

INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA



Inclusive
Education
SOUTH AFRICA

VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1 | AUGUST 2018

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion perspectives in South Africa – *Bertha Magoge*1

ARTICLES

1. Educational and psycho-social service rendering by District-based Support Teams in two provinces of South Africa: Supporting inclusive education? – *Johnnie Hay*2
2. Guiding principles for the effective establishment and functioning of the school based support teams – *Mrs. C. E. van Niekerk and Dr. C. F. Pienaar*7
3. Brief overview of research conducted to develop an integrated, multi-level process to facilitate the promotion of holistic well-being in six South African school communities – *Ansie Elizabeth Kitching* 11

4. The role and importance of school leadership in driving inclusive transformation – *Zondaniimba* 15
5. Perceptions of South African teachers on how they feel supported in teaching learners with special educational needs – *Nozwelo Shanda, Jane Kelly and Judith McKenzie* 18

PROFILES

- Implementing the asset-based approach in a resource-constrained special school resource centre – *H. M. Burgers*22
- Community mapping to access support – *Dr. Izak Van Niekerk Primary School – Natalie Watlington*28

OPINION EDITORIAL

- Learners are progressed only to be left behind – *Robyn Beere*30

Copyright ©
Inclusive Education South Africa (IESA)

Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)



**Inclusive
Education**
SOUTH AFRICA

Inclusive Education South Africa
Email: info@included.org.za
Web: www.included.org.za



INTRODUCTION



Inclusion perspectives in South Africa

Director's Welcome

The framework for an inclusive education system is laid out in Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education 2001). The scope of this policy is broad, as it attempts to address the diverse needs of all learners who experience barriers to learning. The policy calls for a significant conceptual shift based on the premise that all children, youth and adults have the potential to learn when provided with an enabling environment and the necessary support. In many South African schools the inability to recognise and accommodate the diverse range of learning needs results in a breakdown of learning. In order to make inclusive education a reality a conceptual shift is needed regarding the provision of support for learners who experience barriers to learning.

The theme of our first journal is the concept of support for teaching and learning. The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy (SIAS) defines support as “all activities which increase the capacity of a school to respond to diversity.” The diversity referred to here includes the many different support needs of teachers and learners and recognises the wide range of activities undertaken by the school to offer this diverse support.

Inclusive Education South Africa (IESA) has been working to promote both knowledge and practice in inclusive education in order to support the country's educational strategy of advancing education for all children. We believe that the practice and implementation of inclusive education contributes to the realisation of a democratic society, facilitating real transformation which promotes the principle of education as a basic human right as enshrined in the Constitution. IESA recognises that, for this vision to become a reality, we need to broaden the advocacy and capacity building strategies that support the legislative framework on which inclusive education is premised.

In order for our education system to provide these multiple support opportunities at schools effective systems that identify and coordinate support are essential. Our inclusive education system envisages two primary support structures; one at District Level, the District Based Support Team (DBST) and one at school level, the School Based Support Team (SBST).

The SBST is responsible for identifying the support needs of the school, teachers and learners and for coordinating support provision to address these needs. A well-functioning SBST should be able to create a network of support services available at the school, assist teachers with interventions to support individual learners in class and coordinate referral to and liaison with the DBST.

Research indicates that for inclusive education to thrive, a multifaceted strategy that challenges societal attitudes, educational systems and contexts as well as the management of diversity in schools is essential. This journal will encourage a range of opinions and shared practice between and among a diverse range of people. We hope that this dialogue will challenge both the school-level barriers and the cultural-level barriers to inclusion. After many years of working in the inclusive education field we feel that the time is right for us to launch a practical journal in which we encourage a range of opportunities for sharing and learning in inclusive education practice and perspectives in South Africa.

To this end, IESA is launching this journal to discuss common barriers to inclusive education practice in South Africa. We want to create a platform of inclusive engagement between academics, thought leaders, and inclusive education specialists, as well as parents and caregivers.

With this inaugural Inclusive Education Journal I would like to invite you to make contributions by way of sharing your expertise, articles, stories, perspectives and any valuable insights on inclusive education.

Bertha Magoge, Director – IESA



ARTICLES

1. Educational and psycho-social service rendering by District-based Support Teams in two provinces of South Africa: Supporting inclusive education?

By Johnnie Hay

Associate Professor, Educational Psychology, North-West University

This article reports on research done during the course of 2015 and 2016 in the Free State and North-West provinces of South Africa. The focus was to determine the nature and levels of educational and psycho-social services rendered by multi-/trans-disciplinary District-based Support Teams (DBSTs) in the respective districts of the two provinces. DBSTs form – with School-based Support Teams (SBSTs) – the backbone of education support services within the inclusive education system of South Africa, and were envisaged in policy documents published since the initial White Paper 6 on Special Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System of 2001, to support schools in cases where the SBSTs ran out of options of support.

Introduction

Education support services were conceptualised on mainly two levels, namely at the schools and in the districts. At schools School-based Support Teams (SBSTs) (earlier called Institutional-level Support Teams) were to be established mainly from volunteer staff at the schools, and at district level multi-disciplinary District-based Support Teams (DBSTs) were established by the provincial departments of education (DBE 2014). These two levels of support would work across three types of schools, namely ordinary schools (which should be as inclusive as possible), full-service schools (catering for learners experiencing moderate barriers to learning) and special schools (serving learners experiencing high-intensity barriers to learning). Specialist support personnel at special schools and full-service schools would also form part of the DBSTs.

Background of education support services in South Africa

The current education support services system to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education, comprising SBSTs and DBSTs was preceded by a medical model dominated support system within the previous special education paradigm. Fragmentation of this system was evident amongst the racially-based education departments with whites and Indians receiving far better educational, psycho-social and para-medical support than coloureds and blacks. The support services to white learners (and in some instances Indians) were comparable to those of developed countries in terms of ratios and quality: multi- or trans-disciplinary support teams were located at child guidance clinics or educational aid centres or school clinics across the four pre-1994 provinces (Hay 1994). These teams were well resourced with highly qualified staff and equipment and transport. Team members combined clinic-based assessment and support with itinerant service rendering at schools.

This disparate situation of education support services provision was inherited by the new South African government after 1994. Inclusive education was seen as an excellent alternative to the separation that the special education paradigm – with its unequal education support services – brought to education over a number of decades. The establishment of well-functioning DBSTs was one of the key support measures to ensure that the inclusive education project would be a success.

District-based Support Teams – purpose, composition and challenges

The following staff members were envisaged to be part of the DBST: psychologists, therapists, remedial/learning support educators, special needs specialists (relating to specific disabilities) and other health and welfare staff employed by the department of education. Added to that is the mentioned curriculum, management and administrative specialists as well as the specialist staff and teachers of special schools – a seemingly extended team that was envisaged (affirmed in the DBE 2014 document on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support).

Previous studies with a focus on the execution of the functions of the DBSTs found that the availability of infrastructure in the form of transport, facilities and human resources was a real challenge. One of the further challenges that DBSTs are facing is that many teachers and some medical model trained support staff have still not made the shift to a social or ecosystemic way of looking at barriers to learning: diagnosis, individual treatment and referral to specialised settings are still predominating in these cases. Some teachers and DBST staff such as specialist educators and educational psychologists – on the other hand – have made the shift to view learners experiencing barriers within the total ecosystem: here environmental circumstances are sufficiently

taken into account when assessing learners, and efforts are made to keep learners in inclusive classes as far as possible (Hay 2012).

Problem statement

From the above exposition it may be clear that as researcher I was curious to investigate the nature and level of multi-/trans-disciplinary educational and psycho-social support rendered by DBSTs in the Free State and North-West provinces of South Africa, approximately 15 years after the introduction of inclusive education.

Research methodology

Data collection

Data was gathered through three instruments: self-developed questionnaires with predominantly qualitative questions to all DBST members focusing on the educational and psycho-social service rendering that are provided by the team, focus group interviews with a representative sample of the DBSTs' disciplines also engaging with service rendering and semi-structured in-depth interviews with team leaders on their views about service rendering. For the purpose of this article only the questionnaire results are discussed.

Composition of DBST in the two provinces

Table 1: Composition of the nine DBSTs in the five Free State education districts

FREE STATE	MOTHEO (2 DBSTS)		XHARIEP	LEJWELEPUTSWA (2 DBSTS)		FEZILE DABI (2 DBSTS)		THABO MOFUTSANYANA (2 DBSTS)		TOTAL
	Team 1	Team 2		Team 1	Team 2	Team 1	Team 2	Team 1	Team 2	
Team leader	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Learning support advisers	4	5	7		5	2	6	8	8	45
Sociopedagogues		4		3		2	1	1		11
Speech therapist/ audiologist	1		1	1		1			1	5
Occupational therapist	1	1				1				3
Psychologist	1	1	1			1	1	1		6
TOTAL	8	12	10	5	6	8	9	11	10	79

In the North-West province the situation is as follows.

Table 2: Composition of two of the four DBSTs in two of the North-West education districts

NORTH-WEST	DR KENNETH KAUNDA	DR RUTH SEGOMOTO MOMPATI
Team leader	1	1
Therapeutic section: Speech therapist Physiotherapist Occupational therapist	1	1 2
Social section	2	1
Psychological section	2	2
Special and full-service schools	1	
Learning support section based in area offices	6	8
TOTAL	13	15

The above provides an indication of the structuring of DBSTs in the two provinces. When compared to the envisaged structuring of DBSTs per education documentation, it becomes clear

that these teams have been established in the two provinces and that trans-disciplinarity has been effected. However, the composition of the teams tends to vary across the two provinces and also amongst districts in the same province. What is of great concern is that the DBSTs are seemingly only made up of the traditional psycho-social-educational-para-medical members, and no curriculum, management and administrative members of districts are included. The teams are also not managed by the district directors and little evidence has been provided that special school staff has been included in the team functioning (especially in the Free State).

Findings regarding the questionnaire to all DBST members

Despite distribution of questionnaires to all four DBSTs of the North-West province via three of the team leaders and one contact person, no questionnaires were returned – despite repeated requests.

Table 3: Biographical detail of the Free State DBST participants who completed the questionnaire

	MOTHEO	XHARIEP	LEJWELEPUTSWA	FEZILE DABI	THABO MOFUTSANYANA	TOTAL
Gender:						
Female	10	8	11	6	7	42
Male	4	1	0	2	2	9
Age group:						
20–29	0	0	0	0	0	0
30–39	2	0	2	1	0	5
40–49	6	3	3	3	4	19
50–59	5	5	5	3	3	21
60–65	0	1	1	1	2	5
No indication	1					1
Position:						
Team leader	2	1	2	1	1	7
Learning support adviser	7	6	5	5	7	30
Sociopedagogue	2		3	1		6
Speech therapist	1	1	1		1	4
Occupational therapist	1					1
Psychologist	1	1		1		3
Total participants	14	9	11	8	9	51
Total of DBST members	20	10	11	17	21	79
Response rate of DBST members completing the questionnaire	70%	90%	100%	47%	43%	65%

From the above Table 3 the following is quite clear:

- Female participants predominated at 42:9 which may be an indication of female dominance in DBSTs. In one of the districts (with the 100% response rate) neither of the DBSTs had any males;
- An absence of young staff in the age group 20–29 was detected, with the age group 50–59 being the best represented. This may create a problem over time as the service would preferably need young staff to move through the ranks;
- Learning support advisers (LSAs) are by far the position that is in the majority: most of them are experienced educators with qualifications in learning support, inclusive education, honours in psychology, some registered as psychometrists, etc. Sociopedagogues/school social workers are the second most with speech therapists and psychologists next. One district's occupational therapist also completed the questionnaire, although it is clear from Table 1 that two districts can boast with occupational therapists. Team leaders seem to be either psychologists or specialist educators.
- The Lejweleputswa (100%) and Xhariep (90%) districts had very high questionnaire response rates, while Thabo Mofutsanyana (43%) and Fezile Dabi (47%) were rather low. The average response rate was 65% which is relatively good.

The findings from the questionnaire could be summarised as follows: 51 of the 79 staff members of the nine DBSTs in the Free State province responded, which represents a good 65% response rate. Staff members seem to be overwhelmingly female with an absence of staff in the 20–29 age group; most staff is located in the 50–59 age group. Staff seems to be well trained with a large number in possession of postgraduate degrees. All nine teams are not consistently staffed: only three teams in two districts have the services of occupational therapists, three of the nine districts are without a psychologist and six of the teams do not have a speech therapist. One of the teams does not have a social worker nor an LSA. Staff seems to have adequate

experience in the field (average 8 years and 9 months) although the para-medical staff seems to have a higher turnover than the rest. Most of the existing staff come from an educational background before joining the DBST or education support services, though many para-medical staff worked in private practice and social workers in social work organisations previously. Team members had a good idea how many schools they were responsible for but had little idea how many learners (and teachers) they were supposed to serve. Ratios of DBST member to learners was also an unfamiliar concept to the overwhelming majority, which should have dire effect on planning of services. A variety of educational, psychological and social work services were mentioned to be rendered by DBST staff: it was unclear, however, what level of impact this had on the total number of learners and schools a team was serving. A small majority of participants felt that they were adequately trained for their tasks, whilst a large minority felt that more in-service training was needed for the educational context. A recurring theme was that all sections of the district offices are not participating in the DBST as originally envisaged, and that the shortage of specialist staff members is hampering inclusive education service rendering seriously. Staff differed with respect to the extent to which inclusive education is supported by DBSTs – a small majority felt that the ideals of White Paper 6 are either realised fully or predominantly, but a substantial minority felt that little is being done to support inclusive education – especially when all sections of education are scrutinised.

Conclusion

DBSTs in the Free State and North-West provinces of South Africa are functioning under a serious amount of stress because of near-absent operational budgets, a limited number of staff and being isolated from other sections in the district offices. Despite this, members are supporting the inclusive education venture with good commitment; educational services predominate with social work services probably not far behind; psychological and para-medical services are however very limited. Progress is understandably slow and all schools and

learners are not reached optimally. Few signs of systematic attempts were found to spread services fairly across all schools to reach at least all learners who have high intensity needs. It also seems as if little concerted efforts have been made to move to indirect service rendering when it is clearly impossible to render direct services to all learners in need at such ratios. The way in which DBSTs are rendering services will probably

have to be re-thought substantially (by probably engaging overwhelmingly in indirect services with direct services only to those learners with high intensity needs), other sections of district offices will have to come on board and operational budgets of DBSTs will have to be rectified in dramatic ways. Only then will DBSTs contribute more meaningfully to an accelerated implementation of inclusive education.

Reference list

1. Department of Basic Education. 2013. South African Education Districts: A review. Accessed on 30 January 2017 at http://gis-solutions.co.za/images/downloads/Review_of_education_districts_March_2013_sample_pages.pdf
2. Department of Basic Education. 2016. Education Statistics in South Africa 2014. Pretoria: Government Printers.
3. Department of Education (2005) Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for District-based Support Teams. Pretoria: Government Printers.
4. Du Toit, N., Eloff, I. and M. Moen. 2014. Effectiveness of the School-based Support Team within an Inclusive South African Educational System. *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* 54(2). Accessed online on 4 November 2016 at http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0041-47512014000200011
5. Engelbrecht, P and L Green. 2017 In press. *Responding to the Challenges of Inclusive Education in Southern Africa* (2nd Ed). Van Schaik: Pretoria.
6. Hay, Johnnie. 2003. The implementation of the inclusive education paradigm shift in education support services. *South African Journal of Education* 23(2): 135-138.
7. Hay, Johnnie. 2012. The dilemma of a theoretical framework for the training of education support services staff within inclusive education. *Journal of New Generation Sciences* 10(2), 92-105.
8. Makhalemele, T. 2011. *The changing role of district-based education support services in establishing the inclusive school settings: an ecosystemic approach*. Unpublished Research Thesis: North-West University.
9. Makhalemele, T. and M. Nel. 2016. Challenges experienced by District-based Support Teams in the execution of their Functions in a specific South African Province. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 20(2): 168-184.
10. Mfuthwana, T. 2016. *Teachers' perceptions regarding the role of district-based support teams as well as inclusive education teams in establishing inclusive schools*. Unpublished Research Mini-dissertation: University of Stellenbosch.
11. Parker, R.M. 2013. *Educators' perspectives on collaboration in Institutional Level Support Teams (ILSTs) of Schools in the Wynberg, Grassy Park and Pelican Park area*. Unpublished Research Dissertation: University of the Western Cape.
12. Pillay, J. and T. Wasielewski. 2007. The Utilisation of Psychological Support Services in Primary Schools in Gauteng. *Perspectives in Education* 25(4): 63-75.
13. Rulwa-Mnatwana, B. 2014. *School-based Support Teams' understanding and experiences of Inclusive Education in the Western Cape*. Unpublished Research Thesis: University of Western Cape.
14. Tebid, C.A. 2010. *An investigation of the support offered by the institution level support team to the foundation phase teachers in a single school in Johannesburg*. Unpublished Research Mini-dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand.

2. Guiding principles for the effective establishment and functioning of the school based support teams

By Mrs. C. E. van Niekerk and Dr. C. F. Pienaar

Introduction

Policy documents derived from the South African Constitution and the South African Schools Act state that all learners are entitled to support. Support at school level should be rendered by a School Based Support Team. The purpose of this article is to provide guiding principles to schools for the effective establishment and functioning of School Based Support Teams, based on Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory.

A qualitative, interpretive research design was employed. Findings indicated that schools need to work closely with parents and communities if they want an effective and well-functioning SBST. Therefore, the recommendation of this article, which is based on Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory, includes guiding principles to schools for the effective establishment and functioning of the SBST.

The SBST is the cornerstone of the development of an inclusive education culture within all schools. *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* states that SBSTs should be established at all schools (Department of Education, 2001:48).

Literature reviews and research findings indicated that schools are expected to establish these teams, but no guiding principles are readily available to schools for the effective establishment and functioning of these teams. The unavailability of guiding principles and the apparent challenges experienced with the effective establishment and functioning of these teams led to the need for research which has as its focus guiding principles to schools for the effective establishment and functioning of School Based Support Teams.

Background

The purpose and goal of the SBST is to identify and address barriers to learning within the school and offer support in the teaching and learning process (Department of Education, 2001:48). Furthermore, SBSTs need to co-ordinate specific learner, educator and institutional needs (Johnson, et al., 2007:163; Donald, et al., 1997:26; Department of Education, 2009:19).

According to Donald, et al. (1997:27) and the Department of Education, (2007:114), educators as members of the SBST should have the essential knowledge regarding the identification of learning barriers and they should be willing to intervene in learner support. (Department of Education, 2003(b):40). Furthermore, these educators must be innovative, pro-active and competent in their teaching methodologies, thus accommodating learner diversity within the classroom (Landsberg, 2005:66; Department of Education, 2008:88).

In addition to the educator component of the SBST, representatives from the School Management Team (SMT) and School Governing Body (SGB) should be included. (Department of Education, 2003:40). Johnson, et al., (2007:163), Donald, et al., (1997:26) and Landsberg, (2005:67) agree with this viewpoint and state that the inclusion of the SMT and SGB within the SBST may help to convey the message that learner support is an important and central school activity. Close collaboration between the SBST and DBST (District Based Support Team) should be established. A coordinator for the SBST should be appointed to coordinate and take responsibility for the organization of this team (Landsberg, 2005:67; Department of Education, 2009:19).

Discussion

The majority of research participants agreed that the SBST is an important support structure at school level. The researcher and co-researcher detected that although SBSTs are established their level of functionality is a matter of concern. The following essentials with regards to SBSTs will now be discussed:

- The present functionality of SBSTs at schools.
- Roles and responsibilities of SBSTs and its members.
- Challenges experienced with the establishment of SBSTs.

The present functionality of SBSTs at schools

SBSTs are established at schools but the teams are not functioning optimally. Research results indicated that SBSTs are able to grow and develop into effective teams with the necessary guidance and support. It is evident that DBSTs should empower educators with the necessary skills and knowledge regarding SBSTs. The commitment and support of the DBST to the SBST should enable the SBST to grow and develop into effective support teams.

A shortage of educators, the lack of parental involvement and the negative attitude of some educators towards learners experiencing academic challenges, are hampering the functionality of SBSTs. The negative attitudes of certain educators towards these learners are in conflict with the responsibility educators have towards learners, as well as in direct divergence from Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory, which is the theoretical framework underpinning this article.

This theoretical framework clearly indicates that educators form part of the microsystem of the child. Inhabitants of the microsystem affect the learner directly as they are the closest to the learner and they play a vital role in the growth and development of the learner. With such a role and responsibility in mind it is imperative that educators fulfil their duty towards learners and that they do not withdraw themselves from any intervention and support needed by the learner.

Although some educators indicated that they did not want to be involved in the SBST, most educator participants indicated that they would like to be actively involved in the activities of the SBST. Research revealed that SBSTs are in need of continuous growth and development with the help and support from the DBST, School Principals, community members, parents, educators and professionals within the community. The SBST coordinator plays a vital role in the effective establishment and functioning of the SBST. The coordinator will be responsible for the management and administration of the team. This person may be an educator at the school, or schools can appoint a learner support educator based on their staff establishment. The coordinator (or learner support educator), should serve the needs of the team (Landsberg, 2005:67 and Department of Education, 2009:19). The SBST coordinator and team members of the SBST must be able to function well in a team structure and have skills in collaboration, problem solving and essential knowledge regarding identification and intervention.

Schools are advised to ensure that SBST members are a group of people who are able to support and trust each other and to share information instead of keeping it to themselves. This team shares its resources, special talents and strengths in order to develop cooperation, high morale and a good work ethic. SBSTs should become effective learner support structures within schools with the support and guidance of the DBST.

The roles and responsibility of SBSTs

It is expected from SBSTs to embrace a holistic, pro-active approach to learner support where measures are in place to prevent possible barriers to learning. Additionally, it is expected from SBSTs to arrange regular in-service training opportunities for educators. Good in-service training will enhance the skills and knowledge of educators with regards to learner support and intervention.

Growth and development within the SBST is an ongoing process as educators need to develop themselves on a continuous basis. New knowledge and skills to address the diverse needs of all learners in all schools needs to be acquired.

Challenges with the establishment of SBSTs

An overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that the establishment of SBSTs at schools can be challenging. They mentioned various factors that challenge the establishment of SBSTs at schools. Systemic challenges (multi-grade teaching), negative attitudes of educators and the non-involvement of parents were some of the challenges schools had to deal with during their endeavours to establish SBSTs at their schools.

Systemic challenges such as multi-grade teaching, a lack of knowledge with regards to SBSTs, over populated class groups, as well as time limitations contributed negatively to the establishment of SBSTs at schools. Educator participants felt that due to their multi-grade situation it is nearly impossible to provide additional help and support to learners. Educator participants mentioned that big class groups cause educators to feel overwhelmed with responsibility and overloaded with work.

The non-involvement of parents in the lives of their children hinders effective learner support and intervention. Parents are important role players in learner support and intervention as they are rich sources of information and educators need their input to provide the best possible support for the learner.

In contrast to schools that experienced challenges with the establishment of SBSTs, some participants mentioned that they did not experience any difficulty with the establishment of their SBST. Schools which embraced an ethos of inclusivity did not experience major challenges with the establishment of their SBST. At these schools learner support was perceived as fundamental and of utmost importance. Guiding principles for schools will now be presented for the effective establishment and functioning of SBSTs at schools.

Guiding Principles for the School

According to Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory, schools form part of a social system. Based on this fact schools, in close collaboration with other interrelated systems and sub-systems involved in learner support, should aspire to support and address institutional, learner and educator needs.

Inclusive Education demands a school culture that welcomes and accepts learner diversity and embraces a positive attitude towards learner support (Swart, et al., 2005:19 and Mitchell, 2008:27). Schools need to create a school culture that addresses learner needs. The vision and mission statement of the school should portray that all learners matter, all learners can achieve and therefore all learners should benefit from learning.

Furthermore, schools in close collaboration with the SBST need to collaborate with various role players to address systemic and other challenges. SBSTs need to make contact and consult with other professionals within the community as well as with the DBST with regards to training opportunities for educators. The DBST, in close collaboration with other professionals within the community, needs to train educators on identifying and addressing barriers to learning, thus enabling them to address the diverse needs of all learners. The knowledge and skills gained by educators during training sessions or capacity building sessions will enable the entire school to grow and develop optimally.

With the above-mentioned in mind, the successful establishment and functioning of the SBST is only attainable once support structures within the school work together towards effective learner support. School Principals, SMTs, SGBs, SBSTs and educators need to create collaborative opportunities, where they can work together regularly with parents, professionals and communities. Such collaboration should concentrate on learner support, learner behaviour and learner achievement.

Summary of the guiding principles for schools for the effective establishment and functioning of the SBST

- The School Principal, SMT, SGB and the SBST should take the lead and embrace an inclusive school culture.
- Schools need to establish and ensure inclusive policies and practices that acknowledge learner diversity.
- Learners, educators, parents and the community should be aware that all learners matter, all learners can achieve and therefore all learners should benefit from instruction.
- School Principals, SMTs, SGBs, SBSTs and educators need to create opportunities to collaborate with each other, with parents and with communities on a regular basis.

- A collaborative team approach towards learner support should be embraced.
- DBSTs and School Principals need to inform SBSTs of their roles and responsibilities.
- SBST members, in close collaboration with the School Principal and SMT, need to appoint an SBST coordinator to manage and administer SBSTs activities.
- SBST coordinators, SMTs and Schools Principals need to create opportunities for educators to develop their skills and knowledge on how to address barriers to learning.
- SBSTs should recruit parents, community members and other professionals within the community as members of the SBST.
- SBSTs should keep regular contact with the DBST.
- DBSTs should use their ability and authority to establish the multi-layered, multi-disciplinary support structure needed for learner support and intervention.
- DBSTs should collaborate with SBSTs and other professionals within the community.
- DBSTs should provide training and capacity building sessions to SBSTs, educators and other professionals within the communities.

Conclusion

From the above discussions, research results and recommendations it is apparent that for the effective establishment and functioning of the School Based Support team an eco-systemic approach such as Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory needs to be used. Literature highlighted the importance of establishing School Based Support Teams within an Inclusive Education setting whose core responsibility would be to address barriers to learning systemically. The importance of collaboration with various stakeholders such as the SMT, SGB, SBST members is highlighted as well as the appointment of an SBST coordinator. Additionally, literature revealed that SBSTs should provide support within the school to learners, educators and parents (Daniels, 2010:637 and Department of Education, 2003:15, 50). Based on the above discussion it is evident that an eco-systemic model will be conducive for the effective establishment and functioning of the SBST.

Reference list

1. Department of Education. 2001. *Education White Paper 6. Special needs education: Building an Inclusive Education and training system*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
2. Department of Education. 2003. Directorate: Inclusive Education. *Conceptual and operational guidelines for the implementation of Inclusive Education: District-based support teams*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
3. Department of Education. 2007. Directorate: Inclusive Education. *National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
4. Department of Education. 2008. Directorate: Inclusive Education. *National strategy on screening, identification, assessment and support*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
5. Department of Education. 2009. Directorate: Inclusive Education. *Guidelines for Full-service/ Inclusive Schools*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
6. Daniels, B. 2010. Developing inclusive policy and practice in diverse contexts: A South African experience. *School Psychology International*, 31(6):631–643. Downloaded at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University on July,14, 2011.
7. Donald, D., Lazarus, S. & Lolwana, P 1997. *Educational psychology in social context: Challenges of development, social issues and special need in Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
8. Johnson, B, & Green, L. 2007. Thinking differently about education support. (In: Engelbrecht, P & Green, L. *Responding to the challenges of Inclusive Education in Southern Africa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers p.159–174).
9. Landsberg, E. 2005. Learning support. (In: Landsberg, E., Kruger, D. & Nel, N. *Addressing barriers to learning. A South African Perspective*. 2nd.(edition) Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers p.69–85).
10. Mitchell, R. 2008. *What really works in special and Inclusive Education:using evidence-based teaching strategies*. London : Routledge.
11. Swart, E. & Pettipher, R. 2005. A framework for understanding inclusion. (In: Landsberg, E., Kruger, D. & Nel, N. *Addressing barriers to learning: A South African perspective*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers p.3–26).

3. Brief overview of research conducted to develop an integrated, multi-level process to facilitate the promotion of holistic well-being in six South African school communities

By Ansie Elizabeth Kitching

Associate Professor Educational Psychology

School of Psycho-Social Education Faculty of Education North-West University

"All social change begins with a conversation." (Margaret J. Wheatley)

The promotion of wellbeing, according to Roffey (2013) should be at the core of schooling. Wellbeing, used interchangeably with wellness, encompasses a positive state of affairs, brought about by the simultaneous and balanced satisfaction of diverse objective and subjective needs on individual, relational and collective levels Prillettensky (2012). The promotion of well-being, does not disregard the challenges associated with disabilities, special needs, ill-being and disease, but encourage the blending of a focus on problems (ameliorative) with a focus on the strengths, assets, resources and possibilities as a basis for transforming schools into enabling environments (Evans, Hanlin and Prilleltensky, 2007).

The promotion of mental health and wellbeing was introduced into the South African Education system in 1999 with the establishment of a Health Promoting Schools Framework (Swart and Reddy, 1999) and is still considered a key programme of the Department of Basic Education. The main strategic objectives of the programme suggest a focus on addressing issues and problems associated with ill-being while simultaneously attending to the prevention of ill-being. Ryff and Singer, (1996) argue that addressing ill-being, although important and necessary is not sufficient to encourage higher levels of well-being. The promotion of well-being in schools need to incorporate a broader understanding of well-being with a focus on the promotion of well-being on individual, relational and collective well-being that involve all the members of the school as a community into a holistic process (Evans, Hanlin and Prilleltensky, 2007).

An invitation by an Education Trust to be part of an initiative aimed at facilitating the holistic development of six schools in a specific geographical area in the Western Cape allowed for an opportunity to investigate how the promotion of wellbeing can be promoted in a more integrative and holistic manner. All the schools, with the exception of one are quintile 1 schools, however the school rated as a quintile 4 school serve learners from the same community as the other 5 schools. All these schools face serious challenges associated with contexts of poverty, and have very limited resources to address these challenges. Various stakeholders with different foci were invited by the Trust to participate in the process. The team of stakeholders entered the schools with the director of the trust, who negotiated our involvement in these contexts with the management of the schools and the Department of Basic Education.

The initial conversations with the school-based support teams mainly centred around challenges such as unruly classrooms, learners who are absent from school or not capable to cope academically, stress experienced by teachers and parents who are not invested in their children's schooling. They also mentioned substance abuse and teen pregnancies as major problems particularly in the senior phases of schooling. Concurrently, the teachers referred to various services and initiatives implemented by the Education support services of the Department of Basic Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Development, as well as higher education institutions, the business sector, non-profit organisations and volunteers. Although they appreciated these interventions,

it became evident during the discussions that the interventions are not sufficient and also not integrated effectively with the other activities in the school. Teachers reported that they are often unaware of what kind of interventions or programmes are implemented by various stakeholders, which obviously affected the sustainability of the supportive interventions.

It was evident that the schools needed a more proactive holistic approach which incorporated the promotion of mental health and well-being into the core business of schooling as proposed by various international researchers (Cefai & Cavioni, 2015; Konu and Rimpela, 2002; Roffey, 2012). From a community psychology perspective, a pro-active holistic process should integrate the promotion of well-being across the individual, relational and collective levels (Prilleltensky, 2012). Individual well-being, entails self-determination, a sense of control, self-efficacy, physical and mental health, optimism, meaning and spirituality. Relational well-being encompasses the enhancement of respect, appreciation of diversity and focus on cooperation and democratic participation. Collective well-being refers to the equitable allocation of bargaining powers, resources and obligations in a community as an enabling context (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

In deliberations that flow from our initial meetings with the schools, 30 teachers who were interested in the process were invited to participate in a work session with the aim of developing a common understanding of what the promotion

of holistic well-being would encompass and the possibility of wellbeing support teams emerged. The group then co-constructed the expectations for the functioning of the teams and nominated a coordinators for each school who could work in close collaboration with a project coordinator.

The coordinators and the team members went back to their respective schools to introduce the concept of holistic well-being as well as the rationale for attending to the promotion of holistic well-being based on the information they obtained during the work session. They also included parents and learners on the teams in concurrence with the recommendation by Prilleltensky (2012) that members from all the levels of interrelatedness are represented.

Once the teams were established, a participatory action learning and action research approach (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002) was applied to develop the process. The PALAR approach offers opportunities to participants to come together as equal partners to negotiate ways of working together, building relations with one another and through this, participants come to recognize common bonds that unite them. An introductory workshop was held to develop a vision for the promotion of holistic wellbeing in the respective schools. Before they commenced with the development of a vision participants were engaged in a relationship building exercises across school boundaries to facilitate a sense of connectedness. Each team then develop a shared vision for the promotion of holistic well-being in their schools. They made



a visual representation of the vision which they could use to convey their intention to the other members of their specific school communities.

Following the introductory workshop, the research project team continued to support and guide the teams by organizing action learning set meetings in which members engaged in free-flowing discussions aimed at involving all those present in stating their needs and learn together in the act of creating change in their contexts. During their involvement in the action learning sets participants engaged in reflexive conversations on the process of facilitating holistic well-being in their school communities, discussed action plans to promote holistic well-being on all three levels as well as ways to implement these plans. All the members, and in particular the learners and parents were invited to share ideas, opinions and concerns and present ideas to facilitate holistic well-being in their school communities.

It is important to note that the teams was not expected to implement a blue-printed program to promote holistic well-being in their schools, they were engaged in process aimed at facilitating the promotion of wellbeing in ongoing cycles of observation, planning, action and reflection – this implied an understanding of the complex dynamic nature of human that does not allow for linear, reductionist solutions to challenges (Morrison, 2009). As part of the participatory action learning and action research process, the teams held a mid-term and a final celebration to showcase what they had achieved. A world café event (Brown and Isaacs, 2005) was held as part of the final celebrations.

In practice the process encompassed that the teams identified everyday interactions as well as existing opportunities that could be used to promote the wellbeing of individual members, the relationships between them and the overarching climate in the school. Some of these opportunities already existed such as assemblies, outings, camps, parent meetings, but were now utilized more deliberately and effectively for the promotion of wellbeing. In addition the teams introduced new actions, activities and interventions specifically aimed at the promotion of well-being on all three levels. Examples of such actions include fun

and games days where all the members of a school community were engaged, teambuilding opportunities for teachers, workshops for parents, teacher and parent appreciation days, a # Kindness through Happiness day, mentoring camp for Grade 12 learners, motivation and career choice group sessions, life skills development work- sessions, a discipline seminar, a transition workshop for Grade 7 learners.

The analysis of the data indicate that the introduction of the process facilitated a shift away from the exclusive emphasis on academic performance that dehumanize people. They gradually co-construction a more humane space in which people are accepted and valued irrespective of their academic performance. A space in which connectedness, respect, care and kindness are embraced. The wellbeing support teams for example made special efforts to organize activities that allow all the members of their school communities to engage in conversations and have fun together. Special days such as Valentines day and Mothers day were utilized to express appreciation for significant others. Concurrently, social justice and equity issues were openly discussions in assemblies, classrooms and during parents.

An ethos of care and support was enhanced by a more pro-active approach to addressing the challenges that prevail in these contexts. Informed by a more pro-active mindset the team members no longer merely focus on the symptoms they observed but started to suggest ways to intervene on deeper levels. An example is the way in which one schools' team addressed the fighting amongst learners by inviting a counselor to present a workshop to enhance mutual respect amongst learners. In another school the teachers took children who display challenging behavior away for a weekend to teach them skills to manage emotions and deal with conflict, rather than to punish them with detention. Yet another example of proactive engagement was the way in which the teachers' attitude towards parents changed over a period of time. In the initial conversation the teachers demonstrated what Roffey (2015) refers to as – a discourse of negativity, blame, competition and conflict. Parents were in particular blamed for

the learner's behavior, lack of achievement and absence from school. As the process developed and more parents were involved in processes, they assisted with the development of strategies to include more parents.

The teams gradually became less dependent on the guidance of the facilitator to steer the process. They continued to arrange their own team meetings to discuss initiatives that could contribute to the promotion of well-being. The key aspects that contribute to the sustainability of the process are establishment of ownership and responsibility of the process across all levels of interrelatedness, the co-construction of a shared vision, the development of relationships between people to ensure their shared commitment to the process; the integration of the process within the functioning of the school system and the recognition of the complex interactive nature of the process (Kitching & Van Rooyen in press).

The process is currently steered by a coordinating committee that include the 6 teams coordinators – who are pivotal in this process – and 6 parents who represent the six schools. The steering committee applied for funding and oversee the ongoing activities of each of the teams. The shared responsibility that this committee take for the process in collaboration with the wellbeing support teams from each of the schools confirms the value of participatory research approaches in the facilitation of enabling, inclusive schools environments.

In the next phase of the research the contribution of the process to the integrative implementation of various policies and programmes aimed at the transformation of schools into enabling, inclusive communities will be investigated.

For further information on workshops offered to start a similar process at your school or research related inquiries send email to Ansie.Kitching@nwu.ac.za or leave a message at 021 8643593.

Reference list

1. Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (2005). *The world café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
2. Cefai, C., & Cavioni, V. (2015). Beyond PISA: Schools as contexts for the promotion of children's mental health and well-being. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 19(4), 233–242.
3. Evans, S. D., Hanlin, C. E., & Prillertensky, I. (2007). Blending ameliorative and transformative approaches in human service organizations. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35(3), 329–346.
4. Konu, A., & Rimpelä, M. (2002). Well-being in schools: A conceptual model. *Health Promotion International*, 17(1), 79–87.
5. Morrison, K. (2002). *School leadership and complexity theory*. London: Routledge
6. Nelson, G., & Prillertensky, I. (2010). *Community psychology: In pursuit of liberation and wellbeing* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
7. Prillertensky, I. (2012). Wellness as fairness. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 49 (1–2), 1–21.
8. Roffey, S. (2012). *Changing behaviour in schools: Promoting positive relationships and well-being*. London, Routledge.
9. Roffey, S. (2015). Becoming an agent of change for school and student well-being. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 32(1), 21–30.
10. Ryff and Singer, (1996). Ryff, C. D., and Singer, B. 1998. The contours of positive human health.
11. *Psychological inquiry*, 9(1): 1–28. England: SAGE.
12. Kitching & Van Rooyen (in press) The sustainable coordination of an integrated, multi-level process to facilitate holistic well-being in South African schools. Submitted to *Health Promotion International*.
13. Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2002) A model for designing action learning and action research programs. *The Learning Organization*, 9(4), 143–149.

4. The role and importance of school leadership in driving inclusive transformation

By Zondani Zimba
MEd: Rhodes University

“By defining the problem positively, by providing classroom-based support, by maintaining ongoing communication, and by building peer-support networks, we can create an educational setting that positively and successfully includes all our students” (Dalheim, 1994).

Introduction

Inclusive Education (IE) reflects the values, ethos, and culture of an education system committed to excellence by promoting education opportunities for all learners. Inclusive education is about building a more just society and ensuring the right to education for all learners regardless of their individual characteristics or difficulties (UNESCO, 2007). Inclusive education acknowledges that barriers which different groups encounter cannot be eliminated by promoting separate systems or schools but by promoting an inclusive system that responds to diversity (UNESCO, 2007). This is achieved by schools transforming from so-called “normal” operating procedures to inclusive ones.

During transformation leadership and management play a critical role in advancing the agenda of inclusive education by structuring the environment to accommodate diversity. To achieve this diverse environment leadership needs to manage uncertainty and encourage collective problem solving through multi-disciplinary teams.

The four dimensions that can be transformed to foster inclusive practice in schools are culture, structure, operational procedures, and enhancing partnerships.

Inclusive Culture

Inclusive schools require a different kind of leadership, a leadership which acknowledges ‘differences’ and works to bring about an inclusive culture. A school that has transformed to adopt an inclusive culture develops a shared vision in which all learners are respected and valued, has

leadership and systems in place to support staff, learners and the surrounding community to attain such a vision.

A practical illustration using three cases where a principal excluded learners will give a clear understanding of an inclusive culture in a school setting.

In the first case, the termination was owing to the child having muscular dystrophy. In the second case the discontinuation of enrolment was as a result of learner’s failure to keep up academically. The third case was because the learner used a wheelchair. In all cases the principal failed to acknowledge that inclusion is in line with the international calling of Education for All. In addition, in the South African setting, the principal violated various legislative frameworks, namely; Admission Policy, SASSA and the S A Constitution. Thus, the culture of an inclusive school acknowledges diversity and as such, learners who cannot easily be accommodated should not be seen as ‘having problems’. The difficulties they face should be seen as challenges, and educators should re-examine their practices to make them as flexible and responsive as possible (Zimba, 2012).

It is worth noting that the culture of the school is usually strongly influenced by the existing attitudes. Often, inclusive education is seen as a luxury in the education sector despite international and national principles. Department officials and educators take this view that they cannot even afford to educate all “mainstream” learners because of diverse challenges namely;

large classes, lack of specialists, lack of materials and funds. Nonetheless, where attitudes are positive and welcoming, learners in an inclusive class can be successfully supported by teachers in larger classes and with limited materials (Save the Children, 2008).

Support Structures

An inclusive school requires multi-disciplinary personnel. The team is comprised of a range of different specialist professionals. Support structures can act as a support or as a barrier to inclusion, if not well managed by the principal. Hence, in an inclusive school the role of the principal is to work with different stakeholders: parents, pupils, educators, district officials and specialists in order to come up with innovative ideas and address policy implementation problems. These could range from rigid school policies and administrative arrangements, the absence of policy dialogue among stakeholders and coordination among different social parties (Zimba, 2012).

In order to manage multi-disciplinary personnel in an inclusive school, these schools have to move to devolved management structures as these encourage flexibility. In a devolved management style, decision making powers are shared among individuals in schools. The Screening Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy document suggests that critical school structures be in place to enhance inclusion. Further, the SIAS policy document is a guide to identification and management of external stakeholders. The role of the principal in managing different stakeholders as described in White Paper 6 and the SIAS Policy is critical in an inclusive school.

As stated above, support structures that influence teaching and learning in an inclusive school are diverse and often involve a range of different staff members, approaches and working methods. The most critical support structures in an inclusive school are the School Based Support Teams (SBST), Professional Support, and Physical and Human Resources Support.

Firstly, the roles of SBST are identification and assessment of learners' barriers and then to plan and develop an intervention programme to address such barriers.

Secondly, professional support involves a planned and systematically monitored arrangement of teaching procedures, adapted equipment, materials and accessible settings. Other interventions should be designed to help educators teach learners experiencing barriers to learning achieve a higher level of personal self-sufficiency and success in schools (Masango, 2013).

Lastly, regarding Physical and Human Resource Support, it is the responsibility of Department of Basic Education to provide necessary training and resources to assist teachers and learners in developing skills to ensure that they can support inclusive schools (*Ibid*).

Operational Procedures

The term Inclusive Education has a wide range of interpretations and this influences the management of the school. Thus, it is important for the principal to be aware that there is no step-by-step route to follow when managing an inclusive school, as the operations of the school are strongly influenced by circumstances and community being served.

Since operations in an inclusive school require several additional resources compared to mainstream school, the roles of a principal can be somewhat more demanding. The principal must drive the programme of resource mobilisation. Limited or no access to certain resources and provisions may actually hinder inclusion and equality of opportunities for learners to reach their full potential. For instance, the principal should be leading the process of mobilisation and distribution of resources such as technical resources (e. g. access to people who have skills and interests), material resources (e. g. curricular, material that shows differentiation in skill and interest) or organisational resources (e. g. shared planning) and these should be carefully managed.

Thus, the role of the principal in an inclusive school extends to engaging in a comprehensive action planning process to identify how these skills and resources are to be acquired and implemented. In practice, the process requires relocating available resources and making changes in the roles of existing staff members to attain efficiency (Zimba, 2012).

Partnership with Parents

The phrase 'parental involvement' certainly does not do justice to the important concept of a relationship between parents and educators in schools. Firstly, the phrase gives an impression that it is one-way street rather than two-ways. Perhaps the word 'engagement' is more appropriate as it describes a partnership between parents and teachers.

In an inclusive school, the principal should look at the role of the parents as complementary to the school and should strive to identify parental needs in order to cultivate a good working relationship that promotes best inclusive practices (Habegger, 2008). This good working relationship is achieved when the principal makes a point of keeping parents well informed of what and how the learners are performing in school. To communicate well with parents, the principal and teachers can use the methods such as phone calls, conferences and a note book system. (*ibid*).

According to the research by Wits School of Governance (WSG) and Bridge (2016), partnerships in schools exist when parents, teachers and leaders (in schools as well as districts) collaborate to set goals, monitor and manage progress and provide support and resources relevant to context. To strengthen partnership in schools requires shared accountability, professional collaboration, distributed leadership and collegiality (*ibid*). In an inclusive school, principals need to engage in collaborations with local business, NGO's and the community through a community mapping exercise.

Conclusion

In the discussion it has been established that principals are usually the key players in making sure that an inclusive philosophy is in place in a school. Principals ensure that teachers and stakeholders receive the information they need to work with pupils with diverse needs. They also work towards organising the resources and support needed on site, and ensure that staff members are supported in areas of release time, problem solving, and strategies to further inclusion.

However, this is not always the case as not all principals are skilled in this area. It can therefore be more of a challenge to obtain support for learners experiencing barriers to learning. In view of the above, it is the duty of Department of Basic Education to ensure that all teachers have access to an excellent and equitable programme that provides solid support for teaching and is responsive to their prior knowledge, intellectual strength, and personal interests (Masango, 2013).

Reference list

1. **Dalheim, M. (1994).** *Towards inclusive classroom*. West Haven, CT: National Education Association.
2. **Habbegger, s. (2008).** *The Principal's Role in successful Schools: Creating a positive school culture*; www.naesp.org/principal.
3. **Masango, J. M. (2013).** *The role of Principals and SBST in supporting teachers teaching inclusive education*. Unpublished Masters' Thesis: University of Pretoria.
4. **Wits School of Governance and Bridge (2016).** *Teachers, Parents and School Leadership Working together to improve learners' Education*. Wits School of Governance and Bridge.
5. **Zimba, Z. (2012).** *Managing an Inclusive School. A case study in a pilot school in Swaziland*. Unpublished Master's Thesis: Rhodes University.

5. Perceptions of South African teachers on how they feel supported in teaching learners with special educational needs

*By Nozwelo Shanda, Master of Public Health;
Jane Kelly, Master of Psychological Research;
Associate Professor Judith McKenzie, PhD Humanities*

Introduction

Despite policy commitment, there has been slow progress towards achieving quality education for learners with special educational needs¹ in South Africa. One of the main reasons for this being that teachers do not feel adequately supported in addressing the different and diverse educational needs of these learners (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart, & Eloff, 2003; Statistics South Africa, 2011). In this paper we explore the perceptions of teachers in how they feel supported in teaching learners with special educational needs.

Methods

A qualitative description research design was used in this study (Sandelowski, 2000). The study was conducted in eight schools (six special schools and two full service schools) across the Western

Cape, Eastern Cape and Gauteng in South Africa. The six special schools represented two schools for learners with severe intellectual disabilities, two for learners who are blind or have low vision, and two for learners who are D/deaf. The participants of this study included provincial and district officials, teachers, learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments and parents of these learners. However, in this paper we focus on the perspectives of the 39 teachers interviewed. Thematic analysis was used to analyse this data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Ethical approval was granted for this study by the University of Cape Town Faculty of Health Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC REF: 151/2017).

Data is anonymised through the use of codes for the teacher participants:

Table 1: Key for teacher participant codes

TEACHER PARTICIPANT CODE	MEANING
TCDHH	Teacher from a school for the D/deaf and hard of hearing
TBID	Teacher from a school for the intellectually impaired
TCLVB	School from a school for the visually impaired
TBFS	Teacher from a full-service school
TAFS	Teacher from a full-service school

Findings

In this paper we focus on the following themes in relation to how teachers felt supported in teaching learners with special educational needs:

- Impairment specific curriculum and training
- Impairment specific supervision and support
- Access to assistive technology and learning and teaching support materials (LTSM)
- Appropriate languages and media for learning and teaching
- Infrastructure and resources
- Teacher-parent partnerships

Impairment specific curriculum and training

Learners with special educational needs have additional support needs that arise from their impairment. They require either an impairment specific curriculum or adapted curriculum that addresses their learning needs through additional programmes or modifications.

Teachers expressed that learners need to be taught by teachers who are confident and specially trained in making the curriculum accessible to them. Instead, they described themselves as feeling ill-equipped to do this: *"The first challenge is that as teacher when I was trained, I was not trained to teach these kinds of learners. So, when I come to the school which is fully serviced, then I come across these kids who are having difficulty in hearing then it becomes a challenge for me"* (TBFS2). Relatedly, teachers reported needing support in planning for the needs of a diverse group of learners who were at different levels of academic progress. One teacher explained that: *"I have 14 kids and all of them are on different places. Let's say one can only do Grade R work, the other one can do Grade 1 work, the other one can do Grade 2 work. So, the planning and everything is difficult because you have to plan for everyone"* (TBID5). Furthermore, they noted that they need support to effectively teach learners with multiple disabilities such as those who are both intellectually impaired and blind or D/deaf: *"Yeah, like you can get that although she D/deaf she is also intellectually impaired. So I think those are the problems I encounter with them"* (TCDHH1).

The limited formal academic training opportunities available to teachers that focus on educating learners with special educational needs, either at a pre-service or in-service level is challenging. Teachers recognised the need for formal educator training at teacher training institutions that focuses specifically on learners with special educational needs. One teacher at a school for the D/deaf noted: *"if you want to do teaching ... the D/deaf, there must be a program for four years. And the actual, what we call the teaching methods, they must be D/deaf aligned"* (TCDHH5).

There was considerable evidence that at full-service schools there is not always training specific to meeting learners' special educational needs. When one teacher was asked what training she had received in teaching learners with disabilities her response was *"nothing"* (TAFS3). If teachers in full-service schools want to develop disability specific skills it seems they need to seek this out for themselves: *"I'm saying that because I was never exposed to learners that needed a scribe, and someone that would have to read, a blind learner...What we are saying, we're gonna make it happen for them so we will go out"* (TAFS1). As can be seen, teachers require training support in acquiring skills that will make the curriculum accessible to learners.

Impairment specific supervision and support

Teachers said that they needed constant support from the district based support teams (DBSTs). Although some teachers expressed gratitude for the support they received from their DBSTs, others were not happy at the infrequency of this support. One teacher noted: *"They [the DBST] came only once this year, to introduce themselves and to tell us what they intend doing this year. Nothing came of it. So, so there is nothing that is going on"* (TCDHH1). Thus, teachers felt that there was a lack of on-going support from their DBSTs and they also acknowledged that they might benefit more if the support was consistent and impairment specific.

Access to assistive technology and learning and teaching support materials

Teachers acknowledged the importance of using assistive devices during teaching. However, not all teachers were skilled or literate in the use of assistive devices such as computers. Some pointed out that they had not received any training in the use of assistive technology or what technology was available for the different impairment types. One teacher said: *"For me so far none, I haven't received any training. Personally so far I am still using the material like the charts and textbooks but not assistive technology at all."*

Not yet" (TBDHH3). Concurrently, some teachers faced challenges in accessing and adapting the LTSM to suit the different learner educational needs. In this study, teachers from the schools for the blind shared their concern at not having enough braille textbooks, textbooks with the correct font and correctly formatted learning support materials. It is therefore clear that teachers need training in assistive technology support, adapting the available LTSM and access to adapted LTSM.

Appropriate languages and media for learning and teaching

In this study, teachers also acknowledged that it is important to be able to fluently communicate and teach learners using the South African Sign Language (SASL) (in schools for the D/deaf), braille (in schools for the blind) and have knowledge on the use of Alternative and Augmented Communication (AAC) (in schools for the intellectually impaired). Some teachers have been trained in these skills. However, most teachers reported that the training was too short

Teachers also felt that they have to cope with the task relating to infrastructure and teacher learner ratios:

So the department if they are serious about this, there are directorates, for inclusive education, it is something, it is big, it is a reality, it is there, so if they are serious, I am asking why is that one of the eight high schools in the province never ever had a meeting, or a workshop, or a conference? (TAFS1).

The conclusion drawn from this is that some schools are not being capacitated to deal with children with special educational needs.

Teacher-parent partnerships

Teachers also emphasized the need for parental involvement in learners' education. They understand that parents are partners in

given the amount of work: *"We are attending workshops during holidays and it is a short time just for a week. So we can't even learn everything in a short period (TCLVB5).* Other teachers stated that they had not received this form of training and relied on other teachers to assist them. It can be concluded that teachers need training in braille, SASL and AAC to be able to effectively teach learners with impairments who need these specific skills.

Infrastructure and resources

Inadequate infrastructure posed a challenge for teachers. As a result, they were faced with large classes and struggled to give individual attention to each learner as this teacher explained: *"We don't have enough space and the large classes. And it becomes difficult to give some learners that individual special attention" (TAFS1).* In turn teachers expressed that the large and diverse classes were overwhelming given that the curriculum had to be delivered in a short space of time.

education and have a significant role to play in meeting learners' educational needs. However, some teachers felt frustrated by the lack of parental involvement in supporting their efforts at school: *"It is frustrating if parents cannot cooperate especially with these kids. That was the worst part ... that was frustrating me, whereby you find you will make appointments with the doctor or with someone that will help the child but the parent do not cooperate (TAFS2).*

Recommendations

It is clear that teachers will face many challenges in teaching learners with special educational needs if they do not receive the necessary support. Recommendations to mitigate these challenges include the following:

- In-depth impairment specific training should be included as a specialisation in teacher education.
- Ongoing support for teachers from the DBSTs in impairment specific pedagogy is essential.
- Continuous training or workshops at school and district level should be offered on the use assistive technology
- Consistent braille, SASL and AAC workshops should be provided at schools and at a district level

- Inclusive education modules that enable all teachers to respond to learner diversity should be offered in pre-service teacher training.
- Teacher-parent partnerships need to be strengthened.
- School infrastructure needs to be improved.

Acknowledgements

This paper falls within the Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion (TEDI) project. The TEDI project is a partnership between the University of Cape Town and Christoffel-Blindenmission, and is funded by the European Union.



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion
(TEDI) tedi@uct.ac.za, 021 650 2489.

Reference list

1. Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
2. Engelbrecht, P., Oswald, M., Swart, E., & Eloff, I. (2003). Including learners with intellectual disabilities: Stressful for teachers? *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 50(3), 293–308.
3. Sandelowski, M. (2000). Focus on research methods-whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing and Health*, 23(4), 334–340.
4. Statistics South Africa (2011). *Census 2011. Profile of persons with disabilities in South Africa*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Notes

1. In this paper we are specifically referring to learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairment.



PROFILES

Implementing the asset-based approach in a resource-constrained special school resource centre

By H. M. Burgers

Principal, Meerhof School

Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to implement the asset-based approach to **identify** the under-utilised assets and resources at a resource-constrained special school resource centre (SSRC) and to **mobilise** the resource centre to function optimally. The researcher has a great interest in special school resource centres having been a principal of a SSRC for many years and wishes to implement the inclusive education system which was defined and approved in South Africa through Education White Paper 6. (DoE, 2001) The wish is to strengthen special schools, especially in rural areas by introducing and implementing the asset-based approach used in inclusive education. The application of the asset-based approach could allegedly assist SSRCs to become more functional.

The asset-based approach and bio-ecological model were used as the conceptual framework for the study and an instrumental case study as research design. One rural resource-constrained SSRC was selected through convenience sampling, and nine participants were purposely selected. Data was collected with individual semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and observation and documented by verbatim transcripts of audio recordings, photographs, field notes and a research journal.

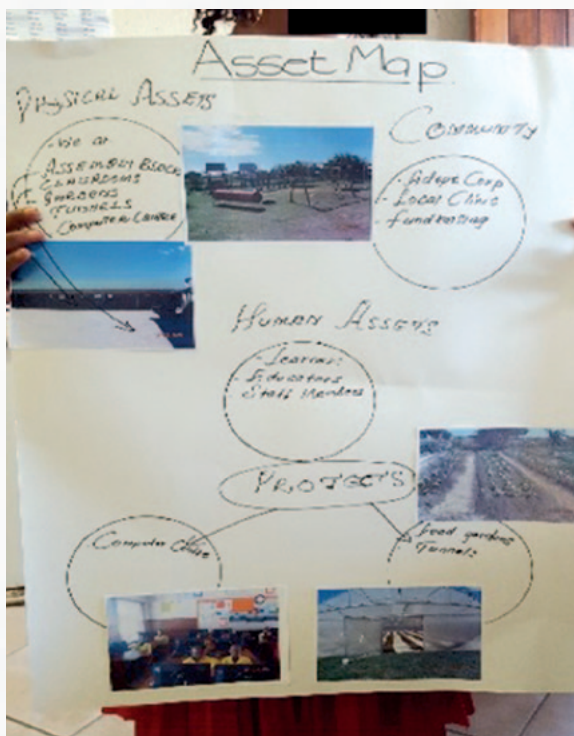
Three main themes emerged at the resource-constrained SSRC which identified **two projects** to mobilise as assets and resources which could support the centre's inward functioning. It was found that the implementation of the asset-based approach is one way to support the inward functioning of a resource-constrained SSRC

Conceptualisation

The asset-based approach within the bio-ecological model

A SSRC in rural North West province, which did not yet have all the necessary assets and resources to be a fully functional SSRC, was identified as an instrumental case study design, following the qualitative approach. **The asset-based approach** was chosen for its focus on strengths, capacities, assets and resources, unlike the needs-based approach, which focuses on deficiencies, needs and problems (Cordes, 2002). According to Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006b) the mapping of assets is an on-going process and during the mobilisation phase the participants concentrated on inward change from professional dominance to collaboration and strove to engage the community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Matthie & Cunningham, 2003). The study focused on facilitating asset mobilisation whereby participants could take charge of their own assets and resources to mobilise solutions and improve the inward functioning of a rural resource-constrained SSRC.

The final stage of the asset-based approach which is revision of strategies, and if necessary, re-identification and re-mobilisation of assets and resources to achieve set goals, emphasises the importance of ownership and commitment to new projects of all parties involved. (Loots, 2011; Bender, 2004; Eloff, 2006). This commitment and ownership evolved spontaneously whilst a lasting relationship with the community was built (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; McNulty, 2005; Jenal & Cunningham, 2003).



Illustrates the process of mapping identified assets and resources on an asset map by participants at SSRC

The bio-ecological model aspect focussed on the broad interaction between the different systems and sub-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994). The closest environment to the individual plays an important role. (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). To use this model effectively the researcher needs to see that every person in any context is always part of a system and that there is constant system interaction. In this way a better understanding was reached of the relationship between individuals, the community and the social settings at the SSRC before commencing the research. (Lazarus, 2007; Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002).

Methods and methodology

Qualitative research paradigm: Purposeful sampling was used to select nine participants for the study (Creswell, (2015), which included the principal, an SGB member, a SMT member, an SBST member, an HOD, a non-educator, a DBST member, and the deputy chief education specialist. Unfortunately, the parent has withdrawn. The participants were assisted to draw

up asset maps, identify assets and resources and mobilise the identified assets and resources. They identified two projects:

- an under-developed garden to mobilise and maintain as **project one**
- an under-developed computer centre to mobilise and maintain as **project two**.

Data generation and documentation: The asset-based approach was used in the pre-implementation phase, the implementation phase and the post-implementation phase. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, permission to record and the right of privacy were stressed (Loots, 2011; Creswell, 2015; Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Elias & Theron, 2012).

Data analysis and interpretation: The researcher used inductive data analysis and interpretation as a useful method for interpretative qualitative data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2005). Patterns, categories and themes were built from the data generated, until three themes had been established and the research questions had been answered. Throughout the research process, the aim was to ensure quality and rigour and to adhere to the following quality criteria – credibility, confirmability, transferability, dependability and authenticity.

The two projects emerged from the three themes which will be discussed during the results.

Project one: The garden project:



Learners growing seedlings



General assistant in vegetable tunnel

Project two: The computer centre project:



Under-developed computer centre



Demonstration of assistive devices and computer programs to participants

The research questions asked during the study:

The **primary research question** asked was:

- How can the asset-based approach be used to support (or not) the inward functioning of a special school resource centre? The researcher firstly aimed to strengthen the school inwardly with assets and resources identified, mobilised and managed, before the school could be outwardly strong enough to strengthen the surrounding schools, as expected from SSRCs.

- The main **secondary questions** were:
 - Which challenges, resources and assets can be identified at the SSRC?
 - How can available resources and assets be mobilised in order to address existing challenges and support the inward functioning (or not) of a resource-constrained SSRC?

Results

The results of the study are presented according to the three themes and sub-themes emerging from the study:

Theme 1: The answer to **secondary research question 1:** “Which challenges, resources and assets can be identified at a resource-constrained SSRC?”

Participants identified natural assets and resources, such as open land, when implementing the asset-based approach, which is in line with natural capital, according to Green and Haines, (2002). Roos and Temane, (2007), also referred to as environmental capital.

Participants identified human resources including staff members, learners and participants, when implementing the asset-based approach at the resource-constrained SSRC. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) identified the main categories for identification of assets.

One category relates to the potential value of human resources such as: According to DoE, (2001); DBE, (2013); DoE, (2001b) additional specialist educators, therapists, professional nursing sisters, psychologists, counsellors, social workers, hostel staff, class assistants, drivers at the SSRC.

Participants furthermore identified physical resources, including classrooms or centres used for teaching academic or practical skills. Education White Paper 6 states that SSRCs should have physical resources such as special facilities and assistive devices to assist learners and educators (DBE, 2013).

Participants identified a range of gardening resources. Greene and Haines (2002) referred to instrumental resources in their asset-based community, which is in line with the gardening tools at the SSRC.

The findings of theme 1 were that when the asset-based approach is implemented in a resource-constrained SSRC, natural-, human-, physical- and gardening resources may be expected to be present.

Theme 2: The answer to secondary research question 1: “Which challenges, resources and assets can be identified at a resource-constrained SSRC?”

Participants have experienced challenges related to limited physical space and fertilised land when implementing the asset-based approach at a resource-constrained SSRC.

Another challenge was related to the use of technology including limited skills and competencies and limited systemic support for technological use when implementing the asset-based approach. This is one of the key challenges in many SSRCs in rural areas. In order for these schools to be fully functional in assisting learners with disabilities and special needs they need to have the technological resources to implement special facilities and utilise assistive devices (DoE, 2001; DBE, 2013, DBE, 2015). However, in line with the results of the study, Sprang (2009) argues that due to financial constraints SSRCs do not always have the necessary computer programmes and technological skills to optimally teach learners. Even educators in the inclusive education system are not always comfortable with assistive devices technology or trained in special needs support. (Sprang, 2009; Wood, Mueller, Willoughby, Specht & Deyoung 2007). (Loots (2011) indicated that participating educators reported time constraints and additional responsibilities when implementing the asset-based approach in schools. Balfour,

Mitchell & Moletsane (2008) agreed by referring to difficulties of access in rural communities, as a result of long distances, transport barriers and time spent travelling.

The findings of theme 2 were that when the asset-based approach is implemented in a resource-constrained SSRC, limited physical space and fertilised land, as well as technological challenges may both be challenges. In addition extra responsibilities and related time constraints were challenging. Role-players may also experience challenge of attending to asset-based projects after school hours.

Theme 3: Answer to secondary research question 2, How can available resources and assets be mobilised in order to address existing challenges and support the inward functioning (or not) of a resource-constrained SSRC?

The mobilisation of the food garden project at the resource-constrained SSRC resulted in financial benefits to the school. The literature agrees on the financial gain for low-income communities when they mobilise assets and resources effectively (Benson & Stagg 2015). A further benefit of the food garden project was the National School Nutritional Programme (NSNP) which supported the school. As South Africa is one of the countries with one of the highest incidences of malnutrition amongst children, such a programme reduces malnutrition (DBE, 2011).

The partnerships with the DBST, special schools, SSRCs, full service schools, mainstream schools area office, the community, and local businesses were also strengthened at the resource-constrained SSRC through asset mobilisation. Department of Education (DoE, 2001; DBE, 2010a, 2013). 2006). The mobilisation of assets and resources at the SSRC resulted in skills development of both learners and staff members which supported the functioning of the school.

Discussion

Within the context of the bio-ecological approach, every system and every sub-system have assets and resources as well as challenges. Typical mesosystem assets and resources at a resource-constrained SSRC are natural resources, human resources, physical resources and resources for gardening. Challenges that may be expected are limited physical space, technological challenges additional responsibilities and related time constraints.

When role-players (microsystem) at a resource-constrained SSRC (nested in the mesosystem) are introduced to the asset-based approach they are likely to focus on and identify assets and resources within a system or systems. When an asset-based approach is implemented in a

resource-constrained SSRC the role players are more likely to identify and mobilise assets and resources, which could in turn address challenges and support the resource-constrained SSRC.

Typical expected outcomes are financial benefits, support of nutritional programmes, strengthening of partnerships in different systems, skills development, and demonstration of intra and interpersonal qualities. Supporting the SSRC could have a direct and indirect impact on other systems, such as local businesses and organisations as well as neighbouring schools.

In the study local businesses and neighbouring schools assisted with the asset-based projects by marketing and selling vegetables.

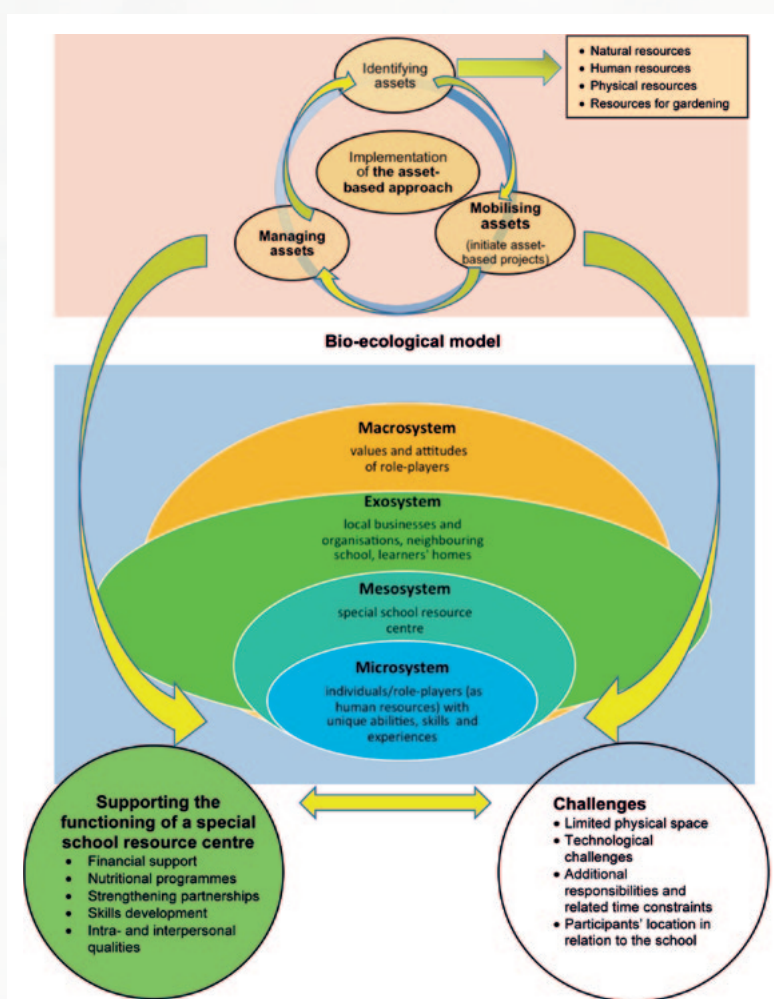


Figure 1 illustrates how the asset-based approach could be utilised in supporting the functioning of a resource-constrained special school resource centre.

The financial gain had a positive effect on all systems involved. In addition, **gardening skills training and computer skills training** assisted individuals to extend their skills to the broader community. Nutritional programmes also benefitted from the establishment and upgrade of their food garden.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A limitation of the study was that it was conducted at only one rural resource-constrained SSRC in North West province. An in-depth understanding was gained of the implementation of the asset-based approach through a qualitative interpretivist study. The findings could be transferrable in similar cases, but could not be generalised.

The following recommendations are made for further practice, training, and research:

Recommendations for practice

Based on the findings, the asset-based approach could be implemented at other SSRCs on a practical level to identify and mobilise assets and resources for support

Recommendations for further training and development

Prospective and practicing educators should include the asset-based approach in the content of training material. Role-players involved at schools could benefit from the asset-based approach which could support the functioning of schools.

Recommendations for further research: (based on findings):

- The outward change at the SSRC after being strengthened inwardly
- A follow-up study at the same resource-constrained SSRC identifying and mobilising other assets and resources to support the school and involving other participants.

- A follow-up study identifying more than two projects at the same resource-constrained SSRC and involving the community as well.
- A follow-up study at the selected resource-constrained SSRC to investigate the sustainability and effect of the asset-based projects that were implemented.
- A comparative case study to compare the implementation of the asset-based approach at different SSRCs in different provinces.

Reference list

1. Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press.
2. Department of Basic Education. (2010) *National Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support*. Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printers.
3. Department of Basic Education. (2013). *Guidelines to ensure quality education and support in special schools and special school resource centres*. Pretoria, South Africa: Sol Plaatjie House.
4. Department of Education. (2001). *Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
5. Ebersöhn, L. & Eloff, I. (2006b). *Life skills and assets* (2nd ed.). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
6. Loots, M. C. (2011). *Teachers' implementation of an asset-based intervention for school-based psychosocial support*. (Unpublished doctoral thesis) University of Pretoria: Pretoria, South Africa.
7. Peters, S.J. (2003). *Inclusive Education: Achieving education for all by including those with disabilities and special education needs*. The World Bank: Disability Group-Report, 30 April 2003. Michigan: Michigan State University.
8. Simelane, M. (2012). *Progress report on the implication of Education White Paper 6: 2001–2012. HEDCOM Subcommittee on teacher development and curriculum management*. Report presented at Department of Basic Education: Inclusive Education Meeting Pretoria, South Africa.

Due to space limitations the complete list of references has not been included but is available from the author.

Community mapping to access support – Dr. Izak Van Niekerk Primary School

By Natalie Watlington

Information and Communication Specialist, Inclusive Education South Africa

Ordinary South African classrooms mirror the communities from which their learners are drawn and thus encompass an array of learners from diverse circumstances all accommodated in one school. Research shows that the majority of learners in the Northern Cape experience one or more barriers to learning during the course of their education. These barriers include class sizes averaging 45 learners per class, a high incidence of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, poor nutrition and a lack of adequate school transport.

Inclusive Education South Africa (IESA) has been working to strengthen Full Service Schools in the Namaqua District of the Northern Cape since 2012. One of these schools, Dr Izak van Niekerk Primary School, is situated in Bergsig, a community just outside of the town of Springbok. Springbok, like most towns in the Northern Cape has relied on mining activities for most of its economic

activities and employment opportunities. Springbok is 800kms away from Kimberley where the only ten Special schools in the province are situated. This means that ordinary local schools must accommodate learners with higher levels of support needs, especially the newly designated full service schools, of which Dr Izak van Niekerk is one.

The Salamanca Statement declared that “Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities.”¹ The implications of this are that this school will need to provide an even wider range of support to a more diverse learner population.

The 2014 SIAS Policy defines support as including

“all activities in a school which increase its capacity to respond to diversity. Providing support to individuals is only one way of making learning contexts and lessons accessible to all learners. Support also takes place when schools review their culture, policies and practices in terms of the extent to which they are inclusive centres of learning, care and support.”²

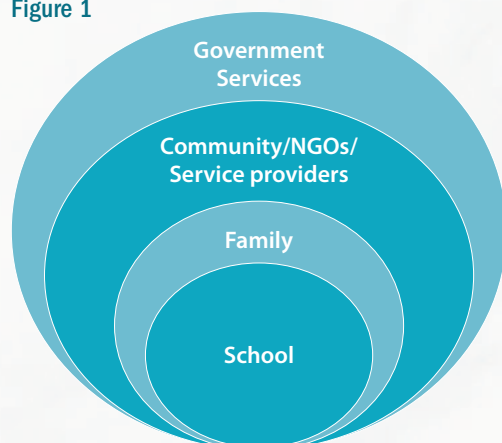
The National Model of the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) framework³, envisages that ordinary community schools become the hub where various services and service providers come together to offer a wide range of support to children and families. With this as the starting point IESA engaged with the School Management Team (SMT) and School Governing Body (SGB) to determine a strategy to identify potential support providers in the broader community. The remote and rather isolated nature of the Northern Cape towns limits access to as broad a range of support services as other urban schools may enjoy. However, a creative exercise to raise awareness of available support does reveal a wider network of community based resources than assumed.

Community mapping is a valuable process whereby the SMT, School Based Support Team (SBST) and whole staff analyse the surrounding community and identify possible sources of support. IESA facilitated the session and the SMT and SGB led the process. Staff were encouraged to think about a broad interpretation of support which would include psycho social services, nutrition, health and well being and other needs beyond learning support. Staff were also reminded that support includes addressing the needs of teachers as well as learners.

The staff had to identify possible support service providers from a number of different sources both within the school and the broader community. Staff were reminded to think beyond government

as the only service providers and to discover the rich resources that exist in the surrounding community. Figure 1 illustrates the range of service providers to consider in the community mapping exercise.

Figure 1



The group began by drawing an actual map of the community surrounding the school on large newsprint. They brainstormed all possible service providers and populated their map accordingly. They identified a wide and extensive range of service providers including local churches and faith-based organisations, individuals who could provide classroom support, recreational facilities and local government services including health, social welfare, police, library.

It was a revelation to staff that such a wealth of support could be resourced from the broader community. The exercise made them aware that they were not as isolated and under resourced as they had thought.

The staff then drew up a list of the services from the service providers they had identified on their map. A plan was developed to make contact with each of these service providers to establish the following:

- a. Description of services available
- b. Contact person and contact details

Once all of the details had been collated, the school drew up a directory of services in a very creative and innovative way. Enthusiastic and committed staff members produced a professional and reviewable poster format. As the photo shows a plastic pocket was attached

under each service provider and a card with the relevant contact details inserted. In this way the contact information could easily be updated.

The school felt that the process and resulting directory was an effective way to identify and access support for the school from the community. The positive and enthusiastic response from the staff during the community mapping exercise was sustained and led to a change in attitude. Teachers felt less personally burdened by the need to provide support themselves and could see the other avenues they could now explore.

IESA has shared the excellent work done by Dr Izak van Niekerk Primary school and used it as a model for other schools to follow in their community mapping.



Footnotes

1. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, Spain, 1994
2. The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy, Department of Basic Education, 2014, Chapter 3 s8 (2&3)
3. The Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Framework: National Support Pack, Department of Basic Education, 2010



OPINION EDITORIAL

Learners are progressed only to be left behind

By Robyn Beere

Inclusive Education Consultant

The merits or otherwise of our promotion and progression policy are often the topic of fierce debate. The policy recently came under the spotlight once again as the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga is considering doing away with repetition in the foundation phase.¹ This is apparently based on research showing that young children do not benefit from repeating the early years of education. Whatever your views, Any policy should have, as the underlying premise, the fact that all children learn in different ways, at different levels and at a different pace. Any one-size-fits-all approach will exclude many learners from reaching their full learning potential.

As our promotion policy currently stands a learner can only repeat one year per phase. The rationale behind repetition is that a learner who has not mastered the skills or concepts sufficiently for that grade and who would benefit from a second year should repeat the year. Some learners may repeat and still not have mastered the concepts and must then be progressed to the next Grade. It does make certainly makes sense that a learner should progress, more or less, with his peers to avoid the situation of a 16 year old learner sitting with 8 year olds! This we all seem to understand and accept but what we fail to get right is that the progressed learner should be progressed WITH SUPPORT.

The National Protocol on Assessment Grade R-12 expressly provides for this, stating that, "Progression can be used to prevent a learner from being retained in a phase for a period exceeding four years as stipulated in the Admission policy for ordinary public schools ... **provided that the underperformance of the learner in the previous grade be addressed in the grade to which the learner has been promoted to.**" [my own emphasis]

It makes absolutely no sense for a child who has not mastered for example Grade 2 Maths to be progressed to Grade 3 Maths and be taught and assessed at a Grade 3 level. Yet this is what happens! Learning gaps get wider and wider, learners continue to progress, with no support, until eventually, unable to do the basics of learning, read or write, they drop out! What a gross injustice and an unacceptable disservice we are doing to our children. How can a curriculum be implemented so inflexibly and a system of assessment be so rigid that it allows this to happen?

It must be obvious for all to see that the Grade 2 learner progressed to Grade 3 Maths is going to need support to first master the Grade 2 concepts before moving on to a Grade 3 level. Our policies makes ample provision for this – the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy (SIAS) for one, outlines in detail the support that should be put in place for individual learners. The NCS CAPS contains Guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom giving detailed guidance to teachers on how they should differentiate their teaching for different learners. The National Protocol for Assessment – Grades R-12, explicitly states that **"within a flexible, learner-based and learner-paced** approach to the curriculum, all learners can be enabled to achieve their full potential...Curriculum differentiation implies that learners will straddle grades and phases. **This needs to be dealt with in assessment, recording, reporting and promotion.**" [my own emphasis]

Nevertheless when I go into schools and speak to teachers the overwhelming response is that the way that CAPS is being implemented and monitored does not allow for this flexibility. Subject advisors seem only interested in ensuring the teachers are keeping up with the curriculum pace setters and that all children are being assessed using uniform grade level assessments. The result of this is surely plain to see – the recent PIRLS results show that 78% of South African Grade 4 children cannot read for meaning in any language!² This is a shocking indication of how seriously our education system is failing our children.

We must stop doing what is easiest and start doing what is right if we are to give our children a chance at receiving the quality basic education

to which they have they a fundamental right. Instead of only assessing a school based on academic achievement of learners, why not introduce another performance indicator for school evaluation – What support are progressed learners receiving to improve their learning outcomes? Surely we should be encouraging schools and teachers to be more creative and pay more attention to how they differentiate teaching? Surely our District and School Based Support Teams should be focussed on accessing and providing a wide range of support to ensure all children are meaningfully participating in learning? It is time to implement our curriculum and policies in the way they were intended – to support teaching and learning taking into account the rich diversity of our nation's children!

Footnotes

1. See article at <https://www.iol.co.za/mercury/no-repeat-year-for-pupils-under-10-15037188>
2. Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), 2016 Report, Page 55

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Inclusive
Education
SOUTH AFRICA

Inclusive Education South Africa

The Education Hub
6 Blackwood Avenue
Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193
Suite No. 345, Private Bag X30500
Houghton, 2041
Tel: 087 803 0150
Email: info@included.org.za

3 Tiverton Road,
Plumstead
Cape Town, 7801
P O Box 18093,
7824
Tel: 021 762 6664
Email: ctgeneral@included.org.za

St John's Presbyterian Church
81 Aliwal Street,
Arboretum
Bloemfontein
9301
Tel: 051 430 1244
Email: fsadmin@included.org.za