



## **Strengthening teaching to meet the needs of learners with severe to profound disabilities**

### **Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion (TEDI) session at the Third South African Symposium on Teacher Education for Inclusive Teaching (10<sup>th</sup> July 2018)**

This session on teacher education speaks to the chronic and severe lack of teachers skilled in meeting the special educational needs of learners with disabilities. The Department of Higher Education and Training has recognised this and set up three centres of excellence at the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Pretoria, for the development of teacher qualifications for specialised teachers who are equipped to deal with impairment specific skills. These projects link with TEDI which is a university and civil society partnership funded directly by the European Union.

Considering the above evidence that teachers lack the necessary skills that empower them to cater for learners with varying special educational needs, in this session we will discuss four research projects, housed at the University of Cape Town, the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Pretoria, that focus on strengthening teaching to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.

#### **Paper 1:**

**Title:** The needs of teachers with respect to teaching learners with disabilities

**Presenters:** Judith McKenzie, Nozwelo Shanda and Brian Watermeyer (University of Cape Town)

#### **Abstract**

In light of the necessity to upskill and empower teachers to cater for the special educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual disabilities, the TEDI group undertook an analysis of the needs of teachers with respect to teaching learners with disabilities. Interviews with district and provincial officials, teachers and school management in Gauteng, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape revealed that teachers are in need of training in the following areas: (1) The use of South African Sign Language, Braille and augmentative and alternative communication as well as assistive technology; (2) Impairment-specific training, including the nature of impairments and how this may impact learning; (3) Relationship and listening skill development and (4) Recognising disability as an



issue of social justice. Upskilling teachers in these areas will contribute to ensuring that the needs of learners with disabilities are adequately met through quality education.

## Paper 2:

**Title:** Availability of teacher training that addresses the needs of learners with disabilities

**Presenters:** Jane Kelly, Judith McKenzie and Nozwelo Shanda (University of Cape Town)

### Abstract

While teacher qualifications are offered at 28 schools of education at universities and universities of technology, it is not clear to what extent they address the special educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual disabilities. Further, although NGOs and DPOs offer training in impairment specific skills for teachers and carers of learners with disabilities, there is largely a disjuncture (with some notable exceptions - for example, the Deaf education programmes at the University of the Witwatersrand) between the impairment specific skills housed in these NGOs and the formal teacher education sector. In light of this, the TEDI group has undertaken – through online surveys and face-to-face interviews - to gain an overview of the currently available teacher education resources regarding their suitability in preparing teachers to address the special educational needs of learners with severe to profound disabilities. We will examine the provision of resources for such teachers in: (i) Formal, accredited teacher education in existing programmes at universities, (ii) informal teacher education run largely through NGOs and DPOs, and (iii) The three centres of excellence at University of Pretoria, University of the Witwatersrand and University of Johannesburg. The results of these online surveys and face-to-face interviews will be presented.

## Paper 3:

**Title:** Conceptualising teacher training programmes that focus on supporting learners with Neurodevelopmental disorders.

**Presenters:** Dr Helen Dunbar-Krige, Dr Jean Fourie (University of Johannesburg)

### Abstract

Neurodevelopmental disorders are conditions which manifest in childhood and are characterised by impairments in personal, social, academic, or occupational





functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Developmental deficits range from highly specific limitations of learning, communication difficulties and attention control to broad impairments of behaviours, social skills and intelligence. This wide range of difficulties poses challenges for educators when supporting these learners in mainstream, full service or special needs schools. Since the formalisation of inclusive education there are more learners in all schools displaying these deficits as reported in the implementation of Education White Paper 6 (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Educators require skilful competence to identify, assess and support these learners. In conceptualising teacher training programmes to address these issues, we discuss the continual tensions between the deficit, medical-based approach and an inclusive, systemic paradigm. Conflicting notions of how to differentiate the curriculum, adapt classroom practices and individualise learning plans characterise the debates. Our deliberations extended to the functioning of multi-disciplinary teams and the blurred roles of professionals and parents in schools in attempting to support learners with neurodevelopmental deficits. In this paper we present our curricular conceptualisations in attempting to resolve some of the tensions inherent in focusing on neurodevelopmental disorders within a socially just, inclusive education system.

## **Paper 4:**

**Title: Teachers' experiences of the implementation of inclusive education policy, with a focus on the context of visual impairment**

**Presenters:** Maximus M. Sefotho, Maesala Thabe, Ronél Ferreira, Ruth Mampane (University of Pretoria)

### **Abstract**

In South Africa, teacher training in the field of inclusive education and visual impairment is limited and constitutes a minority of teachers in the teaching profession. Since inception of the Education for all philosophy in 2000, which became a precursor for inclusive education, little has happened in terms of the development of formal training courses aimed at the implementation of inclusive education policy in general, and teaching in the context of visual impairment in particular. In this paper we report on a study exploring the needs of teachers in both special schools (for the blind) and full-service schools in five provinces of South Africa. Amongst other guiding questions, we focused on teachers' understanding of inclusive education policy, and what the teaching of learners with visual impairment entails. Relying on a case study design, we purposefully sampled seventeen schools (ten special needs schools and seven full service schools) in five provinces



(KwaZulu Natal, Gauteng, Limpopo, Free State and the Eastern Cape), informed data generation for this study. Data were generated through PRA-based workshops, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, and documented in the form of field notes and visual data capturing techniques. Preliminary results centre on the following compelling themes: (i) educators' needs for implementing inclusive education policy, (ii) factors challenging the implementation of inclusive education policy, and (iii) factors supporting the implementation of policy. Based on the findings of our study we will develop a formal qualification in the field of visual impairment studies. In this regard, we were able to observe positive experiences amongst teachers due to them fulfilling the role of contributors to an academic and professional programme which may strengthen inclusive education policy implementation in future.



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## Discussion

What are the key considerations and priorities for teacher education in strengthening teaching to meet the needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual disabilities?