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## Every Child Can Learn Podcast

### Episode 14: Michael on inclusive accelerated learning

**Intro:** You are listening to the Every Child Can Learn podcast. The podcast is offered to you by Backup Uganda and Brainstud. You can listen to our podcasts online on our website, [www.backupuganda.com](http://www.backupuganda.com). And if you are in Gulu, you can pick up the audios offline from Mega FM, Radio Rupiny, Divine Video and Music Library. Head teachers from the district's schools can pick this podcast from the District Education Office. And head teachers from city schools can pick theirs from the City Education Office. You can as well pick up the podcast episodes from the following schools Highland Primary School, Gulu Prison Primary School, Gulu Town Primary School, Mary Immaculate Primary School, St. Joseph Primary School, or Christ the King Demonstration Primary School. Do you like our podcast? Feel free to share it with your family, friends, or neighbors. The more people learn about learning difficulties, the better we can help our children.

**Glades:** Welcome to our 14th episode of Every Child Can Learn. My name is Lanyero Glades, I work for Backup Uganda. Today, I'm very happy and delighted to meet our special guest. He is going to tell us his name, where he's from, maybe the name of the organization and what we are what he would like us to know about him. So let me welcome our guest.

**Michael:** Thank you very much Glades. My name is Okello Michael Roberston. I work for Comboni Samaritans of Gulu organization which is based in Gulu. We are implementing an education program. I work as the program coordinator for the Northern Uganda Education Program in Gulu.

**Galdes:** Thank you very much, Michael, for that introduction. Could you please tell us more about what you do, and maybe your position as a supervisor in the organization you just mentioned to us?

**Michael:** Thank you, Glades. As I mentioned earlier, I work for Comboni Samaritans of Gulu as the program coordinator for a project called the Northern Uganda Education Program. This project entirely focuses on supporting critically vulnerable children who drop out and those

who have never been to school before. And in short form, we call it the speed school program. Now, in my capacity as the coordinator for this program, my work is to supervise the facilitator in this regards, we refer to the teachers who implement the program, or the teachers who actually teach do the actual support to the children in the classes, as in normal terms, we term it as teaching. Yeah, so my work is majorly to support them, technically, and make sure that the learners get exactly what is prepared for them. Thank you.

**Glades:** Thank you so very much, Michael, for explaining that, you really do a great job. You've talked of supporting your teachers or your facilitators in their teaching. And I believe you also do practice what we call inclusive education. Could you please let the listeners also know what do you understand by inclusive education? And what does inclusive teaching look like to you?

**Michael:** Thank you, once again, when we look at the philosophy itself, this is just looking at, let me put in the most simplest way that urging schools, neighborhoods and community or any nearby category of people who support learning in school, to make sure that they value each and every child the way they are, because you know, individually, we are created differently. Therefore, you realize that my capacity may not be exactly as your capacity and my understanding, and the time that I will take may not be exactly at the same pace. Therefore, if the teacher or the facilitator, or a nearby neighborhood, or anybody who supports learning, understand and takes you the way you are, you feel motivated and encouraged to move on. Therefore, in this regard, it is very important that as we value these children, or whoever comes across our lives, we should support them the way they are. So when we talk about inclusive education, we are looking at the philosophy that urges all schools, neighborhoods and communities, or anybody who comes around to welcome and value everyone regardless of their differences, or their individual differences. Thank you.

**Glades:** Amazing. Thank you so very much for sharing that. You mentioned a lot of things pertaining inclusive education that involves every learner regardless of their capacities to understand or to pick up whatever the teachers are teaching in the classroom. Could you also share with us some examples of how inclusive your facilitators or your teachers have been teaching? And what have you learned about inclusive education?

**Michael:** Thank you once again, Glades, you know, like for our own case, we pick children who have never been to school before, and children who drop out of school like two to three years ago. So when you bring them back to school, you realize that you will meet so many children with different unique learning difficulties. Some people or some learners may have difference or difficulties in reading and writing, not necessarily that that they don't know. Some may have difficulties in adding, subtracting basically mathematical. Therefore, such children with dyscalculia, that's the term that we use, of course, children who get difficulties in adding, subtracting, or generally, we can talk about mathematics. You really need to get closer to some of these learners. And some of these learners not necessarily that they do not know, but because that is the way they are. So they really need special attention. Therefore, as we give this special attention to these learners, there is a need for you to consider all other factors as possible to ensure that these learners they get exactly what you're teaching or what you're prepared for them to deliver. You may not understand them exactly. But when you draw nearer, you realize that some of these children, they may not necessarily also have some time learning difficulties, but because of some of the challenges that they come across in lives, like from home, some children from home, the way they're treated, it affects them even as they get to their respective classes to continue learning, as there is need for this, our facilitators or for us, as supervisors to see possibly how we can support these facilitators or the teachers in ensuring that these learners are or the critically vulnerable children get exactly what is prepared for them. And they also feel motivated and catered for and also cared for. Thank you.

**Glades:** Thank you so much. Maybe before I continue on with my next question, how have you been supporting these facilitators? You mentioned you support them in how they can teach these learners in the classroom inclusively. How have you supported them?

**Michael:** Thank you. First and foremost, before we send these facilitators to classrooms, we make sure that we take them through orientation training of about a week. And during the training, there are specific areas that we prioritize on, like we are quite certain of some possible learning difficulties that we are sure of, for example, there are some children that they can hardly see. Alright, so now, as we've continued supporting these facilitators, we encourage them to write boldly. So as they write body on the chalkboard, the child will be in

position to understand or even those with such kind of learning difficulties, we ask them to make sure that they draw them nearer to the chalkboard or they should sit in the forefront so that they are able to understand. There are other children that they take time to learn, and that means you need to create some additional time to support these children. Because when you're given like 40 minutes, like maybe to facilitate learning, you realize that within the 40 minutes, some children are fast learners, they will learn faster. So now you realize that these specific learners, sometimes they take over and they dominate the whole classroom and those ones with specific learning difficulties they get challenged. Now it is the responsibility of the teacher to be very keen in identifying some of those children, such that at the end of the day, they can also reorganize or plan for some remedial lesson on how they can support them. Not only that, if they're being given group tasks, or group activities to do as a group. In our setting in each group, we have six learners. Now you realize that some learners are so fearful, and they cannot take up some leadership roles within their groups. Now, it is the responsibility of that facilitator or the teacher to ensure that each and every time a task is given, they're supposed to move around to ensure that they observe they should be keen and realize that most of these learners are taking up responsibilities in sharing. Hence, in that regards they are able to learn together as a team, and that's where that aspect of inclusive education come in. Thank you.

**Glades:** Thank you very much. Amazing. I love that one element that you mentioned that you have remedial lessons and we've worked with many schools where it is not remedial lesson but extra lesson but in this case for children with disabilities, remedial lessons, do help a lot. Thank you so much, Michael, for sharing that. I wanted you to also share with us what do you think is the biggest myth that people say about disability according to you?

**Michael:** Okay. Thank you once again. What I have observed is that many times we rush into conclusion. We judge some of these children, and we even baptize them names like this child is dense, you are a slow learner and yet, you have not decided or you have not taken your time to learn the child. Sometimes we conclude certain things which are not necessarily true, because just like the way I shared earlier, you realize that if a child is being mistreated from home, it will affect the child, the child's education. Now, when the child comes in a classroom, he will not, he or she will not be the same as a child who is taken very good care

of from home. Now, talk about hunger. All right, sometimes some of these children, they come to school, and during lunchtime, other children are going to have learned some are not okay, that they have, maybe their home is far away from the school environment, and therefore, they will always stay hungry. Now, that will affect the child learning. But the biggest myth about these children with learning disabilities, is that these children, if we are given, or if they are given opportunity, they are able to learn just like the normal way. Only that they are not being given opportunities to explore more, and also excel where there are. Because some of these children are even talented. Some of them they're talented, they're gifted, but they are always not given opportunity to demonstrate or to explore what they're able to show, like a case, and that becomes a very big challenge to them. But ideally, all these children for the past years, we have started implementing this program in 2016 to date. We realize that some of these children with learning difficulties, if paid attention to, you realize that towards the end of the year, they're even becoming the best performance because only that they were not being given opportunity. And sometimes they end up losing even hope. They end up even dropping out because now nobody is drawing attention, from home nobody supporting, from school nobody supporting even the friends. Thank you.

**Glades:** Thank you so much, Michael, for elaborating that and explaining to our listeners, I believe the listeners have really understood so very well. And the one point that I've loved is attention. A lot of times, our parents, the teachers or the facilitators, do not give attention to these learners in particular, those that are struggling with disabilities. But after listening to this, I believe our parents and the teachers out there will understand much, much better that giving attention to these learners and also doing the things that our guest Michael has mentioned will really help them. Now to wrap it up. What do you think our parents can do to support their child best if they are dealing with any disability, and maybe when you're done giving what parents can do to support you could also, finally advise the parents who are listening to the program.

**Michael:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Glades. First and foremost, let's all try to understand that these children are the same. Now when we are looking at what the parents should do, or what I think parents can do to support their child's best if they are dealing with any disability. First and foremost, they should understand the child. What kind of learning

disability are we talking about? Now, if they understand that they should try to follow up even from school. Many of us believe that or think when we send our children to school, we pay their fees, and we send them with requirement that is all. You see, there are gaps in this thought. There are things that teachers can do, and then there are things that parents should do, because as a teacher, there are areas that the teacher cannot go beyond like for instance from home. A teacher might try or the teacher can do all it takes for the child to understand and deliver the lesson as planned, putting into consideration the learning disabilities. But you realize that when the child gets home, some of the parents or some of the caretakers, you are just trying to abuse this learner, trying to abuse this child. You have not understood the child. I always tell people that it is everybody's dream that may be if a child is sitting for primary living examination or senior four it is good. It brings joy if a child gets a first grade, but now, if a child does not get the first grade, is it a crime, really what happened? You see, we need to ask so many questions. So as a parent, you should also try to do your best understand the child, see possibilities of how you can support the child, follow the child, go to the class and meet the class teacher and understand what the problem is and what you can do as a parent. And besides, far from that, you are also supposed to support this child in other ways. You see in the school right now, we believe that it is good for the child to learn holistically. Now, when we are talking about such kind of holistic learning, you realize that from home alone, I mean from school alone is not going to be enough. And it is the responsibility of the parents to make sure that after getting the key information, when you follow the child from school, you will even encourage the child, okay. And if you're looking at the exercise books, maybe the task given by the teacher, yes, try to understand what the problem is. During the this last lockdown, we were doing our program in the villages, because now we were all home, children were home. So we were, we were preparing some packages for our children or our learners in the villages. And we're also giving parents task to support their children, because the teacher cannot move all the time. Therefore, we realized that the contribution of the parent is very key in a child's life as far as learning is concerned. Therefore, we should also take charge and make sure that we support our children as far as education is concerned. Because take for instance, if may be a child is in a lower primary, and maybe they are teaching about culture. You may realize that maybe a trained teacher from the college may not be in position to know some of the things which are within our tradition, but when the child gets home, will

understand it deeper from the grandmother or from the parents, because most of our teachers you realize that they are young. So, there are certain things of the tradition that they will not be in position to share with the children but they will send the children back home to gather some of this information. Like, take for instance when we are talking about naming of twins, like in Acoli land, you will not run away from that even if you were born again. That's why some people called Achen or Opio. So they should understand why what are the process what are the procedures and why what are the circumstances leading to that kind of namings. So, when we talk about naming ceremonies. So these are very key because now if the parents is coming to support the child, along that line, the child will also be impatient to understand my mum also understand something Thank you.

**Glades:** Thank you so very much, Michael for elaborating and explaining so well to our listeners, what they can do as parents and also teachers out there. And what, the one thing that I've loved is the relationship between teachers and parents. Teacher- parents relationship is very, very important. We've been mentioning this every time. Follow up is very, very key. Parents who are listening to this program, you need to follow up your child you need to identify and get to know how best you can help your child. Thank you once again, Michael, for sharing this wonderful information. I believe it's really going to help our listeners out there, especially the parents, the teachers, and those caretakers and also those supporting children with disabilities and even those that do not have disabilities. As Backup Uganda, we always say Every Child Can Learn. Thank you very much.

**Outro:** Thank you for listening to Every Chance Can Learn. Please share your thoughts with us. Join the conversation on Facebook, or send your questions to 0772630078. Do you want to learn more about Backup Uganda and stay updated about our activities? Check our website on [www.backupuganda.org](http://www.backupuganda.org) and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn.