Educators' Views on Management Practices in the Implementation of Inclusive Education: An Ecosystemic Approach

Rantsie Jeremiah Kgothule[1] and Johnnie Hay[2]

[1]*University of the Free State University, Qwaqwa campus, School of Education Studies, Faculty of Education, Phuthaditjhaba, P.O Box X13, Free State, Republic of South Africa 9866*
E-mail: kgothulerj@qwa.ufs.ac.za
[2]*University of the Free State, Bloemfontein Campus, Faculty of Education, P O Box 339, Bloemfontein, Free State, Republic of South Africa 9300*
E-mail: Hayjf.@ufs.ac.za

ABSTRACT South Africa, like many developed and developing countries, has adopted a policy of inclusive education, where all learners experiencing barriers to learning for various reasons, such as ineffective learning ecology, are included as far as possible. This article presents educators' knowledge and views of evolving inclusive management practices. A brief overview of inclusive education policy, the management of inclusive education and evolving inclusive management practices is followed by the results of the survey. Members of School Management Teams (SMTs) and teachers in primary and secondary schools in the five Free State districts responded to a questionnaire. It was found that SMTs have made good strides overall in terms of the management of inclusive learning ecology and the mobilisation of resources. Nevertheless, much more needs to be done in terms of changing teachers' perceptions regarding inclusion and the role they need to play in implementing inclusive practices.

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of a new constitution in South Africa in 1994, together with the introduction of a range of new education legislation and policies provide a framework for creating a sustainable learning ecology, recognising diversity and providing quality education for all learners, including those excluded by the previous system (Department of Education (DoE) 1997; Engelbrecht et al. 2001). The DoE (2009a) re-emphasises that Section 5 of the South African Schools Act (Act 79 of 1996) makes provision for all schools to be full-service schools by stating that public schools must admit learners and serve their educational needs without unfair discrimination. Siemens (2003) stresses that these goals can be achieved only if a learning ecology or an environment that is consistent with how learners learn, is created.

The appointment of the National Commission on Special Needs Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Commission on Education Support Services (NCESS) by the Ministry of Education in 1996, supported by the development of the Index for Inclusion in 2000 (Booth et al. 2000), as well as the release of the Education White Paper No. 6: Special Needs

Education (2001), are indicative of the fact that South Africa's work on creating inclusive education began more than a decade ago. However, it seems that SMTs have not yet been equipped with knowledge and teachers have not been put into real situation where inclusive education takes place in order to ascertain whether they can implement inclusive practices. Winter (2007) states that a growing number of authors are calling for professional preparation approaches that better prepare principals and teachers for the diversity of today's classrooms. Inclusive education in South Africa is envisaged as an integrated education system involving: special schools; regular schools; partnerships with stakeholders from the health and social development sectors; and allows for pathways to all levels of education, as well as all types of provision (Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) 2008). It therefore complements the more inclusive education which is implemented in South African schools.

The Index for Inclusion (Booth et al. 2000) predominantly developed in the United Kingdom, but now is utilised internationally, is a valuable tool for creating inclusive learning ecology and implementing inclusive education. The Index highlights three dimensions used to ensure

the successful implementation of inclusive education: creating inclusive cultures; producing inclusive policies; and evolving inclusive practices. Through the process of addressing each of these dimensions meticulously, individual school communities are able to empower themselves in creating the type of inclusive education that is effective in their contexts and of benefit to their particular learners (Corbett 2005). Therefore, if inclusion is to be comprehensively and efficiently implemented, school principals and teachers' views and knowledge regarding emerging inclusive practices should be established and developed.

This article aims to report on the level of knowledge of SMT members and on teachers' views regarding evolving inclusive management practices in an inclusive ecology.

The theoretical part of this article discusses inclusive education policy, the management of inclusive education within the educational management and leadership context, as well as intended and evolving inclusive practices. The empirical section will, among other things, highlight the results obtained from the questionnaire and a discussion of these results.

Inclusive Education Policy

The Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution (1996) addresses issues of national importance, whereas policies on, for example, school discipline, may address issues of local significance. Some policies change over time to reflect current thinking, while others are more stable because they articulate basic beliefs or rights. With the new dispensation in South Africa, the Ministry of Education has declared that official policy in education has changed and is clear about inclusive education. This system of education involves the changing of school cultures and ecology that are deeply embedded in exclusionary beliefs and values that need to be eradicated (Ministry of Education 2009).

Inclusive education policy corresponds to various approaches to school management and curriculum development currently being promoted. It is also consistent with the move towards a school-based management approach outlined in the South African Schools Act, where the capacity of schools and other education institutions are developed so that they can take responsibility for managing themselves and re-

sponding to local needs. Inclusive policy supports the idea of responding to the diverse needs of the learner population in flexible ways (DoE 2005). The emphasis is redirected therefore, to promoting the learning of any child who might experience difficulties in the school context, rather than focusing on traditional categories of children that have been defined as having special educational needs (Messiou 2012).

Inclusive education policy is significant because it informs the creation of ecology for inclusiveness, in order to ensure quality education for all. It points to developing a renewed understanding with regard to managing diversity, individual differences, learning leadership, and 'inclusion'; none of which denies disability or the psychology of personal growth (Rayner 2007).

Management of Inclusive Education within the Context of Educational Management and Leadership

The DoE (2000) states that since the 1994 elections, the idea of what it means to be a school leader has changed. The present policy encourages a team approach with the formation of an SMT which comprises the principal, deputy principal and heads of department. Thus, it involves changes on many different levels, from policy and structural levels, partnership to the level of school leadership (Strogilos 2012). Against this background, the functions of inclusive school leaders are subsequently addressed. These functions relate closely to the three dimensions of the Index for Inclusion, namely: creating inclusive cultures; producing inclusive policies; and evolving inclusive practices.

The conceptualisation of leadership articulated by Mitchell (2008) challenges the notion of heroic leaders in school reform, arguing instead that the following leadership roles need to be implemented in a school to bring about an inclusive culture.

Providing and Selling a Vision

Kouzes and Posner (in Mui 2008) define a vision as "an ideal and unique image of the future". Mui (2008) further states that a vision is important for an organisation and it is only effective if people therein share and agree with it. A vision should be held by leaders (SMT) and

the group (staff members). McKenna and Maister (in Leaming 2007) indicate that the key point is to get people enthused, excited and energised.

The SMT members may play a crucial role in promoting a vision by ensuring that the inclusion process is included as a point of discussion in most of the staff meetings. Mitchell (2008) asserts that endorsing a vision involves defining the philosophy and goals and promulgating them wherever possible; for example, in school publications, by talking to parents and the community, as well as in casual conversation. A conclusion suggested by the DoE (2009a) is that the principal, together with his/her management team should communicate unambiguously to staff members the expectation to establish the school as an inclusive ecological centre for learning, care and support.

Obtaining Resources

Mitchell (2008) indicates that obtaining resources is one of the many important functions of the SMT, since a key barrier to the successful creation of ecology for inclusion is the lack of appropriate resources.

The DoE (2009a) points out that physical facilities and material resources, as well as accessibility, are important in reaching the goals of effective implementation in the educational system. With reference to physical resources, the DoE (2009a) makes it clear that the function of SMT members is to carry out a full-access audit of the building and school grounds and to ensure that:

 * the school has enough accessible classrooms for the recommended teacher: learner ratio; and
 * the school has adequate toilet facilities for learners and educators, including at least one toilet that is accessible for a person using a wheelchair.

Material resources are also important in enabling educators to effectively include learners in the lessons. However, in many cases, material to enable the inclusion of learners with disabilities is a cause for concern. The school leadership therefore, has to establish on-going contact with the provincial education department which provides some of the relevant assistance and material. This relationship is ensured by assigning to the District-Based Support Team (DBST) the responsibility of coordinating and integrating the services of resource centres into a comprehensive community-based support system (OECD 2008). The function of the SMT members is to advocate for adequate resources to be brought into the school and ensure that they are equitably distributed.

Adapting Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Mitchell (2008) is of the view that adapting SOPs as a function of school leaders constrains reform efforts. This function means changing the formal structures for learners who experience barriers to learning, thus making alterations to learning ecology to accommodate inclusion at both programmatic and individual levels.

One way of converting formal structures may be to put in place participatory structures which will promote inclusive education through training, curriculum delivery, distributing resources, identifying and addressing barriers to learning, leadership and general management. The task of SMTs, according to the DoE (2008) is to ensure that Institutional-Level Support Teams (ILSTs) are established, the primary function of which is to coordinate school, learner and educator support services.

With regard to the curriculum, the DoE (2009b) points out that the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) adopts an inclusive approach, specifying the minimum requirements for all learners. The special educational, social, emotional and physical needs of learners are addressed in the design and development of appropriate learning programmes and ecology.

Lastly, regarding adapting SOPs, is the issue of assessment. The DoE (2009b) maintains that the ILSTs and SMTs of school leadership should include determining which learners should have access to adaptive methods of assessment and specialised programmes. SMTs have a mammoth, yet achievable task of ensuring that adaptive assessments are in line with the Policy and Adaptations for Learners who Experience Barriers in Assessment. This would include staff identified to coordinate and manage the procedures and equipment needed (DoE 2009a).

Monitoring Improvement Effort

This task does not accept leaders to simply 'do good', but accept leaders who show that

what they are doing is having a positive impact on learners' achievements (Mitchell 2008).

Ryan (2006) avers that SMTs need to be involved in questioning what it is that they are doing from a perspective of how their agenda fits with the view of what constitutes a just, learning ecology and inclusive society. The DoE (2002) states that it is useful to include references to individuals or groups who are responsible for carrying out certain tasks so that 'everybody's business' will not become 'nobody's business'. On-going monitoring can also indicate whether the process of effective inclusion is not unfolding as anticipated and this might result in revising or revisiting the plan.

As Gibson and Blandford (2005) advise, once a collegial approach to policy development, monitoring and evaluation has been adopted, the school community can move forward with confidence.

Managing Conflict

One leadership function for inclusion is the managing of conflict and other disturbances from both inside and outside the learning ecological influences of the school. This is necessary because inclusive education is rarely a settled and agreed upon policy in any school; therefore, overt and covert resistance has to be managed (Mitchell 2008). Capobianco et al. (in Runde and Flanagan 2007) define conflict as any situation in which people have incompatible interests, goals, principles or feelings. These authors also caution that this definition encompasses many different situations and ecologies, as do a leader's role and responsibilities. The conflict we refer to in this study, is one which may occur when changes during the implementation of inclusive education takes place.

Evolving Inclusive Practices

This dimension of inclusive practices is explained by Booth et al. (2000) as being concerned with ensuring that classroom and extracurricular activities encourage the participation of all learners, in addition to drawing on their knowledge and experiences outside the school. During the development of inclusive practices, teaching and support are integrated in the orchestration of learning; thus, barriers to learning and participation are overcome. Staff mem-

bers should also mobilise resources within the school and the local communities to sustain active learning for all. Crucial sections of this dimension, such as orchestrating learning and mobilising resources that ensure the implementation of inclusive practices should be emphasised. The following indicators, according to Booth et al. (2000), demonstrate learning that is effectively orchestrated for an inclusive learning ecology:
- Lessons are responsive to learning diversity;
- Learners are actively involved in their own learning;
- Learners learn collaboratively;
- Assessment encourages the achievements of all learners;
- Classroom discipline is based on mutual respect;
- Educators plan, review and teach in partnership;
- Teachers actively support learning and participation; and
- All learners take part in activities outside the classroom.

Indicators for Mobilising Resources

These are as follows:
- Community resources are utilised;
- Staff expertise is fully exploited; and
- Learner differences are used as a resource for teaching.

When attention is paid to learning that is effectively orchestrated, the focus shifts to inclusive measures that move beyond the classroom walls to include the acquisition of learning support materials outside the physical environment of the classroom. As far as the mobilisation of resources is concerned, the DoE (2009a) suggests that the SMT should be proactive and constructive in facilitating relationships and support networks between the school, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), other government departments, staff members and parents/families with a view to addressing barriers to learning and teaching. The SMT should be aware of and access a wide range of resources to support educators and staff members in creating and sustaining inclusive schooling (DoE 2009a). With respect to the utilisation of staff expertise, attention will have to be given to optimising the expertise provided by health practi-

tioners, ranging from private medical and paramedical practitioners, such as psychologists and therapists, to primary health care workers employed by NGOs or Disabled People's Organisations (DoE 2008). Learners should also be made to realise that they have something unique to offer which should be seen as a resource in itself (DoE 2008).

METHODOLOGY

A literature study was undertaken to determine important inclusive practices when creating an inclusive learning ecology in the implementation of inclusive education. The views of teachers were established by means of a quantitative approach using a questionnaire and the data were summarised by utilising basic descriptive statistics.

The selection of the target groups involved random sampling of SMTs and convenience sampling of teachers. In the case of the SMT members, random sampling was preferred because 50 primary and 50 secondary schools were chosen randomly in the survey which dealt with knowledge, skills and opinion. A hundred questionnaires were sent to SMT members situated in the 5 Free State education district. It was decided to obtain the same number of teachers as SMT members. Against the background of time and financial constraints, the researchers used convenience sampling by personally distributing 50 questionnaires to teachers in two Free State education districts which were in close proximity. No specific selection of schools was undertaken. As Gomm (2009) states, samples made up of the people (in this case the teachers) were selected on the basis of being conveniently available to researchers. The emphasis on the anonymity of the respondents, assisted in maintaining confidentiality and trustworthiness between respondents and researchers.

Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation of Results

The questionnaire was utilised as the data collection instrument. In an attempt to establish educators' knowledge of inclusive practices, the researchers used indicators identified by Booth et al. (2000) in the Index for Inclusion. Indicators ensuring the orchestration of learning (Statements 1-8) and those ascertaining the mobilisa-

tion of resources (Statements 9-11) were used as basis for developing a questionnaire. Initially, a survey on the knowledge, skills and views of SMT members in the management of these two sets of indicators in schools was conducted. The developed questionnaire was distributed on a random basis to 50 primary and 50 secondary schools in the 5 Free State Province districts. The questionnaires, one for each school, were sent via the post to the principals. Questionnaires had to be completed by either the principal, deputy principal or head of department. After the follow-up, a response rate of 50% was attained. This was followed by distributing a further 50 questionnaires to teachers to survey their views and knowledge on the same subject, where a total of 45 responses were received. The views of teachers had to be established because SMTs responses and the impression they created were that the implementation of inclusive education in schools was effective. Responses were interpreted on a reduced 3-point Likert scale. This was done after numbers 1 and 2 (strongly disagree and disagree) were combined to indicate disagreement; whereas numbers 4 and 5 (agree and strongly agree) were combined to indicate agreement with the statement.

The fact that a questionnaire containing closed-ended questions was constructed and was based on the Index for Inclusion and the fact that the questionnaire was pilot-tested beforehand increased the reliability of the questionnaire. Threats to external validity, such as the characteristics of subjects, were counteracted by random selection (that is, irrespective of whether the school was under-resourced or well-resourced).

The major type of descriptive statistics employed was measures of central tendency. According to Gay (1992), measures of central tendency give the researcher a convenient way of describing a set of data with a single number. The number resulting from the computation of a measure of central tendency represents the average or typical score attained by a group of subjects. Gay opines that the three most frequently encountered indices of central tendency are the mode, the median and the mean. For the purpose of this article, the researchers used the mean for ratio or interval data. Gomm (2009) agrees that the mean is the most usual and useful measure of central tendency. Educators' answers regarding inclusive management practic-

es were then scored from 1 to 3 and a measure of the respondents' views/opinions was produced.

RESULTS

The results of the educators' knowledge regarding two sections of inclusive management practices that is, practices ensuring the orchestration of learning, and practices referring to the mobilisation of resources are presented in this section.

The results of questions 1 to 11 of the questionnaire are summarised in Table 1. A summary of responses from statements of the questionnaire will be dealt with as follows:

⬥ The number of respondents will be presented in two columns; for the SMTs and the teachers respectively; and
⬥ A combined interpretation from both groups of respondents will be provided in the discussion.

DISCUSSION

Inclusive education in South Africa is here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future and the policy has been developed from 1992 (with the initial National Education Policy Investigation report) to the NCSNET/NCESS report of 1997, as well as the White Paper on Special Needs Education of 2001: Building an inclusive education and training system. During the past few years, the DoE of South Africa has drawn up guidelines which show the country's commitment to inclusive education practices and full-service/inclusive schools and structures, such as SIAS, DBSTs and ILSTs have been put in place. It is now crucial to ensure that the implementation phase of inclusive education gains adequate momentum to make the progressive inclusive education policy a reality in classrooms around the country.

This study investigated the status of and perceptions demonstrated by SMTs and teachers with respect to evolving inclusive practices which, according to the Index for Inclusion, determines to a large extent, the success of the implementation of inclusive education.

Interesting conclusions may be drawn from the two sections of evolving inclusive practices.

Inclusive Management Practices Ensuring the Orchestration of Learning

SMT members are, on the whole, much more positive than teachers that various measures are taken and implemented to ensure the effective

Table 1: The results of 1-11 questions

Statements	S.M.T Percentages agree/agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree/disagree	Teachers percentage agree/agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree/disagree
1. Lessons are responsive to student diversity	38	11	1	24	10	11
2. Students are actively involved in their own learning	38	8	4	19	17	9
3. Students learn collaboratively	35	10	5	21	15	9
4. Assessment encourages the achievements of all students	45	4	1	26	13	9
5. Classroom discipline is based on mutual respect	31	8	11	31	8	6
6. Teachers plans, review and teach in partnership	45	5	-	26	10	9
7. Teachers support the learning and participation of all students	45	3	5	28	10	7
8. All students take part in activities outside the classroom	36	7	7	20	11	14
9. Community resources are known and drawn upon	22	16	12	21	8	16
10. Staff expertise is fully utilised	40	8	2	21	11	13
11. Student difference is used as a resource for teaching and learning	33	11	6	19	15	11

orchestration of learning for an inclusive environment. Of the eight statements dealing with the orchestration of learning, it is only with statement five that SMT members do not demonstrate sufficiently high levels of agreement, when compared with the agreement of teachers. Statement five deals with the fact that the SMT has the document encouraging classroom discipline based on mutual respect: 31 SMT members and 31 teachers agree/strongly agree; eight SMT members and eight teachers are neutral; whereas eleven SMT members and six teachers disagree/strongly disagree. It is evident that these mixed feelings regarding statement five may be due to issues such as very large numbers of learners in most classrooms, and the resultant effects on discipline issues. It also seems as if the DoE has not come up with alternative and acceptable disciplinary measures for learners who experience barriers to learning. Another factor which may have influenced the result to this indicator is a lack of empowerment of both SMTs and teachers in dealing with learners with barriers to learning in such large classes.

As far as the other seven statements are concerned, SMT members show a higher level of agreement than that of teachers.

* 76% agree/strongly agree that the SMT instituted a procedure to ensure that lessons are responsive to learner diversity; whereas only 53% teachers agree/strongly agree (statement1);
* 76% agree/strongly agree that the SMT has the guidelines that provide information on how learners can be actively involved in their own learning; whereas only 42% of teachers agree/strongly agree (statement 2). The provision of information by the SMT regarding this matter will address the dissatisfaction shown by some respondents;
* 70% agree/strongly agree that there are established guidelines set by the SMT to ensure that learners learn collaboratively; whereas only 42% of teachers agree/strongly agree (statement3). This means that school leaders should emphasise important strategies, such as cooperative learning among staff members to allay the fears shown by some participants;
* 90% of SMT members agree/strongly agree that a monitoring system has been implemented with respect to assessment; where-

as only 58% of teachers agree/strongly agree (statement 4). For the remaining few respondents who are neutral and in disagreement, training should take place regarding assessment that is more conscious of the holistic needs of the learner;
* 90% of SMT members agree/strongly agree that the SMT plays a coordinating role in ensuring that teachers plan, review and teach in partnership; only 58% of teachers agree/ strongly agree with this (statement 6);
· 90% agree/strongly agree that the SMT has a plan of action to ensure that all learners are supported in their learning; whereas only 62% of teachers agree/strongly agree (statement 7); and
* 72% agree/strongly agree that all learners take part in activities outside the classroom; whereas only 44% of teachers agree/strongly agree (statement 80).

In order to address disagreement and neutral views still held by some SMT members and teachers, educational leaders can, if necessary decide which activities are to be extended or phased out.

A possible explanation for the above discrepancies in perceptions is that SMTs have had more exposure to inclusive education policies and implementation, and that the communication to teachers has not been as effective as they had hoped. It may also be indicative of greater buy-in from SMT members to the implementation of inclusive education when compared with teachers who bear the brunt of the actual implementation. Another plausible explanation is that SMT members are more positive about management practices, since they are in management themselves.

Although the difference in the degree of positivity is important to note, it must be stated that the overall results with regard to practices for the orchestration of inclusive learning provide reasons for optimism in all instances. The majority (though it may be a small majority, in some instances) of SMT members and teachers agree that certain practices have been instituted to promote inclusivity in schools. This optimism is, of course, tempered by a relatively substantial number of teachers who apparently have not perceived these practices at ground level, or have perhaps not tried to implement them themselves, despite the possible existence of implementable practices.

Inclusive Management Practices Ensure the Mobilisation of Resources

The same general trend as in the previous section is detected in the three statements dealing with practices to ensure the effective mobilisation of resources. SMT members express higher levels of agreement with the statements than do teachers. Overall, they are more positive that certain measures have been taken to mobilise resources for inclusive education. It is only with regard to the first (statement 9) of the three statements that perceptions are reasonably similar:

* 44% of SMT members agree that the school leadership arranges regular meetings with community members to draw upon community resources; 32% of teachers agree/ strongly agree; 18% are neutral; and 36% are in disagreement. This means that an education system should be community-responsive to encourage the involvement of community members thereby probably addressing the negative perceptions shown by some respondents.

The other two statements (statements 10 and 11) clearly reflect the more positive perception of the SMT members:

* 80% of SMT members agree/strongly agree that school leadership creates an environment where staff expertise is fully utilised; whereas only 47% of teachers think the same way; and
* 66% of SMT members agree/strongly agree that learner differences are used as a resource for teaching; whereas only 42% of teachers agree/strongly agree with the sentiment.

The same possible explanations as with the previous section are applicable in this instance. It can once again be deduced that the majority of respondents seem to be optimistic that inclusive practices have been instituted and are being implemented to ensure the effective mobilisation of resources. In the case of teachers, the majority is very small for all three statements; nevertheless, it tends towards the positive side.

In summary, it can be stated that SMT members and teachers have already initiated evolving inclusive practices as described in the Index for Inclusion (Booth et al. 2000) to ensure the orchestration of inclusive learning and the mobilisation of resources. SMT members view the progress as being much more advanced than teachers do, as well as being more positively inclined towards these practices. A slight of majority of teachers are in agreement that these practices are implemented, but a large number do not share the sentiment that these practices are implemented and working.

CONCLUSION

As shown by empirical investigation, the majority of educators (SMT members and teachers) agree that evolving inclusive practices are significant for the effective inclusion in schools. The results, however, reveal that much still needs to be done to especially support classroom teachers with the implementation and creation of a sustainable inclusive ecology. It means SMTs need to manage the process even more efficiently and effectively, in order for teachers to become more positive.

An important positive finding from this study is that the Index for Inclusion seems to provide an essential structure to the further empowerment of SMT members and teachers in terms of managing the implementation of inclusive education. There is evidence from our investigation of mixed feelings regarding management practices. The SMTs seem to have relevant knowledge and skills, but views held by teachers are that some of these are not yet being put into practice. This means that the DoE, has a difficult, yet achievable task of ensuring that learning ecology facilitates the implementation of inclusive education in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the theoretical and empirical study undertaken, the following recommendations are suggested:

Preparatory Inclusive Training for Initial Student Teachers: Teacher education during initial teacher training should include relevant inclusive education policy knowledge and implementation skills to ensure that confident, competent, skilful and qualified educators enter the inclusive classroom. A focus on evolving inclusive practices, such as those described in the Index for Inclusion would go a far way in preparing educators adequately for the challenge ahead.

Regular Workshops on Inclusive Classroom Practices for In-service Training (INSET)

Teachers: Current teachers are the real implementers of inclusive education and as such, they will have to be supported and trained continuously. It may be advisable to utilise the three dimensions of the Index for Inclusion as a starting point; namely, creating inclusive ecology and cultures, producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive practices. This framework should, if conveyed correctly, ensure ownership of the process of inclusive education by teachers.

Empowerment of SMT Members: The implementation of inclusive education will most likely stand or fall by the management of the process. In this regard, the school leadership probably is the crucial management link in the bigger chain of management processes. SMT members will have to be empowered to create inclusive cultures in their schools; will have to develop inclusive policies for the school (if not in place already); and will have to manage the evolving inclusive practices as efficiently as possible. Workshops held for SMTs should not only emphasise theory, but practical skills as well. From the empirical research it is clear that inadequate communication may explain the gap between the perceptions of SMT members and teachers; this will have to be improved.

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