



Empowering teachers of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments

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Despite policy commitment, there has been slow progress towards achieving quality education for learners with disabilities in South Africa, with one of the main obstacles being that there are very few training programmes preparing teachers to teach these learners. This study explores the evaluation of short courses for teachers (developed by the Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion project – TEDI) focused on disability studies in education, as well as teaching learners with severe to profound intellectual disabilities, learners who are D/deaf and hard of hearing, and learners with visual impairment. Drawing on a qualitative research design, data was collected using surveys with 82 participants and focus group discussions with 52 participants. These participants were educators working with learners with severe to profound disabilities (SPD). Data was analysed with regard to teacher empowerment and disability inclusion. Findings reveal that the TEDI short courses fostered supportive and collaborative networks amongst participants that helped them to support inclusion. As one participant said *“I feel like I am part of a network of people making a difference for inclusion”*. The courses also helped participants to understand disability within an inclusive framework: *“I’ve learnt more, especially on the path of inclusion... now I know how important it is to include [the children] in everything that I’m doing”*. Teacher education for children with disabilities should enable teachers to create collaborative and supportive networks. This will empower them to drive their own professional development and to support each other to develop an empathetic understanding of support for learners with SPD.

Keywords: Teacher empowerment, disability, inclusion, teacher education



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