Constructing 'disabilities' and 'inclusion': An explanatory models of disability and inclusive education among teachers in Sri Lanka

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The current thrust towards implementing 'inclusive education', which is 'the integration and education of most students with disabilities in general education classes' (Field, 1998 in Eleweke & Rodda, 2002) poses many challenges in a resource poor country. Arguably, one challenge may be the perceptions, constructs and explanations of disability held by teachers, which could influence their openness to embrace inclusion. The aim of this study is to uncover the constructs, beliefs, attitudes, explanatory models of 'disabilities' and inclusive education among teachers. 60 teachers (30 from special schools; 30 from mainstream schools) were interviewed using an interview guide. The interview data were analyzed using the key features of *Framework Analysis* (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). In the main findings, the teacher explanations of disability reflected a religio-cultural framework and to a lesser extent, a medical model. While the teachers within special educational facilities asserted the need to offer special educational support, the teachers in mainstream echoed the same view, stressing that these students are better placed within special educational rather than mainstream educational contexts within inclusive education. However, these explanations were not framed within a social model or rights-based model of disability, reflecting a limited understanding of the disability movement. The findings reveal that there is a need for pre-service and in-service training programmes for teachers to include information on the current explanatory models of disability, the need to acknowledge students with disabilities as equal and comprehensive training on mainstreaming children with disabilities within mainstream schools if inclusive education is to be successfully offered across the country.

Keywords: disability, inclusive education, perceptions, models