

## Learning Together Disability inclusion in education

### Supporting teachers in differentiating instruction for learners with severe to profound sensory and developmental disabilities

Are continued professional teacher development (CPTD) providers and support structures within education departments equipping teachers with the skills required to teach learners with disabilities effectively?

POLICY BRIEF 3

## About TEDI

The Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion (TEDI) project aims to empower teachers to provide quality education for learners with severe to profound sensory and intellectual impairments through training that is focused on inclusivity, diversity, and addressing learners' impairment-specific needs.



### This policy brief:

- Highlights the obligations that the South African inclusive education policy framework has put on provincial and district-level education department officials to equip teachers (through CPTD training) with the knowledge and skills required to work with learners with sensory and developmental disabilities.
- Makes recommendations to provincial and district-level education department officials, and NGOs and DPOs, on how to collaboratively meet the requirements of teachers for specialised and impairment-specific training – to enable them to differentiate learning for learners with a diverse range of barriers. Additionally, these recommendations show how such training fulfils teachers' CPD requirements mandated by the South African Council of Educators (SACE).
- Identifies the specific content topics and skills that CPTD training providers should cover and impart to teachers in their training offerings.

## Executive summary

Subsequent policies<sup>ii</sup> to assist teachers in reasonably accommodating learners with disabilities in schools were accompanied by training from provincial education departments and other district-level support services. Additionally, many NGOs and disabled people's organisations (DPOs) that support and advocate for people with sensory and developmental disabilities (e.g. BlindSA, DeafSA, Down Syndrome SA, Cape Mental Health etc.) have offered short courses for teachers. This is done on an informal basis through schools to boost teachers' knowledge and skills in impairment-specific teaching and learning considerations<sup>iii</sup>.

Education White Paper 6<sup>i</sup>, which enables learners with disabilities to realise their immediate, constitutional right to basic education, increased the responsibilities of teachers at all levels and in all types of schools to know how to accommodate and differentiate their instruction for learners with a diverse range of barriers to learning.

However, despite these supportive efforts to teacher education providers and ratified international recommendations<sup>iv</sup> to equip all teachers at all levels with the core competencies and values to work in inclusive education environments and the necessary practical learning opportunities to manage specific impairments, research<sup>v</sup> suggests that teachers are still in need of training and support to

teach learners with sensory and developmental disabilities. Furthermore, it is critical for in-service teachers to participate in high-quality CPTD opportunities, even after completing their initial formal teaching qualification.

Research of TEDI<sup>vi</sup>, and recommendations from the DBE's and DHET's Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development 2011-2025 (ISPFTED)<sup>vii</sup>, point to the need for the upskilling of teachers in:

- impairment-specific methodologies such as teaching and learning South African Sign Language (SASL) and Braille,
- the adaptation and use of learning and teaching support material (LTSM) and assistive devices and technology for specific disabilities, and
- curriculum differentiation to meet the diverse educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory and developmental disabilities (SPSDD).

Since it is widely acknowledged that an education system is only as effective as its teachers<sup>viii</sup>; it is clear that a truly inclusive education system will not be realised in South Africa without in-service teachers – those already in the education system – having the necessary knowledge and skills to differentiate learning effectively for learners with SPSDD. Without this, learners with such disabilities will not have access to a proper basic education and will not reach their potential or be able to contribute meaningfully to South African society.

## Why is there a need for CPTD on teaching learners with SPSDD?

Currently, the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) policy<sup>ix</sup> regulates the development of initial teacher education (ITE) qualifications curricula and curricula of accredited CPTD qualifications – those qualifications that are registered on the National Qualifications Framework. The content or programmes of unaccredited, informal learning opportunities (such as workshops, short and online courses etc.) within the CPTD space are largely unregulated. Only CPTD training facilitators registered with SACE as accredited providers of CPTD activities (as part of the professional body's CPTD management system for teachers) have their offerings reviewed and subsequently endorsed.

Neither the MRTEQ nor any other regulatory body prescribes for pre-service or in-service teachers the type of specialised knowledge or skills that must be acquired to teach learners with SPSDD. It also does not mandate teaching practice (or work-integrated learning) in inclusive education settings. Rather, policy<sup>xiii</sup> acknowledges that inclusive education is an important aspect of a qualified teacher's specialised knowledge and requires teachers to be able to identify and address barriers to learning and differentiate the curriculum to address individualised learning needs. However, the content or practical skills that teachers need to be taught for them to perform these competences are not detailed.

Evidence from various research projects suggests that in-service teachers, after having completed their ITE, are not able to fully display the envisioned competencies in inclusive education practices that the MRTEQ prescribes. The Department of Basic Education (DBE)<sup>x</sup> has reported that qualified teachers lack specialised knowledge in many key areas of disability, such as education for learners with visual, auditory or intellectual impairments. A 2018 TEDI research project<sup>xiii</sup> that investigated the extent of teacher education offered in South Africa to equip teachers to teach learners with SPSDD corroborates the DBE's concerning findings.

TEDI's research study<sup>xiii</sup> considered public universities' provision of full, formal ITE programmes and accredited, continued professional academic development (CPAD) training, and informal short courses offered by NGOs and DPOs. Through the review of 23 universities' ITE programme literature, surveys and interviews with deans and key role-players of universities and CPTD providers, participants voiced their concerns over the abilities of qualified teachers to provide intervention strategies for learners with impairments, and teachers themselves expressed their need for upskilling and more training to provide support to learners with disabilities. It was also found that 91% of the 16 South African HEIs offering inclusive education or impairment-specific training components offer such components in their CPAD offering and not in their ITE programmes curricula (B Ed. or PGCE).

This means that the majority of student teachers completing a formal, ITE qualification will not be properly equipped with the skills to teach learners with disabilities, and therefore the upskilling of teachers in these areas relies fully on individual teachers' pursuit of CPTD or further formal learning opportunities after qualifying.

Study participants also noted the following concerning issues, with regard to training opportunities for teachers on teaching learners with SPSDD effectively<sup>xiii</sup>:

- Despite some adoption of a generalised approach to curriculum differentiation, HEIs generally lack disability-focused education programmes and insufficient attention is paid to impairment-specific specialisation and instruction.
- Many NGOs and DPOs offer impairment-specific training on a range of SPSDD and report positive feedback from teachers who have completed such training. However, due to a lack of funding, many are not able to offer teachers such courses regularly. Also, most of these training opportunities are not formally accredited and therefore do not incentivise teachers to enrol.
- Representatives from NGOs and DPOs expressed the need for greater partnerships with HEIs and departments of education to increase teachers' skills.

Another strong indication that in-service teachers are not being empowered with adequate knowledge to teach learners with SPSDD is the deep-rooted attitude among teachers that children with disabilities are not able to learn to the same standard as children without disabilities<sup>xi</sup>. Considerable research<sup>xii</sup> highlights South African teachers' concerns about the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools and the consequences thereof, among which are doubts surrounding these learners' abilities to participate academically and socially in the classroom.

It is therefore evident that a significant responsibility is placed on provincial and district-level education

department officials and CPTD providers to compensate for the lack of impairment-specific teaching methodologies in ITE programmes. Moreover, they have a crucial role to play in helping teachers understand disability as an issue of social justice within education. Provincial and district-level education department officials and CPTD providers should therefore provide high-quality, frequent training opportunities to equip in-service teachers with the necessary skills to fulfil the professional obligations placed on teachers by policy.

## What content should CPTD learning opportunities cover?

For a teacher in a mainstream, full-service or special-needs school to reasonably accommodate individual learners with a wide range of SPSDD, he/she must be able to:

- differentiate the mainstream curriculum (the CAPS) for impairment-specific learning needs,
- adapt existing assessment strategies and potentially use more suitable strategies,
- adapt existing learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) and design or create new resources, and
- use specialised and suitable assistive devices appropriate for specific impairments.

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)<sup>iv</sup> further specifies the need to develop the above skills of teachers by stating that teacher education "should include learning about the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, such as Braille, large print, accessible multimedia, Easyread, plain language, sign language and deaf culture, education techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities". It also says that teachers should be able to:

- provide individualised instruction that has been adapted to the learning styles and unique abilities of each learner,
- develop individual educational plans to support specific learning requirements,
- introduce a pedagogy that is centred on learners' educational objectives,
- foster an inclusive culture among staff, parents and learners to provide an accessible and supportive environment that promotes collaboration, interaction and problem-solving, and

- apply the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which provide a structure to create adaptable learning environments and differentiated instruction.

While not every teacher can be expected to be an expert on all forms of impairment, it is important that they have access to CPTD when they are faced with the need to accommodate learners with SPSDD in their classrooms. Even though provincial-level and district-level offices of the various education departments have offered training opportunities to teachers, these can often only be taken up by specific school representatives, therefore not impacting all teachers, and are often theoretical in nature rather than providing practical upskilling<sup>xiii</sup>.

### Principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

The three principles of UDL are:

- 1. Representation** – Giving learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge.
- 2. Expression** – Differentiating the ways learners can express what they know.
- 3. Engagement** – Stimulating interest and motivation for learning, using content that is suitable for the varied levels of abilities and preferences/interests of learners by facilitating options and choices of activities and resources.

## How have teachers been assisted?

To assist teachers with the realisation of the above, the DBE implemented the following two policies:

- 1. Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the Classroom in 2011<sup>xiv</sup>.**
- 2. Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) in 2014<sup>ii</sup>, which is the mandatory instrument for teachers to identify barriers to learning and determine educational support needs of learners.**

TEDI research<sup>vi</sup>, which involved interviews with a cross-section of role-players within education (provincial and district-level officials, school management teams, teachers, learners and parents) in full-service and special-needs schools in a range of socio-economic contexts in three provinces, provides valuable insights into the experience of teachers using these implemented policies and their corresponding support structures. Some of the findings were that:

- Training on SIAS has progressed well but cannot be described as fully implemented, and the SIAS documentation is not user-friendly.
- District-based support teams are providing support to teachers via monitoring and assessing teachers and implementing training. However, teachers in full-service and special-needs schools do not always feel adequately supported by these teams as there is a lack of consistent support – possibly due to being under-resourced.
- District-level training in mainstream and full-service schools focuses on SIAS and curriculum differentiation and does not include in-depth impairment-specific curriculum adaptation for learners with SPSDD. Teachers in special-needs schools receive limited, provincial-level training in the latter, but then are not supported at district level.

The research<sup>vi</sup> also clarified the training needs of teachers in managing learners with SPSDD, namely:

- More in-depth, formal training in impairment-specific needs of learners with SPSDD is needed for teachers in all types of schools.
- Teachers felt insufficiently trained to make necessary adaptations to curriculum content to meet the diverse educational needs of learners with SPSDD and expressed frustration over a lack of parental involvement in the learning process.
- Teachers expressed the need for assistance with adaptation of LTSM, support in learning Braille and how to use specific methodologies in deaf education and learning South African Sign Language (SASL). Additionally, there were requests from teachers to have more access to appropriate technology and assistive devices and support in the use of these.
- Learners with SPSDD expressed the need to be better understood in terms of realistic expectations from teachers for the pacing of work and environmental adaptation requirements. In turn, teachers expressed their struggle with managing these factors due to a lack of knowledge and inadequate infrastructure.

“I learnt that teachers are not empowered with all they may need to practice or teach children with disabilities. I also noted that there are various areas that can be improved in teacher education and continual professional development to enable teachers who are trained now to implement inclusive education.”

Feedback from an educator after completing the TEDI Disability Studies in Education course



Recommended CPTD training topics	
Domains of specialised support	Recommended impairment-specific training topics for teachers
<b>All domains of specialised support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding disability as an issue of social justice</li> <li>Understanding the lived experience of learners with SPSDD and their families</li> <li>Developing relationships and partnerships with learners, parents and specialists to collaboratively support learning</li> <li>Curriculum differentiation – including guidelines on pacing</li> <li>Behaviour and classroom management considerations for learners with SPSDD</li> <li>Using the SIAS to identify barriers to learning and determine learners' support needs</li> <li>Adaptation of LTSM for the different needs of learners with SPSDD</li> <li>Principles and practice of UDL</li> </ul>
<b>Hearing (Deaf/hard of hearing)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills in South African Sign Language (SASL)</li> <li>Differentiating between oral communication needs and the use of SASL</li> <li>Understanding deaf culture</li> <li>Pathways to literacy using SASL</li> <li>Use of assistive devices &amp; technology such as visual-alerting devices, amplification and captioning devices etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Vision (blind/low vision/partially sighted)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills in Braille</li> <li>Pathways to literacy using Braille</li> <li>Use of assistive devices &amp; technology such as Braille writers, magnifiers, talking and large print devices etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Neurological/neurodevelopmental/cognitive/motor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skills in Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC)</li> <li>Use of assistive devices and technology such as mouse skills and communication software, aids for daily living such as mobility devices etc.</li> </ul>

“It's still a struggle at school. No one is really taking what we've learnt; they are not really taking it as [they] should. We are not really getting the support that we should be getting.”

Feedback from an educator after completing the TEDI Deaf and Hard of Hearing face-to-face course

## Requirements of a professional teacher and CPTD

In recent years, there have been many efforts from stakeholders in education to strengthen teacher professionalism. SACE, largely responsible for this ambit, phased in the implementation of the CPTD Management System in 2014. The system requires teachers to earn professional development points in a three-year cycle to maintain their professional, registered status, much like other professions. CPTD training providers were invited to register as SACE providers in order to allocate points for different types of training. Teachers are therefore incentivised to take up CPTD-endorsed learning opportunities.

Another initiative of SACE was the drafting of professional teacher standards. This was aimed at describing “in broad terms what an educator must know and be able to do to provide quality teaching and learning opportunities for all learners they teach in the diverse context of South African schools”<sup>xv</sup>. These standards reaffirm teachers' professional commitment to ensuring that learners are given the support they need for inclusive access to learning opportunities. It also requires teachers to “have a responsibility to identify and challenge policies and practices that discriminate against, marginalise or exclude learners”<sup>xiv</sup>. This means that teachers, through their now mandatory SACE-endorsed CPTD training, must have access to high-quality, formal learning opportunities in specialised, inclusive teaching practices and impairment-specific methodologies so that they are able to fulfil these professional standards.

## Recommendations

Considering South Africa's inclusive education policy framework, CPTD context, and TEDI's recent research findings; TEDI recommends that provincial and district-level education departments, and other CPTD providers:

1.

**Consider partnerships with NGOs and DPOs in order to provide more frequent and high-quality, practical CPTD training opportunities that draw on the expertise of impairment-specific specialists and resources.**

2.

**Develop a cadre of teachers who have full qualifications or extensive experience in impairment-specific teaching within each district so as to support such CPTD. Teachers in special-needs schools should ideally be experts in disability issues and full, formal qualifications would be preferred. However, given the current lack of suitable programmes and the backlog in this type of training, CPTD would be a viable option to compensate for this lack in the interim.**

3.

**Register CPTD training offerings (short courses, workshops, online programmes) with SACE as part of the official CPTD management system to which teachers are required to adhere, in order to incentivise teachers to complete training in impairment-specific, specialised education.**

4.

**Enter into discussions with SACE to consider the possibility of mandatory CPTD training in inclusive education practices and specialised, impairment-specific teaching and learning methodologies.**

5.

**Consider and review their current CPTD offering (or potential capability to offer CPTD short courses) to qualified teachers working in schools on specialised, impairment-specific teaching and learning approaches and practical methodologies for learners with SPSDD.**

This review process should be completed with the intent of incorporating and/or improving the following content topics or approaches to content in the training opportunities:

- An impairment-specific approach to content and skills development, aligning this with the domains of specialised support (e.g. hearing, vision, motor etc.) indicated in SIAS.
- Understanding disability as an issue of social justice – with attention given to the importance of adapting learning environments and collaborating with learners, their families and specialists to accommodate and understand specific impairments and their impact on teaching and learning.
- Special behaviour-management considerations of learners with SPSDD in a classroom.
- How to use and navigate the documentation of SIAS to screen, identify, assess and support learners who experience barriers to learning.
- The causes, effects of and specific barriers to learning resulting from deafness, blindness and other impairments.
- How to differentiate the CAPS, design and implement specific teaching methodologies and adapt LTSM to overcome barriers to learning for learners with the aforementioned impairments. This should be situated within the educational framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a set of principles that provides teachers with a structure to create adaptable learning environments and differentiated instruction for learners with a diverse range of needs. It assumes that barriers to learning are in the design of the environment, not in the learner.
- How to use a range of low-tech to high-tech assistive devices (and online platforms) to overcome specific barriers to learning through practical demonstrations and practice opportunities.
- How to use SASL, Braille and Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) with learners with specific sensory impairments, and how these mediums can contribute to literacy/language development.

# Notes

- i Department of Education (2001). *Education White Paper 6 – Special Needs Education* (Building an inclusive education and training system). Pretoria: Department of Education.
- ii DBE (2014). Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support 2014. Available from: <https://wcedonline.westerncape.gov.za/Specialised-ed/documents/SIAS-2014.pdf> [Accessed 26 Feb 2020].
- iii Kelly, J. and McKenzie, J. (2018). *Teacher education: An analysis of the availability of teacher education addressing the educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments*. Cape Town: TEDI, UCT.
- iv UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2016). General comment No. 4 (2016), Article 24: Right to inclusive education, 2 September 2016, CRPD/C/GC/4. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57c977e34.html> [Accessed 12 March 2020].
- v Nel, N.M., Tlale, L.D.N., Engelbrecht, P. and Nel, M. (2016). 'Teachers' perceptions of education support structures in the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa'. *KOERS – Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 81(3).
- vi TEDI (2018). McKenzie, J., Kelly, J. and Shanda, N. (eds) *Starting where we are: Situational analysis of the educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments in SA*. Cape Town: Disability Innovations Africa, Disability Studies Programme, School of Health and Rehabilitation Science, UCT.
- vii DBE and DHET (2011). *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011–2025*. Pretoria: DBE and DHET.
- viii Centre for Development and Enterprise (2017). *Teacher professional standards for South Africa*. CDE: Johannesburg.
- ix DHET (2015). *National Qualifications Framework Act (67/2008): Revised policy on the minimum requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications*. *Government Gazette*, vol 596, no 38487, Pretoria, 19 February 2015. (Note: This policy was under review at the time of writing. Requests for submissions of public commentary were made in late 2019. A publication date for the revised version is pending.)
- x DBE (2015). *Report on the Implementation of Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education – An Overview for the Period: 2013–2015*. Pretoria: DBE.
- xi Human Rights Watch (2015). *Complicit in Exclusion: South Africa's failure to guarantee an inclusive education for children with disabilities*. Human Rights Watch.
- xii Bornman and Donohue (2013) and Savolainen, et al. (2012), cited in Kelly, J. and McKenzie, J. (2018). *Teacher education: An analysis of the availability of teacher education addressing the educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments*. Cape Town: TEDI, UCT.
- xiii McKenzie, J., Kelly, J. and Vergunst, R. (in process). *Empowering teachers for disability inclusion: An evaluation of four short courses*. Cape Town: TEDI, UCT.
- xiv DBE (2011). Guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom through the CAPS. Available from: [https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Publications/GUIDELINES%20FOR%20RESPONDING%20TO%20LEARNER%20DIVERSITY%20%20THROUGH%20CAPS%20\(FINAL\).pdf?ver=2016-02-24-110910-340](https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Publications/GUIDELINES%20FOR%20RESPONDING%20TO%20LEARNER%20DIVERSITY%20%20THROUGH%20CAPS%20(FINAL).pdf?ver=2016-02-24-110910-340) [Accessed 26 Feb 2020].
- xv SACE (2018). Draft Professional Teaching Standards. Available from: [https://www.sace.org.za/assets/documents/uploads/sace\\_36738-2019-03-06-SACE%20Draft%20PTS%20for%20Gazette%2028082018%20\(00000003\).pdf](https://www.sace.org.za/assets/documents/uploads/sace_36738-2019-03-06-SACE%20Draft%20PTS%20for%20Gazette%2028082018%20(00000003).pdf) [Accessed 19 March 2020].

## Further information

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for more information on TEDI short courses and research projects aimed at empowering teachers with the knowledge and skills required to facilitate quality teaching and learning of learners with special and impairment-specific needs.

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**Note:** Severe to profound sensory and developmental disabilities (SPSDD) is an umbrella term whereunder the TEDI project focussed only on severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments.