

The State of Inclusion in One South African Primary School: Evidence from the School Principal

Rosemary Chimbala Kalenga¹ and Vitallis Chikoko²

University of KwaZulu-Natal, P. Bag X 03 Ashwood 3605, Republic of South Africa
¹Telephone: +27 31 260 3175, Fax: +27 31 260 7003, Email: Kalenga@ukzn.ac.za
²Telephone: +27 31 260 2639, Fax: +27 31 260 7003, Email: chikokov@ukzn.ac.za

KEYWORDS Inclusive Education. Transformational Leadership. Asset-Based Approach. Zone of Possibilities. Zone of Impossibilities

ABSTRACT While South Africa has adopted the policy of inclusive education, the researchers' interaction with teachers and school managers suggested that schools face many barriers in this regard. This paper seeks to examine the state of inclusivity in one South African primary school from the point of view of the school principal's experiences of inclusion therein. The researchers purposively selected the school on two bases namely the presence of learners with special learning needs therein and its accessibility to them. The principal expressed willingness to share his experiences with the researchers. Through a case study research design, the researchers conducted a two-part semi-structured interview with the principal. In the first part they investigated the school's biographical information to do with inclusivity. The second part involved the principal's perspectives on how the school fared regarding addressing barriers to achieving inclusivity. The main findings include that the principal felt the school was not coping with implementing the inclusive education policy. He blamed education authorities for lack of support, and major barriers included lack of qualified staff, unsuitable infrastructure and a dearth of relevant equipment. The researchers conclude that all changes in a school will succeed or fail depending on the quality of leadership therein, hence the focus on the principal. The researchers foreground the asset based approach as an ideal lens through which to consider how a school can address its own challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Policy and legislation pertaining to special needs education in South Africa are founded on the Bill of Rights, the South African Schools Act and White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education (Department of Education 2001). At the international level, South Africa is signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Smart 2003). The inclusive education policy, as propounded in White Paper 6 (Department of Education 2001), is founded on Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the League of Nations (now United Nations) in 1945. These pieces of legislation and policies stress the principles of human rights, social justice, quality education for all, the right to a basic education for all, equality of opportunity, and in the case of South Africa in particular, redressing of past educational inequalities.

The inclusive education policy in particular proclaims the right of every human being to an appropriate education regardless of gender, disability, race, socio-economic background, colour, religion, etc. Thus, White Paper 6 was born out of the need to change the provision of education and training to be responsive and sensitive

to the diverse range of learning needs including poverty. One of the most important developments to come out of the policies and legislation reported above seems to have been the emerging shift from the notion of learners with special needs to that of identifying barriers to learning and participation, and the recommendation for a community-based inclusive education policy. Therefore, South African schools are called upon to transform and become non-discriminatory in character. In other words, they must change. However, policy makers may craft very useful education policies but if schools do not equip and commit themselves to owning the implementation of such policies, the much called-for transformation will remain a pipe dream.

In a study on teachers' experiences of the progress of inclusive education in South Africa, Ntombela (2011) found that the teachers consulted had little experience of inclusive education, limited knowledge and understanding of the policy on inclusive education and were therefore not ready to implement this policy. This seems to implicate the quality of leadership in schools. In another study Ntombela (2010) identifies three important conditions necessary for successful implementation of inclusive education in South Africa: teachers' professional de-

velopment and support; school development and support; and the development of the entire education system. A key question that arises from these studies relates to who within a school is the key to making all these things happen? Literature (such as Ebersohn and Eloff 2006) suggests that the school principal is a key factor in the school's change agenda. But are South African schools transforming accordingly? Are the school principals driving the transformation agenda? One of the school principal's major roles should be to provide leadership and guidance in supporting processes of change. Many a time schools have blamed for their failures a lack of resources, absence of external support, lack of knowledge and skills, and many other deficiencies. But there exists an alternative to this latter model, namely the asset-based approach where instead of being preoccupied with what is lacking, an individual, organisation or community seeks to tackle its own problems drawing on possible solutions from within. Thus the researchers' objective in this study was to: investigate if schools viewed themselves as endowed with potential abilities (assets) to address some of their own challenges including achieving inclusivity and determine whether the school principal approached his/her job from asset-based thinking.

Background

Still on the policy framework guiding inclusive education in South Africa, White Paper 6 (Department of Education 2001) proposes a progressive and realistic implementation strategy for a period of 20 years. The 20 years have been broken down into three phases. The immediate to short-term phase was to take place from 2001 to 2003. The medium-term was to happen from 2004 to 2008 and the long-term from 2009 to 2021. Short-term strategies (2001-2003) entailed the implementation of the national advocacy and education programme on inclusive education (Department of Education 2001). This involved planning and implementing a targeted outreach programme starting in Government's rural and urban development nodes to mobilise disabled out-of-school learners and youth. Thirty special schools in selected districts were to be converted into special school resource centres. On a progressive basis, systems and procedures were to be established in order to help with the

identification and addressing of learning barriers in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) (Department of Education 2001). With regard to medium-term strategies stretching from 2004 to 2008, further education and training and higher education institutions were to transform so that they could be able to recognise and address the diverse range of learning needs, especially those of disabled learners (Department of Education 2001). The targeted community outreach programme from the base of Government's rural and urban development nodes were to be expanded to include special schools/resource centres, full-service schools and district support teams (Department of Education 2001). The long-term strategies planned for the period 2009 to 2021 entail the expansion of the provision of inclusive education. The expectation is to reach a target of 380 special schools/resource centres, 500 full service schools and colleges and build district support teams (Department of Education 2001).

According to the implementation phases the described above, 2011, the year in which this paper was originally written is already part of the long-term phase that began in 2009 and ends in 2021. However, even before they interviewed their one research participant, the researchers' experience in many schools seemed to suggest that implementing the inclusive education policy was still bedeviled by many challenges. The National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) (Department of Education 1997) identified the following key barriers to learning that were deemed to negatively influence the implementation of inclusive education:

- ♦ Inadequate provisioning and organisation of education,
- ♦ Socio-economic factors,
- ♦ Attitudes,
- ♦ Inadequate and inappropriate assessment of needs,
- ♦ Inadequate institutional development,
- ♦ Inflexible curriculum,
- ♦ Language and communication,
- ♦ Nature and provisioning of support services,
- ♦ Inadequate and fragmented Human Resource Development.

It is necessary to report that the South African school education system is decentralised to some degree in that there are governance and

management decision-making structures at the school level. The School Governing Body (SGB) makes governance decisions in areas such as finance, language and policy, staff selection, and infrastructure development. The School Management Team (SMT) makes decisions on matters such as curriculum implementation, staff development, and staff performance appraisal. The decentralised nature of the education system requires that the individual school supplements the funding provided by government.

The preceding observations, including the identified long list of barriers seem to suggest that implementing inclusive education is a complex matter. In this light there is need to briefly examine the term 'inclusion' in the context of education to which the researchers now turn.

Literature Review

Understanding Inclusion in Education

In this paper, the researchers use the terms 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education' interchangeably. Inclusion refers to a participatory situation in which learners with disabilities are educated together with their non-disabled peers, with special education support and services being provided as necessary (Reddy 1999; Reid and Valle 2005). Inclusion or inclusive education involves the practice of including everyone in a social setting or in supportive general schools and classrooms where all learners' learning needs are met irrespective of talent, disability, socio-economic background, ethnicity or cultural origin (Visoky and Poe 2000). The agenda of inclusive education is concerned with overcoming barriers to social participation in learning that may be experienced by any learner (McCoy and Keyes 2002). Full inclusion means that all learners with disabilities would be educated with their non-disabled peers at all times as much as possible (Bauer and Brown 2001). Foreman et al. (2001) further indicate that full inclusion can only be realised in a unified education system, where all role-players work together and are supported in 'creating' an environment that meets the diverse learning needs of every learner. Inclusion is therefore a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual in society to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition

and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefit of citizenship. Inclusion, therefore, means enhancing the well-being of every member of a community (Montgomery 2001).

Coming to education, the belief behind inclusion is that although it focuses on marginalised groups, it increases the effectiveness of the system in responding to all learners. Therefore inclusion in this context is dependent on continuous educational and organisational developments within the mainstream system of education. Inclusion would therefore involve an understanding of systemic change, and an ecological conceptualisation of learning and of the school as an organisation. This would mean a need to engage with social, economic, political, environmental and other factors that affect centres of learning (Corbett 2001). Thus, this requires leadership that understands the necessary transformations that need to take place in the environment in which they operate. Therefore transformational leadership is necessary in achieving inclusivity in education.

Understanding Transformational Leadership

Leithwood and Jantzi (2009:38) rightly characterise transformational leadership as follows:

All transformational approaches to leadership emphasize emotions and values, and share in common the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational aims on the part of the leader's colleagues. Increased capacities and commitments are assumed to result in extra effort and greater productivity.

Sergiovanni cited by Coleman (2003:162) says transformational leadership (as it relates to schools) is occurring when:

Leaders and followers are united in pursuit of higher-level goals common to both. Both want to become the best, both want to shape the school in a new direction.

From this literature (Coleman 2003; Leithwood and Jantzi 2009) the researchers view transformational leadership as it relates to schools to mean that type of leadership in which organisation members are helped and in turn help one another to develop and sustain a professional school culture that drives the school to higher levels of goal achievement, where staff is continually developed, and through which mem-

bers are helped to solve problems collaboratively and more effectively.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) his colleagues provide what so far appears to be the most fully developed model of transformational leadership for schools. The model comprises the following: setting directions; developing people; and re-designing the organization. The researchers briefly examine each of these below.

Setting directions entails helping organisation members to develop shared understanding about the school, what and how it seeks to achieve its goals. Shared goals help people to find meaning in their work. It enables them to develop a sense of belonging, a sense of identity within their work context. Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) rightly say that specific practices such as articulating a vision, fostering group acceptance and setting high-performance expectations help to set the desired direction of the school. 'Visioning and establishing purpose —are enhanced by monitoring organizational performance and promoting effective communication', (Bennis and Nanus cited by Leithwood and Jantzi, 2009:47).

The second part is to do with developing people. Staff need capacity to enable them productively move in the direction desired by the organisation. According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2009), such capacities are influenced by the nature of the relationship between members and those in leadership roles as well as the broader organisational context. With regard to a school, leaders must have knowledge about what improving teaching and learning would entail. They must offer intellectual stimulation, provide individualised support and serve as role models.

Thirdly, transformational leadership is also about creating school conditions that support and sustain high performance by all stakeholders: leaders, teachers, learners and support staff. This emphasises the importance of collective working and learning or the building of learning communities. A school's structure must therefore be malleable enough to be able to match its changing or improvement agenda. Examples of specific practices to achieve this would include fostering culture-building, participatory decision-making as well as on-going refinement of routine and non-routine administrative activities (Leithwood and Jantzi 2009).

The researchers argue in this paper that every organisation, the school included, has some internal resources (assets) that it can bring to bear in the process of attempting to transform. Below we examine this asset-based approach as the theoretical framework of the study.

Theoretical Framework

The researchers adopted the asset-based model. This approach (here the researchers use the terms 'approach' and 'model' interchangeably) advocates the development and empowerment of communities from inside out (Kretzman and McKnight 1993). It is informed by the 'belief that all individuals, families and learning contexts have capacities, skills, resources and assets that they may develop to become people who are able to solve problems in a variety of contexts' (Khanare 2009:34). The approach sees the starting point to addressing a group of people's problems as lying in what actually exists and works within that community. It views the glass as being half full as opposed to half empty (Mourad and Ways 1998). The belief is that even in the poorest of communities there exist some assets such as skills, resources, willingness and so on that can be harnessed in addressing problems there in. As rightly argued by Minkler (1997) and expressed by Khanare (2009:34) the 'asset-based approach provides opportunities for outsiders to walk with the community in its journey, rather than making the path or leading the group'.

Unlike the needs-based or deficiency model which emphasises a community's problems and incapacities, the asset-based approach seeks to focus on the possibilities (capacities, skills and social resources) that already exist, but which may have not yet been adequately tapped. The asset-based approach is inclusive in that it relies on the involvement of all stakeholders in collaborative decision making and open access to information (Ebersohn and Eloff 2006a). The approach is relationship driven (Khanare 2009). It is about recognising and appreciating people in a given community for what they know and are able to do. Further and more importantly, it is about approaching such people with trust in the course of engaging and helping them (Landsberg et al. 2005). The latter authors argue further that the term 'assets' is therefore very broad, including people and relationships as well as particular knowledge, expertise, services and fi-

financial means. Through collaboration, the asset-based approach advocates the mobilising of existing strengths and assets including empowering, appreciating and motivating stakeholders to offer their time, expertise and encouragement (Landsberg et al. cited by Khanare 2009).

In the context of this study, the researchers argue that the individual school should be viewed as possessing some assets that can be utilised in implementing the Inclusive Education policy. Schools should function as centres of care for all learners (Sayson and Meya 2001; Department of Education 2004; Ebersohn and Eloff 2006b). If the school is to achieve its new role as the locus for care and support for all learners- both the 'able' and the disabled, then it must engage itself in identifying and mobilising assets within itself as a system. A brief look at some examples of a school's assets is useful here. Leadership and management capacity in a school would serve as a good example of an asset in this regard (Ebersohn and Eloff 2006a). A school that develops such capacity across all its hierarchical levels is very likely to be able to address many of its challenges. The school principal plays a key role in such capacity development. Khanare (2009) rightly argues that a democratic leadership style that is inclusive and facilitative is an asset to the organisation concerned.

A second example, closely related to the preceding one relates to other human resources of the school (Khanare 2009). For example, teachers are a central pillar in any education system. Among all adults in society, teachers exert arguably the most influential impact on school-going children (Kelly 2000). One important aspect of the human resources asset base is interpersonal relationships across and beyond the power relations in the school (Ebersohn and Eloff 2006b). To illustrate, if teachers show willingness to assist all learners in the school regardless of whether or not they are disabled, such behaviour could have a positive and lasting effect on the learning and development of the learners involved. It is important to help every learner to develop a sense of self-worth, 'to dream and to start building a future (UNICEF cited by Khanare 2009:38). Teamwork would be an important human resource asset to achieve this. The third and last example relates to school infrastructure (Khanare 2009). A school's physi-

cal resources can be transformed and utilised to promote increased access to quality basic education for all children, among other things. As rightly argued by Khanare (2009), sports and recreation facilities for example, can be utilised fruitfully to keep all children in school. Overall, the school's infrastructure can be an asset that allows all learners to access knowledge, life skills, services, and grow in a safe and supportive environment. It has to be recognised that if schools are to retain their core integrity and viability as centres of learning, while also serving as places where children are provided with essential services, there must be improvement in the way schools are organised, supported and managed.

In the context of this paper, utilising the asset-based theoretical framework in attempting to implement the inclusive education policy implies a paradigm shift from deficit (in this case seeing the school as lacking), to asset-based thinking (harnessing and pulling together the school's assets such as cultural and physical resources, skills, abilities, networks and support systems) (Ferreira 2006). Consistent with the view to looking at schools from an asset-based approach, Cronje, the then KwaZulu-Natal Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) for Education has rightly argued that schools are often some of the strongest and most stable institutions for improving care to all children (Department of Education In: Khanare 2009).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was part of a bigger investigation on the implementation of the policy on Inclusive Education in South African schools. The smaller study the researchers report on here was a case study of the experiences of one school principal, Mr Mangena (pseudonym) regarding the implementation of the same policy in 'his' school- Vuka Primary School (pseudonym). Given the aim- seeking to understand the goings-on at the one school from the principal's point of view, the study was located within the interpretivist paradigm. The researchers purposively (Merriam 1998; Maxwell 2004) selected this one school on two grounds namely; it had children with special learning needs on its roll; and the principal had expressed willingness to share with the researchers his perspectives regarding the state of inclusion in the school. The researchers then sought permission from the authorities as well as informed consent from the principal.

The researchers collected data through a semi-structured interview. The interview was made up of two parts. In the first part the researchers sought biographical information about the school: enrolment; some information about learners with special needs; staffing; school infrastructure; and the general socio-economic status of the immediate community. Such information, the researchers thought, would help us understand the principal's experiences regarding inclusive education in the school. In the second and main part of the interview the researchers asked questions regarding how the principal felt Vuka Primary School fared with regard to addressing the barriers to learning and development as identified by the NCSNET and NCESS we quoted earlier in this paper. One of the researchers conducted the interview. It was held in the principal's office at an agreed-upon time. The interview lasted for one and half hours. With the principal's permission the researchers tape-recorded the proceedings and supplemented this with note-taking. Data were analysed in two phases. In Phase 1 the researchers categorised the data according to responses to the identified broad categories of barriers to learning. In Phase 2 the researchers disaggregated the data further according to specific issues the principal raised. The researchers ended up with six groupings of issues/themes as follows: Learners, resources, expertise; Human resource development; Assessment of needs, Class size; Infrastructure development, Poverty; Language; and Attitude. Each grouping comprised of what we found to be related matters. These groupings have guided the data presentation and discussion as presented below.

RESULTS

In this section the researchers begin by reporting briefly on the biographical information of Vuka School. After this the researchers move on to present what the principal had to say about inclusivity in the school according to the themes they identified above.

Vuka Primary School: Brief Biographical Information

Vuka Primary School is situated very near an informal settlement therefore it draws some of its learners there from. The school's enrolment

was approximately 1 300 learners. Class sizes ranged from 62 to 92 learners. This meant a scary average teacher-learner ratio of 1 to 77. There were 17 teachers including the principal. The principal had a Diploma in Education as his highest qualification. Of the 17 teachers, nine had a Diploma in Education qualification (currently considered a standard teacher's qualification at that level) and the rest had lower qualifications. Three of the nine teachers were pursuing a Bachelor of Education degree by distance education. The school had 17 classrooms. The classroom sizes were meant to accommodate 30 learners each but as the researchers have reported, they housed more than double that number. The learners sat anywhere in the classroom where they could find space. In the District there was only one special school, formally for white learners only. The school was the 'beacon of hope' for learners with special needs failure to which the District Education Office placed them in any mainstream school nearest to where they lived. Vuka was one such school. The researchers give some details of the special needs learners at Vuka School in the next section.

Inclusion at Vuka School: The Principal's 'Story'

The study's research question related to how the school principal experienced the state of inclusion in this school. In this regard, in this interview with the participant, learners, resources and expertise emerged as some of the key variables of inclusion hence the coming section.

Learners, Resources, and Expertise

The researchers asked the principal about the nature of learners with special learning needs at the school. In his response the principal was very quick to talk about resources:

Yes we get learners from the special school transferred to our school. But we do not yet have resources to implement Inclusive Education.

The researchers probed him further regarding the types of special learning needs at the school and he said:

We have a learner who cannot speak properly in Grade 5, and we wish that she could have a speech therapist at least once a week. We do not understand what she says. It is really

difficult. The other one cannot see properly, he is partially sighted. In our school, we do not have equipment to enlarge the print for him; he fails because he cannot see properly.

The researchers asked him if there were more types of special learning needs and he added:

We have learners causing disruptions in the classrooms, some cannot sit still for 5 minutes, they get up and do something stupid and none of the teachers are trained to deal with such learners.

Seeing that the principal had already touched on the issue of expertise, the researchers asked him to shed more light regarding the matter. Did it therefore mean the school was not doing anything to help these learners? This is what he had to say:

We have no skills to develop or adapt the curriculum to make it suitable for these learners. I know for sure that when I trained to be a teacher, I was trained for 'normal' children, for these learners nobody in my school knows what to do.

The principal also added:

The Inclusive Education document came without support services. We now sit with learners in schools, who need special services, but The Department of Education has no specialists for these services, provision of services is just on paper.

Human Resource Development

The researchers then asked Mr Mangena whether the staff development workshops they learnt the Department of Education had conducted were helpful. He responded as follows:

I sent teachers for a workshop on the Revised National Curriculum Statement. They reported that they had a session on Inclusive Education for about 30 minutes only. What are they supposed to achieve in 30 minutes of information on Inclusive Education? We cannot be serious about something they are not taking seriously themselves (Referring to Department of Education officials). They are very confused and after the workshop, we do not know what to do. Sometimes, the people who conduct workshops do not seem to know what they are talking about. So we go back to our schools and carry on like nothing happened.

After a pause he added:

No teacher can know how to adapt the curriculum after one workshop. For anybody to

do this to us is a great disservice. The Department of Education must do research about the effects of all these workshops that they are doing with us.

Assessment of Needs, Class Size

The researchers had learnt that an assessment of school needs had been done. They therefore asked Mr Mangena what he thought about that work in terms of assisting to achieve inclusion in the school and this is what he had to say:

The extent of social, economic, political and environmental factors affecting the schools makes it very difficult for the researchers assessing the situation in the schools to understand what is happening in our schools because they have not lived through our experiences, therefore their assessment is neither adequate nor appropriate.

To illustrate his argument he cited the problem of large classes Vuka School was experiencing. He said:

We have too many learners in each classroom. The smallest class we have has 62 learners, the others are about 92-95 learners per class. I do not think anybody will know so many names, let alone the learner needs. These teachers cannot even mark exercise books. They tell me that the learners are too many they cannot manage to mark them. I do not blame them, it is not possible.

Infrastructural Development and Poverty

The researchers asked what institutional development had occurred in the school since the 'birthing' of the Inclusive Education policy. Mr Mangena responded:

There has been no infrastructural development in line with Inclusive Education. I have been the principal for this school for about 10 years. No adjustments have been done to the buildings in terms of having ramps so that learners on wheelchairs can access the building, nothing!

The researchers asked why this was the case, and he replied:

We do not have money and there is nothing one can do without money. If the government does not give us money for building, I cannot even think that the parents can contribute anything, it is not possible. These people are very poor.

Adding to the issue of poverty, Mr Mangena said:

The Department (of Education) expects us to pull resources together in order to function effectively but the parents are too poor. When we fundraise, we ask for very little money like 20 cents but there are many learners who still bring nothing, and they tell us that they do not have the 20 cents.

Language

In search of something the principal would say was doable at Vuka School, The researchers asked if the school had adopted mother tongue teaching at least in the Foundation Phase, something research has proven should be the way forward and highly encouraged in the country's language policy. He answered:

The Sotho we speak is not the Sotho written in books, which is a problem for both learners and teachers. Most of the learners fail because of that. We code-switch between English and Sotho.

Attitude

In their concluding question the researchers asked Mr Mangena what his overall experience was about the welfare of learners with special education needs in the School and he had this to say:

We have many problems with these learners. They are very unruly. We do not want them here. They are making life very difficult for the teachers and the other learners too. Teachers are very frustrated because they do not know what to do with these learners who are failing everything. They are better-off in special schools otherwise here they are wasting time.

The researchers then asked the principal what he experienced as the relationship between learners with special needs and the others. He answered as follows:

Our learners are very keen to help those with special needs. We have not had major problems in that regard. In fact we see quite some strong friendships among learners regardless of special learning needs.

This response signalled to the researchers what appeared to be an asset or at least a potential one regarding the possibility of inclusive education in this school.

DISCUSSION

The data the researchers presented suggest that according to the principal, while the school was 'pregnant' with learners with special learning needs, the learning at Vuka School was not supportive of such learners. From the principal's perspective, barriers included lack of relevant human, material and physical resources, and no support from education authorities. These and other barriers to learning reported by Mr Mangena cannot be underestimated. The only major thing that had happened in the direction of inclusion was that learners with special needs had become part of this mainstream school's enrolment. If learning support is not provided as was reportedly the case at Vuka, regardless of who is to blame, the researchers see a danger that this otherwise noble and well-meaning policy on Inclusive Education in South African Schools may result in greater exclusion than what prevailed before its birth. Mainstream schools may become dumping sites for learners with special needs. Not only are learners likely to be more excluded, teachers and school managers in mainstream schools called upon to absorb learners with special needs are likely to resent their work environments due to a sense of hopelessness. Therefore a policy not well timed and supported may be a recipe for disaster.

In the literature review the researchers made evident the crucial role leadership must play in transforming an organisation. Quality leadership makes significant differences to schools and to learner outcomes (Bush 2007; McColl-Kennedy and Anderson 2002; Shields 2003; Fullan 2005; Wheatley 2006). Quality leadership would have entailed Mr Mangena the principal at Vuka School setting the direction, developing staff and redesigning (Leithwood and Jantzi 2009) the school with regard to the implementation of Inclusive Education. Instead, it seems that the principal pointed fingers at others especially the education authorities for lack of progress in implementing the inclusion policy. The researchers argue that finger-pointing is in itself a symptom of poor leadership. They argue further that the school principal tended to see challenges only at the expense of opportunities. Drawing from the asset-based approach, the principal seemed not to see any assets in and around the school. He was deficit-oriented and therefore pessimistic about the future of inclusion in the school.

Even if resources are made available in a school, as long as leadership therein is not transformative, the school may not move towards increased effectiveness and improvement. Quality leadership is therefore an asset in any organisation. The data the researchers obtained and presented do not show any attempts by the principal as a leader to transform Vuka School. They think that the principal was not necessarily incapable of effecting transformational leadership. Rather, he was in the researchers' view, of such orientation that he needed some external catalyst to trigger and mobilise the internal assets into action.

In schools, education officials would be well positioned to play the trigger's role. The internal assets regarding the implementation of inclusive education at Vuka included the mere presence of learners with special needs as part of the school enrolment, the potential expertise among teachers who were pursuing degree studies to lead others, and the apparent friendship among learners in the school. The researchers can also add that the school principal's willingness to share his experiences in the school was an asset in its own right in that it created an opportunity for us as researchers to document and analyse the goings-on at the school as well as suggest possible recommendations. The end result is knowledge on what problems the school faces regarding inclusion and some of the ways of addressing them. This confirms the thinking that every community/organisation will have some assets that can be tapped to address problems there in. However, it appears that some organisations may live for a long time endowed with a variety of assets but without recognising the presence of such resources. Such organisations may remain in what the researchers call a zone of impossibilities where like the principal of Vuka, everything towards implementing inclusion was undoable. Vuka needed to be moved out of this zone into a zone of possibilities in which some of the challenges are transformed into opportunities.

A typical example of a response showing the need for transforming challenges into opportunities is when the principal told us that some of the learners were a nuisance and unruly. He did not want them in the school. The literature the researchers reviewed above has shown that transformational leadership is to do with capacity development and increased personal com-

mitment to organisational goals. In many schools today, we often hear about and see programmes to do with the development of teachers but not much about the development of principals. The researchers think that this study has revealed a great need for developing the school's top executive.

CONCLUSION

From the school principal's responses, the researchers conclude that Vuka School was not moving in the inclusion direction. The principal did not seem to view the school from the asset-based approach. Rather, he adopted a deficit approach in which he viewed inclusion as a monster with which the school could not cope. They also conclude that if the top leadership of the school is pessimistic about the future of the organisation, such a position has a negative impact on the performance of other staff therein. Therefore the role of the school principal remains crucial to the possibilities therein. Despite the principal's pessimism, Vuka School, like any other organisation still had assets on the basis of which transformation towards inclusion could be based. The researchers thus argue that the asset-based approach remains a significant way of transforming a school. Such transformation revolves around sound leadership, an attribute that we argue was desperately lacking in the school. Further, they conclude that the challenges of inclusion are so complex that it would be over-ambitious on their part to expect the school to cope without external support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Using this school as a lens to looking at the bigger picture, it seems that in many parts of South Africa, ordinary schools will find themselves having to contend with learners with special needs in their enrolments with or without the presence of the Inclusive Education policy. This reality is not likely to go away. It is crucial that the Department of Education plays a significant role towards implementing this policy as promised in White Paper 6. However, the Department alone cannot and does not have all the answers. The researchers argue that most of the answers must be found and developed in the individual school. Schools are endowed with assets by way of knowledge and skills, positive

attitudes, and so on. However, the people that work in these schools may either under-estimate or fail to recognise their own assets. In such cases, external catalysts are necessary to mobilise the otherwise dormant assets. Quality leadership is often the missing link in all schools operating in what the researchers termed the zone of impossibilities. Therefore the Department of Education needs to invest more in leadership development.

While the policy of inclusivity sounds noble, it appears that school will differ in their readiness to implement such a policy. It may be counterproductive to rush schools into this venture. Therefore robust readiness programmes within and beyond individual schools are necessary. Expertise could be drawn from successful schools in this regard as a way of avoiding over-reliance on the top-down approach to addressing issues.

The school principal, though a crucial 'player' in determining what a school can achieve, is not the only factor. In this connection, further research on teachers' experiences of inclusive education is necessary. Such research could probe further stakeholders understandings of assets.

REFERENCES

- Bauer AM, Brown GM 2001. *Adolescents and Inclusion: Transforming Secondary Schools*. Baltimore MD: Paul H Brookes.
- Bush T 2007. Educational leadership and management theory, policy and practice. *South African Journal of Education*, 27(3): 391-406.
- Coleman M 2003. Theories of leadership. In: M Thurlow, T Bush, M Coleman (Eds.): *Leadership and Strategic Management in South African Schools*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, pp. 155-172.
- Corbett J 2001. Teaching approaches which support inclusive education: A connective pedagogy. *British Journal of Special Education*, 28(1): 55-59.
- Department of Education (South Africa) 1997. *Report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET)*, National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS): Quality Education For All: Overcoming Barriers to Learning and Development. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Department of Education (South Africa) 2001. *White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Ebersohn L, Eloff I 2006a. Identifying asset-based trends in suitable programmes which support vulnerable children. *SAJE*, 26(3): 457-472.
- Ebersohn L, Eloff I 2006b. *Life Skills Assets*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Ferreira R 2006. The Relationship Between Coping with HIV/AIDS and the Asset-based Approach. PhD Thesis, From <<http://apectd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-11092006-135304/unrestricted/00front.pdf>> (Retrieved on September 20, 2007).
- Foreman P, Bourke S, Mishra G, Frost R 2001. Assessing the support needs of children with a disability in regular classes. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 48(1): 239-252.
- Fullan M 2005. *Leadership and Sustainability: Systems Thinking in Action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Khanare FP 2009. *School Management Teams' Response to Learners who are Orphaned and Vulnerable in the Context of HIV and AIDS: A Study of Two Rural Senior Secondary Schools in KwaZulu-Natal*. MEd Dissertation, Unpublished. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Kelly M 2009. *Planning for Education in the Context of HIV/AIDS*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Kretzmann J, McKnight J 1993. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path toward Finding and Mobilizing Community Assets*. Chicago: ACTA Publications.
- Landsberg E, Kruger D, Nel N (Eds.). 2005. *Addressing Barriers to Learning: A South African Perspective*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Leithwood K, Jantzi D 2009. Transformational leadership. In: B Davies (Ed.): *The Essentials of School Leadership*. London: Sage, pp. 37-52.
- Maxwell JA 2004. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- McColl-Kennedy R, Anderson RD 2002. Impact of leadership style and emotions on subordinate performance. *Leadership Quarterly*, 13(5): 54-59.
- McCoy LO, Keyes DW 2002. Developing social competence in the inclusive primary classroom. *Childhood Education*, 78(1): 70-78.
- Merriam SB 1998. *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education: A Qualitative Approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Minkler M 1997. *Community Organising and Community Building for Health*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Montgomery W 2001. Creating culturally responsive, inclusive classrooms. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33(4): 4-9.
- Mourad M, Ways H 1998. Comprehensive Community Revitalization: Strategies for Asset Building. From <<http://design.asu.edu/apa/proceedings98/Mourad/mourad.html>> (Retrieved on April 8, 2011).
- Ntombela S 2010. Towards inclusive education and training: developing the South African system for the challenges of change. *Journal of Education Studies*, 9(1): 69-81.
- Ntombela S 2011. The progress of inclusive education in South Africa: Teachers' experiences in a selected district, KwaZulu-Natal. *Improving Schools*, 14(1): 1-14.
- Reddy LA 1999. Inclusion of disabled children and school reform: A historical perspective. *Special Services in the Schools*, 15(2): 3-24.
- Reid DK, Valle JW 2005. A constructivist perspective from the emerging field of disability studies. In: CT Fosnot (Ed.): *Constructivism: Theory, Perspective, and Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. Act No. 108 of 1996. *Government Gazette*, 378, 17678. Cape Town: Government Printers.

- Sayson R, Meya AF 2001. Strengthening the roles of existing structures by breaking down barriers and building up bridges: Intensifying HIV/AIDS awareness, outreach, and intervention in Uganda. *Child Welfare*, 80(5): 541-550.
- Senge PM 1990. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday.
- Shields CM 2003. *Good Intentions are Not Enough: Transformative Leadership for Communities of Difference*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow.
- Smart RA 2003. Policies for Orphans and Vulnerable Children: A Framework for Moving Ahead. From <http://pdf.dec.org/pdf_doc/Pnact800.pdf> (Retrieved ON April 8, 2011)
- UNICEF 2005. *The State of the World's Children: Children Under Threat*. New York: UNICEF.
- Visoky AM, Poe BD 2000. Can preschoolers be effective peer models? An action research project. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33(2): 68-73.
- Wheatly MJ 2006. *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. San Francisco: Berett-Koehler.