there, and then the school administrators, so I have those four stakeholders. So in that meeting, I always do a PowerPoint presentation with a number of evidence based activities that we do, and also with guidance, because the question really, that I usually ask, is what we want our learners, our children to do in their future, you will realize that many of our parents give us the white collar jobs, that those are the ones they need. But we give the guidance that these people are very different from what we think, their personality, their character, their aptitude, and then the disability or what we call ability is different. So we start from there, to understand what we want our children to be or to be doing in future. And then we go guiding depending on the other areas that I've mentioned. So that is how I basically do it any other way I do it is to invite schools, to my training, to work to my workplace, to show all the work processes and the abilities that different students can have in a workplace, you show them all the processes of doing something. And then they make a choice. You guide them according to how you see them being able and then coping with the production. And then the other thing, we also produce a form to identify the character and personality and abilities of these learners, we have a developed form that they fill and when we can make an assessment to find out what they can do best and what they cannot do best. I think I have answered you briefly, Annemaaike.

Annemaaike: Thank you, that sounds so inspiring. Sounds like something I would love to do. Even though I don't work in a vocational institution. Thanks a lot. My last question for you for today is if you could tell us a bit more about Yeah, what would you tell? Or what would you recommend parents who already mentioned them? What would you recommend parents of children or youth with disabilities, about vocational education, as I'm sure they also play a very important role.

Deborah: Let me take it as a whole not to differentiate the disabled. But let me talk to all parents, whether our children are disabled or not. First by giving you an example, as a teacher, I, I always know that in a training environment, we have what we call the slow learners. And then the fast learners. There are those who are hyper and there are those who are slow. So when I know those differences, because of my background as a teacher, however, there are parents, like one of the parents who gave me my maid, my maid at home. This parent told me that I don't think you should bother my child to take her for further education because she is stupid. So that is the word that she used. My girl is so dull that she cannot even do anything. But with home chores, Yes, you can take her up. So I spent with this girl. Indeed, she was slow. But with patience and with the techniques of a teacher, I managed to get something good out of this girl. Apparently, I call her my personal assistant. She doesn't know how to read and write. But practically, when she sits on the machine, she does wonders. Number two, she does machine technician. She's a

machine technician. She does machine mechanics, not the minor, but also the major mechanical issues concerning our machines. She's the one who does them. I was with her for seven years. So I want to add to parents who are listening. And also those ones we shall interrupt with that there is no one who can not learn. And I'm actually happy with these podcasts every child can learn. I think it fits so well. This girl is one of my experts. So now I have started on the literacy classes for her so that she can benefit and have some English and then these literacy levels of mathematics and counting, these are things that she did not have. So parents have a mentality. This is a girl who was not disabled. But somehow she was a slow learner. So parents shouldn't judge their children because every child can learn that when I'm sure. Then the other thing I need to advise is that parents should not be very excited about this vocational courses, they need guidance, they need to have guidance on what to choose. There vocational courses are skills which are over flooded by people and it is very, very competitive fighting for market here and there. But then there are those courses which are hot and very demanding. So here the Parents also need to have what is called vocational guidance. And thirdly, to the institutions, which give these trainings, I will still urge that we avail the machinery and all the work processes such that by the time our learner leaves our institution, they know quality differences, material differences, they know the machine differences, all those things are very, very important. However, they are not given in some of our institutions with Okay, the vocational training, but these are things that parents must look out for if they are to benefit. Thank you.

Annemaaike: So Deborah, how can people reach you if they want to learn more from you please?

Deborah: Oh, thank you very much, Annie. I think I can give you my phone numbers 0700 449439. I can repeat that, 0700449439 Then the other one which is on WhatsApp is 0782238333. Can I read my email as well? Absolutely. Yeah. Yes, it is enterprisedahlia@gmail.com I wish to spell. This email address is enterprisedahlia@gmail.com

Annemaaike: Beautiful I'm sure that it comes in very handy for people who are listening to this episode. Thank you so much. Deborah, is there anything else that you would like to add that you've not yet mentioned?

Deborah: I think yes. I have realized something like I told you I think I have personally understood what is called vocational education at my level, I think I know. Apparently I am studying my doctorate in counselling psychology. I have many degrees. I have many skills. but I'm finding fashion and designing more paying, more interesting to me as an individual. So as I climb the ladders of academic achievement, I still believe that skills can be more paying to any kmperson who is passionate about them and gets the right training. I am still sure about that. I have tasked myself of two things, that all my children, my children I have, I give them the skill. So I have one in primary two, who can manage the machine, an electrical machine absolutely Well. She can do it very, very well. How I wish I can take up this skill in her, so that in future she

can be a very good fashion designer, I'm very passionate about it. Then the other one, I have a boy. My first one is a boy who is very reserved, a very, very introvert to the extent that I even fail to understand as a mother. But through the skills I have identified the talents of this boy, he is in senior one at the moment in Uganda. But he's a person who can do also machine mechanics and he loves it very well. That is a job for him in future if he carries it well in mechanics. So I have gone on identifying talents of my children, by engaging them in my workplace and identify what they can do best and what they cannot do best. I think parents also need to know this. I think I had forgotten it. That identifying our children's talent at their youngest ages is very, very important. And we help them grow with it. Thank you.

Annemaaike: Thank you so much. Yes, there are so many talents beyond academics, right? Absolutely. agree with that. Thank you, Deborah. And thank you for sharing everything you have shared with us today. I appreciate everything you're already doing and wish you all the best with your doctorate that you are embarking on. Thank you everybody for listening to this episode. We look forward to catching you again for the next one. But for now, I just want to remind everybody that every learner counts and every child can learn.

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