

TEDI Symposium

THE NEEDS OF TEACHERS
with respect to teaching learners
with disabilities

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BACKGROUND

- Project is aimed at strengthening quality education for learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual disability (D/deaf and hard of hearing, low vision and blind, severe to profound intellectual disability)
- Strategy adopted is to support the development of teacher education
- Operating in inclusive education framework, recognising the full range of diversity, with the focus on the needs of children with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments

THEORY OF CHANGE

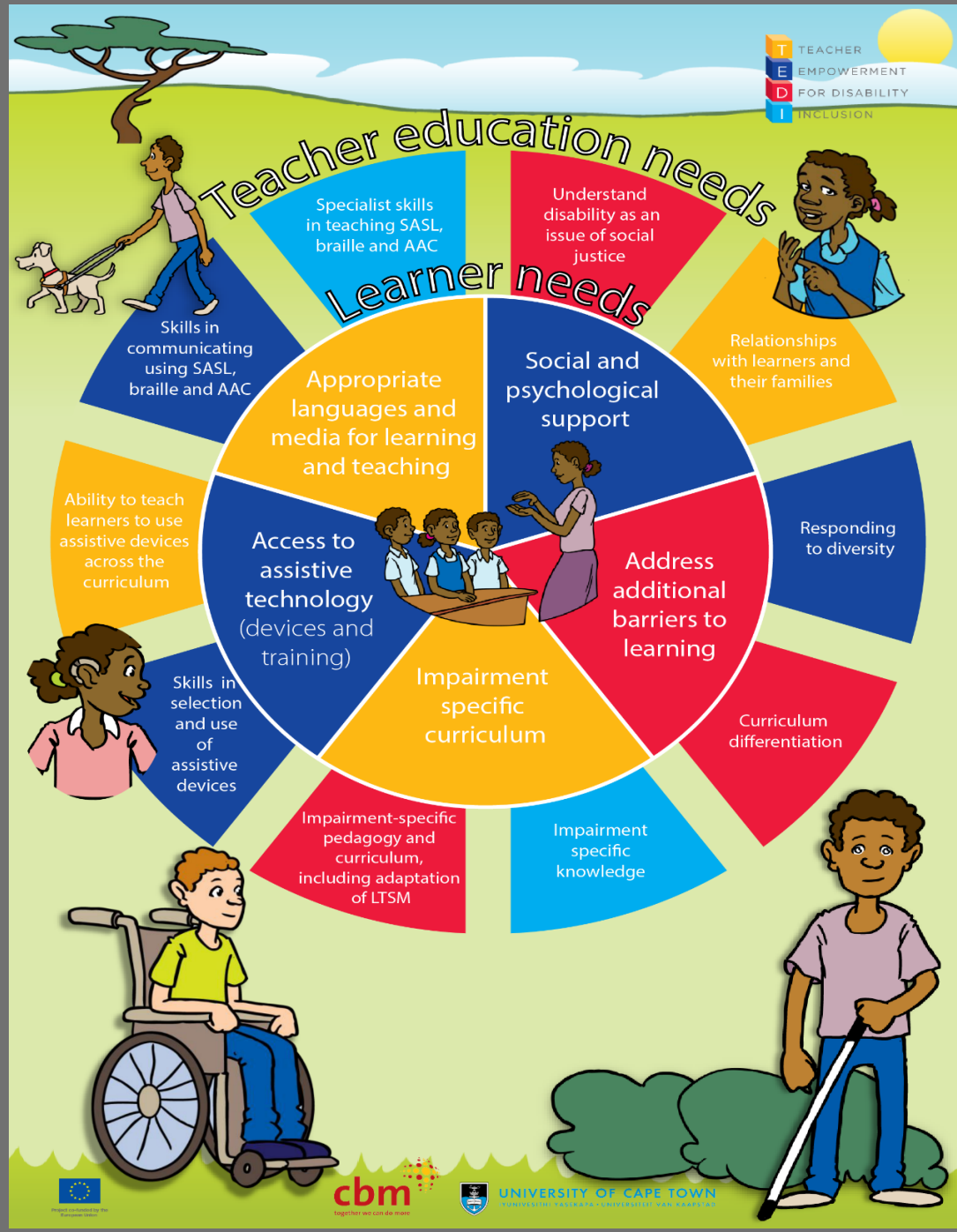
By understanding the needs of learners and how teachers respond to these needs currently, it will be possible to develop teacher education courses and modules that will contribute toward quality education for these learners

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments?
- What teacher education is required for teachers to be able to meet these needs?

RESEARCH METHODS

- Qualitative research study seeking multiple perspectives – parents, teachers, learners, school management, district and provincial management
- Multiple locations – special schools for D/deaf, blind and low vision, intellectual disability, full service schools
- In total 120 interviews with 132 participants
- Data transcribed and coded from different and then applied to the research questions



LEARNER NEEDS 1: ADDRESS BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Learners with disabilities might experience multiple barriers to learning

If they come from areas where there is tremendous gang fighting or whatever, those children come to school and they never really go out of this survival mode ... So that affects how they learn.

(teacher at school for intellectual disability)

In full-service, special and ordinary schools there is a need for curriculum differentiation

Teachers they supply us with everything, although sometimes they give us small printed notes, sometimes they forget that we have visual impairment and they give us small printed notes and sometimes they complain you know (blind learner)

TEACHER NEEDS 1a: UNDERSTAND DIVERSITY

- **Disability is a form of diversity** – can be seen as a marginalised group
- **Intersectionality** – disability is but one part of identity. Experience of disability differs – e.g. for girls, across class and race
- **Diversity needs to be reflected across the curriculum** – in representation and in content.
- Recognise extensive diversity within impairment groupings and schools

TEACHER NEEDS 1b: CURRICULUM DIFFERENTIATION

- Teachers plan for a range of ability, interest, competence etc.
- ALL classrooms (in special, full service and regular schools) classrooms need to adopt an inclusive pedagogy
- This strategy is just as important in the special school as in any other schools

LEARNER NEEDS 2: APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE & MEDIA

Learners strongly express the need to have access to quality communication and expression in the learning environment:

The challenge we are having with some of the teachers is that some of them do not understand what our culture is as a D/deaf nation. Some of them do not understand sign language so I am forced to read whatever it is. (D/deaf learner)

I think something that needs to improve is to have more teachers that know Braille that can read Braille so that those learners that are Braille can be put in one class and the sighted ones in one class so that there must be no noise in the class. To be honest we are sometimes neglected in class. It is like there is no blind learners in class. (blind learner)

TEACHER NEEDS 2a: COMPETENCE IN SASL, BRAILLE OR AAC

Teachers need different levels of competence:

- ALL teachers should understand the needs of SASL, braille and AAC (including cultural and social aspects) and how to work with experts in using them in classroom
- MANY teachers can acquire basic skills in SASL, braille and AAC to supplement expert teaching
- MANY teachers teaching non-specialised subjects
- SOME teachers becoming expert in teaching specialised subjects e.g mathematics

TEACHER NEEDS 2b: TEACHING OF BRAILLE, SASL & AAC

Specialised teachers need to be able to teach literacy in these languages and media:

- Knowledge of literacy and pre-reading skills
- Early intervention, ECD and Foundation phase training

LEARNER NEEDS 3: SOCIAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

Relationships with learners and families:

From the parents' side...there is no support ... none. They seem to think of the school as being a dumping ground (teacher at school for the blind)

Disability as an issue of social justice:

The bread, peanut butter, they just paste it there ... it's not in the right form. They just grab it and put it there and put the bread and give it to you. And also the coffee in the morning is cold, I think they just open the geyser water and put the coffee and put it on the table. (Blind learner)

To be honest we are sometimes neglected in class ... And what the teacher also does sometimes is she tells us to work with sighted learners. I think it is not their responsibility. It is [the teacher's] responsibility to give us the work fully and give it to us so that we can do it on our own. We should not depend on someone to read or to explain to us what is happening. (Blind learner)

TEACHER NEEDS 3a: UNDERSTAND DISABILITY AS AN ISSUE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Teachers need to understand:

- Broad principles of the right to inclusion
- What learners can/should expect from institutions
- Critical view of disability as a social justice issue
- Awareness of the social identity of persons with disabilities in the South African context, and the difficulties this imposes.
- Not all difficulties arise from impairments, but also through interaction with the environment.

TEACHER NEEDS 3b: RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEARNERS & THEIR FAMILIES

- Adequate training, support and information contributes to teachers becoming more patient
- Listening skills are crucial, facilitating open, communicative, ongoing relationships
- Needs expressed, solutions found collaboratively, assistance can be asked for, and also declined
- Role of parental involvement in education, and thus of strong relationships between teachers and parents, is critical.

LEARNER NEEDS 4: ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (DEVICES & TRAINING)

Access to appropriate devices that are fully maintained, with ongoing technical support

We have got a computer room which has 22 computers, but 12 of them work. They haven't fixed the other computers. We have asked for Internet for the computers and Microsoft. We do not get it. It is not a big thing I think for them (teacher at school for intellectual disability)

Assistive technology across the curriculum

We still have teachers who cannot even touch the keyboard; they are afraid. (Teacher at a full-service school)

TEACHER NEEDS 4a: SKILLS IN SELECTION & USE OF ASSISTIVE DEVICES

- They need to be able to identify devices specific to different impairments.
- Teachers need to know how to maintain the devices and explore their potential uses.
- Thorough assessment of a learner's needs; no 'one size fits all' logic
- Careful, informed assessment of the appropriateness of devices (utility, cost-effectiveness, availability, technical support, useful to broadest range of learners)

TEACHER NEEDS 4b: ABILITY TO TEACH LEARNERS TO USE ASSISTIVE DEVICES ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

- Solid computer literacy is a foundational need for teachers
- AT is not an 'add on' skill, but fundamental to how curriculum is delivered.
- Teachers need to develop their own technology skills and familiarity with assistive devices, as well as general digital literacy.
- Able to support learners in finding innovative ways to access and express information.

LEARNER NEEDS 5: IMPAIRMENT-SPECIFIC CURRICULUM

Teachers do not understand challenges that impairment brings and that it varies across learners

- *I don't understand what they always tell me to do ... They usually tell me if I don't understand it is my problem. I don't feel good. (Deaf learner)*
- *If I ask them like for example, I can't see this, can you help me like, sometimes they give me bad comments like I am making excuses, that I am maybe lazy. 'Sometimes you guys are lazy, you guys love to say you can't see this, you can't see that, you know.' I get things like that people telling me that you are lazy you don't want to read things. Because they can see, they think like I can see. (LALVB2)*

Teachers lack specialized skills

- *If I want to teach them about music, I want to show them those treble clef, staff notations, it is difficult for me. I do not know how to show them those that are blind. (teacher of blind learners)*

TEACHER NEEDS 5a: IMPAIRMENT-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE

Teachers need to understand the nature of different impairments.

What are their causes, their effects and how do they impact upon learners' ability to access the curriculum?

What is the impact on each individual child? Need to listen to the child and their family

Health issues such as possible degeneration, possible risk factors etc.

TEACHER NEEDS 5b: IMPAIRMENT-SPECIFIC PEDAGOGY & CURRICULUM, INCLUDING ADAPTATION OF LTSM

Need to understand additional support needs of learners with disabilities e.g. in the hostel, the playground at home etc

Make appropriate additions and adaptations to the curriculum to meet the needs

Create equitable access to the curriculum and to LTSM

Implement curricula such as the Expanded Core Curriculum for children with VI, for learners with Severe to profound ID etc

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching children with severe to profound impairments is a complex matter that that requires both generic good, inclusive teaching skills and highly specialised competences.

How these skills are developed and distributed throughout the education system is a challenge that must be addressed in an inclusive education system.

THANK YOU.



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