

## Competencies that Educators Need in Order to Manage Inclusive Classrooms: The Case of One High School in Alice

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**ABSTRACT** This paper aims to ascertain the kind of competencies needed by educators to enable them identify learner's needs in diverse classrooms. The study attempts to identify the challenges encountered in inclusion which is rampant in schools nowadays. Its purpose is to inform and suggest and guide the actions by governments, international organisations, national aid agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other bodies in implementing the Salamanca Statement. The method of the design of the study was phenomenological and the tool for data collection was interviews and observation. The researchers came up with the main finding that inclusive education challenges the assumptions about the purpose of education and the process of teaching and education. The study concluded that for a successful management of inclusive education, educators need to be supported in the development of new skills and effective practices for their classrooms.

### INTRODUCTION

The White Paper outlines a national strategy to achieve an inclusive education system that will address and accommodate learners who experience various barriers to learning. The existing system would require significant transformation: selected schools would be converted to full service schools to meet a variety of support needs; schools and districts would set up support teams to assist classroom teachers; education managers and teachers would be trained, and special schools would remain not only to serve learners with high needs for support, but also to act as resources for other schools. The process of identifying learners who experience barriers with learning is a critical step and is therefore a major challenge in full service schools in the Eastern Cape District. In some instances, teachers simply write down the lists of learners they believed are experiencing barriers, especially in reading, writing and mathematics, with brief explanatory notes which are too general. This is as a result of teachers not having the necessary skills and training needed to work in such school. Hence this study seeks to explore the competencies of teachers in identifying learners with learning barriers.

"Behind each classroom door lies a world of diversity". According to this, Berry (2006: 5) meant that in any classroom learners display differences in their use of language, learning styles, developmental levels, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds and types of intelligence. This

diversity triggers the concept of barriers to learning and development. Research has revealed that learners learn in different ways because of hereditary factors, experience, environment and/or their personalities (UNICEF 2010). Consequently, the educators need to use a variety of teaching methods and activities to inclusively meet the different learning needs of children. Inclusivity is now a global phenomenon, having received much impetus at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994 in Salamanca, Spain (UNESCO 1994: 7). Its purpose is to inform and guide action by governments, international organisations, national aid agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other bodies in implementing the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education. Although this was the focus, its conclusion was that it could not advance in isolation, and therefore promoted a broader approach, namely that of Inclusive Education. The new goal was to further the objective of education as a fundamental human right by paying attention to the basic policy shifts necessary for its development, thereby enabling schools to serve all learners, particularly those with special educational needs (UNESCO 2009: 8).

Many policies and other documents appeared on inclusive education and barriers to learning after 1994, at both levels domestically and internationally. Such documents are: The Salamanca Statement of 1994; The South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996); The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996; The School Reg-

ister of Needs Survey of 1997; the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET); and the National Committee on Education Support services (NCESS) of 1997; the Dakar Framework For Action (2000); and the Education White Paper 6; Special Needs Education; Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001). These have all made a great impact on implementing inclusive education policy in South Africa.

The National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) were appointed in October 1996 to investigate and make recommendations on all aspects of “special needs and support services” in education and training in South Africa (Department of Education 1997: 1-3). The vision of the NCSNET and the NCESS was to have an education and training system that supported education for all; and accepts the development of inclusive and supportive centres of learning, where all learners can actively participate in the educational process, develop to their full potential and be involved as equal members of the society (Department of Education 1997: 10). Both the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) published their final report on quality Education for All: Overcoming Barriers to Learning and Development, in November 1997.

However, it is apparent that the needs of all learners were not recognised. Whether a child was in an inclusive or segregated environment, it is important that learning preferences and learning styles be included in the planning and delivery of the curriculum. Children with special needs might benefit from inclusive education, but they still require some additional structures and processes to meet their educational, social and emotional needs (Reid 2005: 106). Reid (2005: 104-105) further suggests that learners with special needs must not become too dependent on additional support in the mainstream school. This support usually relates to curriculum content, and in many cases the person who provides the additional support may not have the same standard of knowledge of the content, as the mainstream teacher. Therefore, it was suggested that support in curriculum content should rather focus on the learning process in an inclusive setting. The publication of this report showed the

importance of catering for all learners, including those who experienced barriers to learning – and the importance of educational support services.

The National Disability Strategy emphasised the need for including persons with disabilities in the workplace, social environment, political sphere and sport arenas. It condemned the segregation of persons with disabilities from the mainstream of society. On the other hand, the Department of Education supported this direction, and viewed the establishment of an inclusive education and training system as the cornerstone of an integrated and caring society for the twenty-first century (Department of Education 2001: 10). In view of the above, the White Paper 6, Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, Inclusive Education and Training shared the following in common:

- ♦ Acknowledging that all children and youth can learn, and that both of them need support.
- ♦ Accepting and respecting the fact that all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs, which are equally valued, and are a usual part of our human experience.
- ♦ Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners.
- ♦ Acknowledging and respecting the differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class and disability or HIV status.
- ♦ Maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and curricula of educational institutions and uncovering and minimising any barriers to learning.
- ♦ Acknowledging that inclusive education is a bigger concept than formal schooling, where learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal structures.
- ♦ Empowering learners by developing their individual strengths, and enabling them to it
- ♦ Changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula and the environment to meet the needs of all the participating learners.
- ♦ Clarifying that some learners may require more intensive and specialised forms of support to be able to develop to their full potential.

- ♦ Organising a system that can provide various levels and kinds of support to learners and educators (Department of Education 2001: 16).

### Historical Development of Inclusive Education

Social contexts changed internationally when demographics in education began to change as well as the end goals of education and the needs of the economy. Historically in the U.S.A., according to Sands et al. (2000) the response to learner diversity was to create special programs usually separated from the scope of general education. Learners with disability or any specific need that could not be catered for by the dominant education system were separated and taught in special institutions. The realisation that education practices were inappropriate was solidified when, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created by the United Nations. The international human rights movement exposed educational practices in many countries as questionable. Within America, the beginnings of a change in paradigm became evident when normalisation was introduced.

The concept of normalisation originated from the Scandinavia, but came to the fore in America in the late 1960s. Normalisation can be defined as “making available to all handicapped people patterns of life and conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to the regular circumstances and ways of life of society” (Swart and Pettipher 2005: 6). This process placed children with special needs into “normal” schools and expected them to adjust and fit in like the other “normal” children. Normalisation was the idea or concept that gave rise to “mainstreaming” in education. Mainstreaming suggested that people with disabilities had a right to life experiences similar to that of the others in the society. In view of this, Swart and Pettipher (2005) state that the goal of mainstreaming was to return learners with disabilities to the mainstream of education. This usually only applied to some learners (those with mild disabilities), as learners would still have to prove their readiness to enter the education mainstream. This was required because upon entering the mainstream, learners had little or no access to support services.

When entering a mainstream class, a child with a disability had to prove their readiness to fit in, yet the schools or classrooms never ad-

justed to fit the needs of the new entrant. One could say that mainstreaming actually reinforced the medical paradigm by focussing on the problem within the individual and the individual's need to be “fixed” or cured (Sands et al. 2000). During the 1970s, humanitarian and civil rights movements drove policies leading to “integration”. Integration was different from mainstreaming as it relied heavily on political and social discourse (Swart and Pettipher 2005). They went on to argue that the goal of integration was “to ensure that learners with disabilities were assigned equal membership in the community. Integration as such aimed to maximise the social interactions between the disabled and the non-disabled. As such, integration was different from mainstreaming because special support services followed learners into the schools whereas this did not occur in the mainstreaming.

European countries however referred to integration as the translation of inclusion. In terms of this, inclusion was about the extension of the above ideas in education. A new understanding took shape around the mid 1990s, focussing on the need for an “inclusive society” and closely focussing on an education system's role in doing so. The differences between integration and inclusion became apparent: inclusion was seen as a reconceptualisation of beliefs and values (Artiles et al. 2006). These values celebrated diversity and were to become a way of being, not simply a set of practices or policies (Swart and Pettipher 2005).

This approach to education received its first major boost at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. The purpose of the conference was to extend the objective of education as a fundamental human right. This conference paved the way for fundamental policy to streamline deviations that occur internationally and nationally. The Salamanca Statement described specifically what the ideal was that all countries and education systems should be leading towards. These ideals and aims were emphasised at many conferences worldwide, the World Conference on Education for all by the year 2000 that was held in Thailand, was one such influential event (Lomofsky and Lazarus 2001). The next influential factor was the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006). Within this convention, it was understood that all humans have the same rights, yet a separate

treaty was created because the needs of people with disabilities are different. South Africa became a signatory of this international law in 2007. These conventions and policies began to create awareness on the importance of, not just approaching disability differently, but of looking at difference and diversity in a different light. The Salamanca Statement can be interpreted broadly since it creates an understanding that inclusion and inclusive practices were about more than just disabilities. In other words, it was about embracing and learning from diversity and difference in general. Internationally, a move toward inclusion was in motion and the policies were continuously being revised with a constant effort to make practices more inclusive. It is very important to note that institutional access alone cannot necessarily create the grounds for inclusive education (Berry 2006). In light of this, Berry also notes that it is what goes on in a place (not the location itself) that can potentially make the difference.

Ferguson (2008: 113) states that performances of students with disabilities from the United States are improving. In like manner, "More and more countries in Europe have made great strides toward at least restructuring education for students with special educational needs". She goes on to mention that while access and presence in mainstream classrooms is a necessary step towards inclusive education, it is not entirely enough. It is what happens in the classrooms and schools that are equally critical to achieving true inclusive education (Ferguson 2008).

### **Inclusion in South Africa**

The philosophy of inclusion in the South African education system is rooted in the country's Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996a), which itself is grounded in the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedom (South African Schools Act (SASA 1996b: 34). For that reason, the move towards inclusion in the country's education system has been aimed at maximising the participation of all learners in the curriculum and developing them to become fully functioning citizens who can participate meaningfully in the country's economy, and be able to compete globally. The DoE (South Africa 1997) defines curriculum as everything that influences the learner, from the educator and work

programmes to the environment in which teaching and learning are taking place. According to the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994: 59), inclusion was the guiding principle that informs the framework (which accompanies the statement) that schools should accommodate all learners regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include learners with disabilities and gifted learners, street and working learners, and learners from remote or nomadic populations.

It is quite useful to look at education and special education in South Africa through four phases of history: starting from the 18th and 19th centuries and looking at how education has changed and developed into what it is today. In South Africa, as everywhere else in the world, the 1700's and early 1800's saw hardly any provision for any type of special education need. In this first phase of educational history, a superstitious attitude held by society saw people chained, imprisoned and killed because they were different or strange (Naicker 1999). These people were later recognised as "mentally retarded", physically disabled, blind or deaf. This attitude influenced the treatment of people who were labelled as disabled in the South African context. As a result of superstitious understandings and beliefs in African communities – those who were labelled as disabled suffered a similar fate to those in white communities (Naicker 1999). Phase two in South Africa's history of education saw white-dominated provision and the growing influence of the Church. The nature of special education policy on the part of the state, during the period 1863 to 1963, was extremely oppressive. Initially no special education provision was made by the state for African children.

It took almost a century for the state to provide subsidies for African deaf, blind, cerebral palsied and crippled children. This only occurred in 1963" (Naicker 1999: 29). Churches played a pivotal role during the period; they initiated the provision of special education services for handicapped white and non-white children. They continued to provide a service for non-white children without any state provision for these children for the next hundred years (Naicker 1999). The state only became involved in special education in 1900, when these church-run schools were recognised. In 1928, Act 29 (Special Education Act) was passed. This led to the creation of "vocational schools" and "special schools" for white children.

The 1920s saw the first development of intelligence tests. Many revisions of international tests were applied to white school-going children; these tests were the first connection between education and the labour market. These intelligence tests were the precursor of categorisation, labelling and the exclusive system of special education (Naicker 1999). From 1948, one saw that the policies of apartheid had an effect on every aspect of South African life (Engelbrecht 2006). Also in 1948, the Special Schools Act was passed. This introduced into special education a medical and mental diagnosis and treatment model (Engelbrecht 2006).

The medical model shaped and largely influenced exclusionary practices in the field of education which have continued for decades after their introduction" (Naicker 1999: 31). Because some children were seen as having deficits within themselves, separate special education was justified. Phase three can be seen as the period from 1963 to 1994. After Act No 39 of 1967, whites were privileged to have psychological support services in some schools. Clinics were set up (including many different specialised education support personnel) to service white schools (Naicker 1999). In the following years, due to new policies and segregating practices "the disparities in special education and education support provision were clearly racial and became visible within the unfolding of separate development" (Naicker 1999: 34). The fourth phase in South African education development is the phase starting from 1994 – the new democracy.

Wide-scale transformation was set in motion. Within education, the seventeen separate education departments were unified into a single ministry of education (Engelbrecht et al 2006). In 1996, the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) was appointed, along with the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS). The issue of human rights moved to the forefront of all policy making. In 1995, the White Paper on Education and Training pointed out that education should be committed to equal access, redress and non-discrimination (Engelbrecht 2006).

In November 1997, the report (created by the joint NCSNET and NCESS): *Quality Education for All: Overcoming barriers to learning recognised the need for all learners to have access to a single unified education system* (Engelbrecht et

al. 2006). Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education 2001) builds on previous policies and legislation by placing inclusive education, and its focus on addressing barriers to learning, at the core of education transformation in South Africa. Donald (2008) summarises a few of the aims of the education system as it is today. Non-discrimination is important in fulfilling the rights of every child to access an effective and appropriate education system. He also states that representation and participation by all members of the school community is vital for this inclusive system to work (Berry 2006).

While many schools in South Africa today still struggle with the process of becoming inclusive, there are many others today than there were a few years ago with an awareness of the requirements of an inclusive school community. Wildeman and Nomdo (2007) provide comments regarding where South Africa is in terms of its quest to become more inclusive. They note that "provinces did not conceptualise a strategic campaign and integration strategy for the inclusion of marginalised children and youth with disabilities. Thus, even in the provinces where learners were successfully mobilised, "they did not have the requisite resources (financial and learning) to provide access to education in the existing institutions" (Wildeman and Nomdo 2007: 3).

They also note that schools that are working at becoming more inclusive require specialised support. The Education White Paper 6 proposes the establishment of district-based support teams, "which would be functional at the district level and [would be] actively supporting both public ordinary and special school institutions" (Wildeman and Nomdo 2007: 3). The establishment of such district-based support teams is still to be realised, but there are some teams that seem to be functioning effectively at the present (Wildeman and Nomdo 2007).

To advocate the development of an inclusive teaching and learning environment, Lorenz (2002: 109) stresses that everyone in the school should be involved in the composition or adaptation of an existing school policy if it is to become inclusive. The whole school community should have a part to play, as policy would only influence practice if all those involved had ownership of the process. It can be concluded that all role-players should be involved to support both the educators and learners in promoting

inclusion of all learners. To ensure that all educators of the full service school take responsibility to support all learners, Lorenz (2002: 110) recommend that an inclusive policy should provide basic information about the school's expectations of how to address diversity and provide support to learners who experience barriers to learning. This could include information about the school's policies for identification assessment of and support for learners who experience barriers to learning. Therefore, it becomes clear that an inclusive policy should provide a framework for enhancing the learning and participation of all learners (SASA 1996: 26). Considering that much learning and teaching take place through the medium of language and that language forms part of all spheres of human interaction and development, language has become a central component in addressing the development of full-service schools (Republic of South Africa 2006: 18). The inclusive policy should therefore ensure that language needs of all learners in the school are primarily met as an integral part of the curriculum.

All provinces still have a long way to go – either in terms of getting infrastructure and resources in place or creating understandings and attitudes among teachers and other professionals towards inclusion and diversity that can promote the inclusive ideals that Education White paper 6 outlines. The historical process leading up to the present has hopefully provided useful insight into how the current education system came to existence. It also provides important relevant background information regarding the context of school.

### *Issues and Insights*

Inclusion is further described by Thomas and Vaughn (2007: 8) as equal opportunities for all pupils, whatever their age, gender, ethnicity, attainment and background in order to prepare learners for productive lives as full members of society". In addition to the above, the White Paper 6, Special Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System states that inclusion involves the idea of schools supporting all learners within a locality. Hence, Schools need to take really practical steps to include all learners, irrespective of their race, culture, health, barriers to learning and Special Needs (Department of Education 2001: 55).

Donald et al. (2011) accepted that each day in the classroom presents a new challenge for teachers and as they grapple with the complex and multifaceted demands that face them, the enormity can, at times, feel overwhelming. They suggested that for teachers to conceptualise the many levels in the schooling system that they have influence over, and to influence their teaching, they should develop their understanding of the interaction of all the eco-systemic systems in education – the child, school, family, peer group, local community, wider community and the broad social system.

Besides, Lorenz (2002: 4) states that inclusive education means the fulltime placement in a local mainstream school for everyone who wants it, regardless of their ability or special needs, because it recognises and provides for the individual needs of learners. Through this, learners receive the opportunity to learn and play with their peers throughout the school day, as well as to participate in the extra-curricular activities and in the academic curriculum of the school. Those who promote inclusive education get motivated by the fact that we all want to be kind and fair (Sheehy et al. 2005: 9). In this regard, the key features found in schools follow an inclusive education system are first, effective leadership generating direction to the committed staff. Secondly, the senior management team in schools should be committed to develop the quality teaching matching with the learning styles and abilities of learners. Thirdly, the willingness and ability of school staff to access outside agencies to help develop and sustain inclusive practices in their school (Nind et al. 2003: 42). The main reasons for inclusive education are to have one education system that can be adapted for the learners with barriers to learning, and no discrimination on the basis of race or disabilities.

For a classroom to be fully inclusive, educators need to make sure that the curriculum is accessible and relevant to all learners in terms of what is taught (content); how the educators teach it; how the learners learn best (process); and how it relates to the environment in which the learners are living and learning (UNESCO 2005: 20).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The underlying assumptions on which social constructivism is typically seen to be based

are reality, knowledge, and learning (Pavloviæ 2011). Constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge (epistemology) that argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. The theory therefore suggests that knowledge is a human product constructed in a social and cultural context and is then appropriated by individuals (Nilson 2010). Individuals therefore create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live in.

According to social constructivists, sharing individual perspectives is called collaborative elaboration results from people constructing understanding together that would not be possible alone (Nilson 2010). This theory is therefore congruent with the interpretive paradigm enabling researchers to understand the world of human experiences (Cohen et al. 2000). Interpretivism assumes that knowledge of reality is gained through social constructions such as language and shared meanings (Cavana et al. 2001), within which this study is located. Naicker (2000) argues that the interpretive theorist attempts to understand reality.

Based on constructivism, the main concern of the ecosystem theory is to show how individuals and groups at different levels of society are linked in dynamic, interdependent, interacting relationships or systems which are interdependently operating much like an ecosystem (Donald et al. 2006). According to Maddock (2000), there should be a total interdependence of all systems. In the context of this study, these systems include amongst others, the immediate home/family, the community, religion, the school, society, the Department of Education, Education Support Services, and other cultural forces (Davidoff and Lazarus 1997).

From the ecological and systemic perspectives, the different levels of systems in the whole social context influence one another in a continuous process of dynamic balance, tension and interplay (Engelbrecht et al. 2003). Each sub-system has the capacity to influence other sub-systems, therefore there is tension between power and control in ecosystems which reflect the need for eco-systemic functioning that produces higher order equilibrium to assure its survival (Maddock 2000). Changes or conflict in any one sub-system can ripple throughout other sub-systems (Paquette and Ryan 2001). This correlates with Kurt Lewin's Field Theory which ar-

gues that if elements of the social environment should be adjusted, particular types of psychological experiences would predictably ensue (Jones 2008).

However, if relationships within the whole system are in a balance, the system can be sustained. This is referred to as 'ecological balance'. On the other hand, when there is a major discord or disturbance, the relationships and interdependence may become so distorted that recovery as a whole is threatened (Maddock 2000; Donald et al. 2006). This change effect could be applied to the South African education system which is in a process of being transformed into an inclusive education system. In this regard, inclusive education needs to be seen as a social phenomenon and should therefore have to be developed as an integrated interdependent system where different spheres in society collaborate to ensure its success (Davidoff and Lazarus 1997). This view acknowledges that teachers play a significant role in this equation because they form a crucial sub-system within a macrocosm (the education system). This seems to be convincing enough because they are the 'primary consumers' of policy since they form the basis of the education system and are also responsible for realising the objectives of the inclusive education policy.

In view of the above these researchers think that if the 'inclusive education system' was functioning effectively, adequately resourced fully supported by all sectors; especially if teachers were adequately prepared for inclusive education, there would have been 'ecological balance' and the inclusive education system would have functioned optimally. If however the systems are not functioning in "equilibrium", as seems to be the case, effective inclusive education could be compromised (DOE 2009).

### **Teachers' Challenge in Identification**

The inclusive Education Policy is an international agenda which requires that the effective implementation in a South African context be viewed in both local and international contexts. Terminology is one area in inclusive education that poses difficulties to teachers and related practitioners not only in South Africa but also world-wide. Teachers should have a clear definition of what constitutes learning difficulties before they can be able to identify such learners in their classroom.

The controversy around inclusive education springs from operational meanings of the terminologies such as learning disabilities or learning difficulties or specific learning disabilities. To a lay person, these terms refer to the same conditions that prevent learners from making full participation at school. Practitioners argue that the clarity of what constitutes a learning disability is pivotal because it makes it possible for teachers to design programmes that are tailor made to address that specific difficulty.

### *Teachers' Challenges in Inclusive Classroom*

Recent studies conducted by local researchers indicate commonality of the challenges that classroom teachers face with regard to the assimilation of inclusive practices in their classroom and the identification of learners who experience barriers to learning in particular. Two of these studies were conducted in Gauteng white schools: one independent school (Yorke 2008) and one public school (Ladbrook 2009) whilst two were conducted in African rural and semi rural schools one in Mpumalanga (Mpya 2005), and the others in Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal. The contexts were not identical but the content led to one similar conclusion that South African teachers have challenges with regard to the implementation of inclusion policy. These challenges are experienced by teachers in various provinces racial lines in both urban and rural school settings. These studies identified a few factors that can be impediment to the inclusiveness.

Gwala (2006) revealed that teachers are frustrated with the unavailability of time planning together and supporting personnel in the provision of training to the staff in inclusive education. The shortage of time for training and planning together has serious implications for the implementation of the policy in the classroom. According to the Guidelines for Full-Service / Inclusive Schools (DoE 2010), the words "Collaboration" and "Team Work" are benchmarks in the implementation of inclusive education. In the same document (DoE 2010: 14), the role of the principal is clearly spelled out and includes among other things: Provision of common planning time, crucial for primary school teachers because they spend their day in the classrooms and are unable to share learners' matters as a team (Ntsanwisi 2008: 42).

## METHODOLOGY

The researchers sought to gather data from teachers through interviews that could be interpreted in order to gain a better understanding of their experiences; they wanted to understand their lived reality. In order to achieve this, the phenomenological research design was adopted to describe the experiences. That is to capture the "lived experience" of the respondents (Ross 1999). Constructivism also links with the interpretive ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed by humans through their action and interaction (Andrade 2009). According to Pavloviã (2011), social constructionism has its roots from phenomenology. As constructivists, all phenomenologists agree that there is not a single reality; each individual has his or her own reality. This is why the researchers interviewed the respondents individually in order to gain insight into their unique experiences of inclusive education.

### Data Analysis

This section strongly embeds the study in the theoretical framework that underpins it and makes possible to elucidate the understanding of the phenomenon of inclusive education as experienced in inclusive classrooms by the respondents. This is a phenomenological study that is conceptualized in terms of Social Constructivism based on the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms (Leatherman 2007).

## OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

### Negative Attitudes Towards Inclusion

Q. How do you manage your diverse class in order to make sure that there is equal opportunity for all?

Teacher A: *What can I do? There are no resources and I only do what I can. They bring in children with disabilities as if the school is just a dumping ground. There is nothing you can do to help these children because they themselves already have attitude as if we are the cause of disability.*

From the response of teacher 'A', one can say that most teachers have a negative attitude towards learners with special needs. There is stigmatization as well as some of the teachers



feel that learners with disabilities are not worth attending schools. Some of these teachers are even clueless of inclusive education and so it should be a miracle for them to contribute anything towards inclusion.

Teacher F: *I do the best that I can since the government does not provide resources to cater for these learners. All I do is to make them comfortable with the other learners. If a learner with hearing problem is in the class, there isn't much I can do to change the situation since there is no hearing aid. But I should also say that these learners deserve better and should not be thrown into our school without resources.*

Although teacher 'F' has a positive attitude towards learners with disabilities, there is justifiable evidence that the teacher is not aware of inclusive education. This is elicited in "*these learners deserve better and should not be thrown into our school without resources.*" One thing that comes out clearly is the fact that average schools are far from being ready to accommodate learners with special needs.

It is therefore evident that teachers are the prime agents of change in societies in which they offer their services and therefore the successful implementation of the inclusion policy rests upon teacher's change of attitude towards it. In view of this, Gwala (2008) asserts that when the attitudes are not positive, more damage than good may be done. Teachers' negative attitudes can be traced in the following areas. Teachers avoiding dealing with diversity in their classroom according to a philosophy of inclusion in which the focus is on addressing the needs of the learners. Some teachers develop negative attitudes towards inclusion because they do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to assist them in implementing the policy with confidence (Gwala 2008). It would be thus unfair to blame teachers for their reluctance and negative attitude when they challenge systemic and it has to be dealt with as such by the Department of Education (DoE).

### Learning Styles

Question: *How do you teach in your class to make sure that learners with disabilities are not left out?*

Teacher G: *All I know is that all learners are the same. When I teach, I make sure that everyone follows so that by the end of the lesson, no learner should say I did not understand.*

This is evidence that teachers' style of teaching does not accommodate learners with special needs. It is justified here that teachers are not even trained to handle inclusion and therefore there is no way one can expect them to be cognisant of the fact that they need to change their learning styles and teaching strategies to accommodate learners with special need.

In this light, Learning Styles in identifying learners who experience barriers to learning is seen as needful because the issue of the acceptance and the accommodation of the learners' differences is the centrepiece of inclusive and training system in South African inclusive education policy (DoE 2001: 9). Some of the values advocated in this policy include the acknowledgement that all children and youths need support to learn. The acceptance that all learners are different and have different learning needs which are equally valued as ordinary part of human experience. Learners should be empowered to develop their individual strengths and be allowed to participate critically in the process of learning. While the learning style approach is useful in identifying learners who experience barriers to learning, it can be more useful when teachers focus more on the learners' strengths than weaknesses in order to provide support. However, higher teacher-learner ratios in rural classrooms can make teachers' work more difficult because it may not always be easy for all teachers to discover the strengths of individual learners.

The DoE (Republic of South Africa 2006: 67) states that in applying teaching methods educators should bear in mind that there is no single classroom in which all learners will be exactly the same or learn in the same way and at the same pace. As a result, they must be creative in the use of a variety of teaching methods to reach out all the learners. They should be able to identify different methods being used in teaching inclusive classrooms, such as storytelling, songs, rhymes, dramatisation, learning through play as well as questions and answers.

### Lack of Parental Recognition and Involvement

Question: *What lack of support for the learners did you just refer to in the previous response?*

Teacher D: *Parental support of course. The parents do not give the necessary support to*

*their kids. The only way that they can appreciate the efforts made by the teachers is to blame them for not performing God's miracles. In as much as there are no resources available for learners with special needs, we as teachers do our best but the parents also need to come in to finish their part.*

There is justifiable evidence that parents also have a role to play in inclusion, but they only play the blame game. In fact, the problem should not be with a teacher alone, but also that of the school, the community, the government and everyone else. Inclusion can only become a reality if all the stakeholders give their maximum support.

Managing an inclusive classroom without parental involvement and support is practically impossible as parents are the learners' primary caregivers. When parents take a back seat in the education of their children effective learning is threatened and hindered. The Department of Education (2002: 140) rightly predicted that if parents are not encouraged to be involved in their children's education and not empowered and enlightened as to what is expected of them, they will definitely lack interest in supporting educators to achieve their goals. Engelbrecht et al. (2003: 42) viewed parental involvement from a different angle when they stated that lack of parental involvement is often related to social issues, for instance, parents who are illiterate, have HIV/AIDS, abuse alcohol, are poor and unemployed and those who are ashamed of their children with disabilities. It is without doubt that all these matters can cause barriers to learning and development.

Engelbrecht et al. (1999: 55) endorse the fact that the new policies and legislations in South Africa supports support the optimal involvement of parents in the education of their children and these policies emphasise that parents must be involved in the process of identifying barriers and means to overcome them. Further, they maintain that parents can play a major role in providing an extra hand where teachers need additional support in the school or classroom. Parents are also responsible for developing local school policy and governing the school as it would suit their communities. The Department of Education (2002: 140) is convinced that if parents and the community at large could be well informed about their importance in this course of action, they would become involved and take full responsibility to support their children.

## CONCLUSION

Inclusive education challenges the assumption that most people have about the purpose of education and the process of education and teaching. It is much more than merely changing the curriculum. In view of this, the need for educators to have an opportunity to learn, reflect and discover new ways of thinking and acting is important. For the successful management of inclusive education, educators need to be supported in the development of new skills and effective practices for their classrooms and their schools.

Actually, emphasis should be placed on examining effective teaching strategies, skills and knowledge on how to address or remove barriers that learners encounter in learning. All these efforts are made to assist educators in their striving to increase academic performance and to promote the social skills of all learners. Local as well as international sources are consulted in order to get a broad perspective of the issues involved in inclusive education.

Any school is a unique environment where many elements interact forming the day-to-day functioning of the educational environment. It is for this reason that this study is so important and fascinating – it provides a perspective into the workings of a school that is trying to move towards being more inclusive. In view of this, the development of inclusive education, both internationally and in South Africa is important if not indispensable because change is required in order to do away with stigmatisation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Educators need to ensure that all learners need to be accommodated in teaching and learning. Differentiated teaching, scaffolding of assessment standards, lesson plans and activities must be provided to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all learners. Even if the development of full service schools is still a working process in South Africa, the findings indicate that teaching and learning addresses diversity.

The study therefore recommends that educators need some training and development before they can be competent enough to identify learners with teaching barriers. The schools also need to be resourced before they can meet the level of inclusion

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