

How Inclusive is South African Inclusive Education? A Case Study of Three Foundation Phase Classes

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ABSTRACT Inclusive Education is about supporting all learners, educators and the system as a whole so that a full range of learning needs can be met. In this paper a descriptive analysis of the situation in South African schools regarding the implementation of the policy on inclusion (Education White Paper Six on Inclusive Education) is provided. This qualitative study, located within an interpretive paradigm, is part of the wider study on opinions about inclusive education of learners with minor physical and learning disabilities. The three schools were drawn from the five pilot schools for Inclusive Education used in the wider study. Purposive sampling was used to identify the participants. Using interviews with individual foundation phase teachers and classroom observations, data was generated. Issues such as academic exclusion; exclusion through the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) / medium of instruction; and total exclusion from sports emerged from the case studies. The study reveals that there are hindrances in the implementation process hence learners are excluded in different ways. Due to the minimal support they get and the lack of relevant resources, teachers are failing to give necessary support needed by learners. Implications of the findings are discussed at length the paper makes recommendations thereof.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of democracy in South Africa gave rise to a new education system responsive to the needs of all learners. The constitution emphasizes equality and respect for human rights, thus providing a framework to underpin this new education system introduced in 1996. The Manifesto on values, education and democracy identifies ten fundamental values of the constitution; these amongst others are: social justice and human rights. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) emphasizes these values and highlights social justice, human rights and inclusivity (Department of Education (DoE) 2002). Teachers have to ascertain that there is social justice, equality, respect for human rights; and inclusivity in all aspects of teaching and learning. Before democracy, many learners were excluded, mostly in terms of race and disabilities, from the education system; therefore the current education system strives to redress the inequities of the past. It is therefore against this background that the Education White Paper (EWP) Six came into existence. This policy acknowledges that:

“...all children can learn and that all children need support. It further states that people or teachers should accept and respect the fact that all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs which are equal-

ly valued. The whole idea of inclusive education is about enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners. This means that teachers should give learners labeled as disabled additional support so that they can fit in or be integrated into the normal classroom routine” (DoE 2001: 17).

According to the South African constitution, every child has the right to relevant and quality education (UNESCO 2000). Education must be designed to enhance the potential of children and young adults so that they respect themselves and others; participate in decision making in the society; live in peace and dignity; and can earn a living (UNESCO 2000). This is only possible if the teacher in charge of the classroom has a potential to design lessons to meet these requirements for all learners in the classroom.

Education is a fundamental human right and therefore access to all levels, including higher education, should be equally available to all as stated in the Parliamentary Assembly (1998). The curriculum in most cases falls short of these necessary aspects, it is therefore to blame. Some learners are excluded from the education process because the curriculum does not accommodate diversity so disempowering learners from diverse backgrounds (Lumadi 2008). Teach-

ers who are able to break down ideological barriers by using the linguistic and cultural diversity of learners as a resource for learning are required (H'elot and Young 2005). As mentioned above, exclusion from the teaching and learning context occurs in different forms.

The Global Report (2009) defines inclusive education as an educational process providing learners with dynamic active participation and enjoyable learning. Some children are denied participative education as a result of conditions which are not of their own choice, such as mental and/or physical disabilities, language, socio-economic factors, gender or race. It is stated in UNESCO (2000) that teachers 'exacerbate or mitigate exclusion by how they interact with the children, families and communities served'. It is also maintained in this document that education policies are influenced by the overall national political regime of the country. Some of these policies injure learners in many ways. The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 is one good example of this because although the intention was admirable, the policy is not implementable if learners are from diverse race and language backgrounds. This policy stipulates that an additive bilingualism approach should be used in teaching in the foundation phase classes (DoE 1997). Furthermore, in South Africa, there are many refugee learners whose mother tongues are unknown, making the policy even harder to implement effectively. Mother tongue is a very critical matter in the foundation phase. Education White Paper Five on Early Childhood Education (ECD) states the government commitment to expanding ECD provision, correcting the imbalances in provision, ensuring equitable access and improving the quality and delivery of ECD programmes (DoE 2001b).

According to DoE (1997), barriers to learning are located within the learner, the system of education and /or within broader socio-political contexts. These in short, result in the exclusion of some learners in the process of teaching and learning. The Global Report (2009) states that millions of children are excluded from education as a result they are excluded from developmental benefits, resulting in these learners being poorly served and treated. These excluded children in most cases are children from poverty stricken backgrounds; children living with chronic diseases, disabilities and sexual exploitation; and indentured or injurious child labour, or forced

child soldiers involved in civil and military conflict. In several studies (UNESCO 2000, 2003; H'elot and Young 2005; Hays 2009) it is reported that exclusion still exists in schools, despite the policies stressing equal treatment of all learners. To some extent, exclusion is based on attitude and prejudices people have against the disabled (Global Report 2009). There are many different exclusion patterns. Exclusion could be the result of an inefficient system, bureaucracy, the school itself or the teachers. Schools exclude when they are not learner friendly; do not support their teachers as professionals; and do not welcome families as partners (UNESCO 2000). They exclude when they apply narrow paradigms of what children are and how they learn. They exclude when they are unable to deal with diversity, failing to recognize and to accommodate individuals. Schools exclude when they fail to provide teachers with the professional status to be effectively competent, responsible and motivated.

Exclusion in education means being denied opportunities to acquire the knowledge, capacities and self-confidence necessary in the society (UNESCO 2000). Language of learning and teaching is one of the most important aspects through which learners experience exclusion. Most studies indicate that if learners are taught in a language they do not understand they are excluded from the learning experience. Hay (2009) in her study conducted on indigenous communities and mother tongue teaching in Namibia states that most San communities have very limited and unsatisfactory experiences with formal education. This gives rise to an extremely high drop-out rate, with very few learners progressing to the next level, the reason being that they did not have access to education in their own language. Skutnabb-Kangas (2009), agrees with Hay (2009) in his study on linguistic diversity, linguistic human rights and mother tongue based multilingual education. He states that in schools where children are addressed in a foreign language, there is less progress, followed by high drop-out rates because learning is uninteresting. The Global Report (2009) states that successful education is characterized as enjoyable, dynamic and participative experiences. Studies bear testimony to the benefits of mother tongue teaching as Alexander (2009), Hay (2009) and Biseth (2006) confirm. Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) claims that *'even when children have a year or two of mother tongue medium education before*

being transitioned to education through the medium of dominant language, the results are disastrous educationally, even if the child may psychologically feel a bit better initially'.

This means that learners are to be taught in the language they best know, the mother tongue, as it is the instrument of thought (Alexander 2009). Studies maintain that mother tongue should be retained until the learner is ready to learn through the First Additional Language (FAL); however parents have the right to choose the language through which their children can be taught (DoE 1997). However, teachers have learners of diverse language background in one class have the challenge of implementing the LiEP, as a result some learners are excluded.

Exclusion in sports is one of the issues that affect children the most. In most studies such as Tsai and Fung (2009), Pedersen and Greer (2008), Soumi and Soumi (2000), Nixon and Howard (2007), Morley et al. (2005) and Rizzo et al. (2003) it is reported that some learners are excluded from physical education and sports due to disabilities. Tsai and Fung (2009) in their study highlight the experiences of parents of learners with mental handicaps as they sought inclusion of these learners in sports; inclusion meaning full participation during rehearsals (practices) and the formation of school teams which will be involved in a competition. These parental requests were unsuccessful and parents abandoned their efforts, due to rejection by staff and other stakeholders. Tsai and Fung (2009) recommend that for the inclusion of learners with disabilities to be successful, attitudes of teachers need to be changed.

Pedersen and Greer (2008) state that disabled learners should be included in sports so they become exposed to the culture of global sport participation. This inclusion could also develop leadership skills and foster physical activity, despite disabilities. In their study Soumi and Soumi (2000) discovered that there are barriers encountered in creating and maintaining an inclusive physical activity and sport because learners with disabilities cannot participate in all sports available at schools. Nixon and Howard (2007) suggest the restructuring of sports and sports settings to accommodate the participation of people with disabilities as serious competitors. Bailey et al. (2005) suggest that teachers need professional development and teacher training is required to develop teacher skills in involving learn-

ers in sports and relevant and appropriate activities.

Conceptual Framework

The study is underpinned by two concepts: inclusion and exclusion. The Department of Education (DoE) (2001) defines inclusion as an education that *'recognises and respects the differences among all learners and building on the similarities. It is about supporting all learners, educators and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met. The focus is on teaching and learning actors, with the emphasis on the development of good teaching strategies that will be of benefit to all learner.'* (DoE 2001:17b). Whereas Global Report (2009: 96) defines inclusion as *a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through inclusive practices in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structure and strategies with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children'. On the other hand 'exclusion from education is understood as the complex of conditions and factors with together act to keep a child from participating in effective relevant and well-organized learning experiences' (UNESCO 2000: 46).*

Inclusive education stresses the inclusion of all learners, regardless of their conditions. It is stated that exclusion of learners from learning is a serious offence and a violation of the rights of learners. Exclusion of a learner is part of an intricate web of human rights violations as UNESCO (2000) states. This, according to the DoE (2001) means that in the teaching and learning process the teacher has an obligation to acknowledge and respect differences in learners such as age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability or HIV status as maintains. All learners should benefit from each learning experience.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study located within an interpretive paradigm. According to Cohen et al. (2007), this paradigm is associated with the human sciences because behaviours, beliefs, per-

ceptions and attitudes are investigated. To obtain research participants, purposive sampling of the non-probability design, which is the most common type of research as Schummacher and Schummacher (1993) state. According to Welman and Kruger (2001), in this method, researchers rely on their experiences and ingenuity to deliberately obtain units of analysis to be seen as being representative of the relevant population. Three schools, which are pilot schools for inclusive education, were used in this study. The sample constitutes schools from three contexts: township, rural and urban. Semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were used to generate data. To analyse data all the information was categorized into themes such as: exclusion from sports, exclusion through language and academic exclusion. Ethical issues were taken into consideration in this study, permission and consent of teachers was sought before the study was conducted and the names of schools are withheld. The ethical clearance certificate was obtained to conduct the study, as this study was drawn from a doctoral study.

Research Problem

After teaching practice, student teachers reflect on their teaching experiences. They share the anomalies they observe during this period. They notice that there are learners who are physically placed in schools but academically marginalized. Pre-service teachers themselves could not assist because they are not trained to fully meet the needs of learners who are diverse in terms of disabilities in class. They also find themselves not getting assistance from their school mentors. They find this weird because they are aware of the Education White Paper Six that emphasizes that all learners should be treated equally and be given equal chances in the process of teaching and learning, however this is not happening. Teachers fail to include learners and to give them equal treatment due to their disabilities. This therefore triggered my attention to visit the schools and see what the students are experiencing during teaching practice.

Aim of the Study

To find out how inclusive is inclusive education in South African primary schools

The objectives of the study are:

- ♦ To explore the ways in which exclusion takes place in schools particularly in foundation phase classes
- ♦ To find out what kind of disabilities are prevalent in the so called pilot schools
- ♦ To find out how teachers experience the implementation of the policy on inclusive education
- ♦ To establish what the causes of exclusion in schools are.

FINDINGS

In the three schools visited it became apparent that learners are physically included, yet excluded in different ways. The following case studies present these ways of exclusion in detail.

Case Study 1

This pilot school is located in a township. The school is home to normal children and children with minor physical ranging from wheel chair users, and mental impairments and learners with learning disabilities. Most of these learners were transferred from the special school which is in this vicinity to this school, as part of a pilot project. These children are in different grades in the primary school however the focus of the study was on Foundation Phase learners. The Department of Education had refurbished the school to accommodate different learners' needs. Basic infrastructure such as: enough space, a library and a computer laboratory; and railings and ramps, elevators were in the process of being made available to the school. Specialists in different areas of knowledge (speech therapists, physiotherapists, psychiatrists, remedial teachers etc.) visit the school from time to time to assist with special needs. Despite all that has been done, teaching was not running smoothly in this school. During an interview with one of the teachers, it became clear that there is no progress if these children are in the same class as normal children. As a result, these children were placed in a separate space, leaving normal children in their own class for learning and teaching to progress. The teacher stated:

"The pace is very slow. Learners with mental impairments in particular and those with learning disabilities delay the whole learning process; dealing with them in one classroom is

problematic. Last year they were part of the classroom now we can see there is no progress we are putting them in their own separate class. Normal learners are suffering a lot.

Case Study 2

This school is a former House of Delegate, Indian school situated in a small KwaZulu-Natal town. This school had predominantly Indian children and is now dominated by African children. Of the forty learners in class, four are Indians, all children in class are normal except for the language background. With regard to the staff, Indian teachers are still the majority with few African teachers. The researcher made observations in a grade three class. The isiZulu speaking teacher was teaching Life Skills in isiZulu, thus attempting to respond to Education Policy for language, which stipulates that Foundation Phase learners must be taught in their mother tongue. Although the majority of the learners were isiZulu speaking, the teacher was favouring these learners by conducting the lesson in isiZulu, so excluding the four English speaking children. The language policy has remained unchanged in this school since it was an English medium school. However, the teacher, because she was experiencing difficulties teaching in English and the majority of learners were isiZulu speaking, she decided to conduct the class in isiZulu, with a little code switching to accommodate the four English speaking learners. The researcher noticed that these four children were not part of the lesson because they were not participating but just passive onlookers. After the lesson the researcher was curious to ask how these children learn in such a context. The teacher answered:

‘They understand isiZulu a bit and they also speak ‘Fanakalo’ (English slightly changed to isiZulu). They respond to some questions and they can write a few sentences in isiZulu’. The teacher complained that learners have very superficial knowledge of English language as a result they underperform. This triggers her to teach in the language they understand better.

Case Study 3

This pilot school is a rural, primary school in a disadvantaged area. The school has learners with physical impairments. They participate in all the activities at school and are academically

included. The only challenge teachers have is the inclusion of learners with physical disabilities in sports. During an interview with teachers, they mentioned that learners are happy but the challenge is to include them in sports activities. They stated that they would have loved to have them in their school team but they do not know how to design activities that would suit them. One teacher stated:

‘The challenge is the nature of their disabling condition. In a ball game (football of netball) we do not know how to include them. They may get hurt and we cannot form a team of them alone because they are few. As a result we do not include them in teams but we let them play separately so that they do not get hurt’.

Emerging Issues

Based on the data, three issues emerged from the study and these are: exclusion in academic activities due to the disabling condition (that is minor mental retardation), exclusion through the language of learning and teaching and final exclusion in sports due to physical impairments.

- i) Learners with minor mental retardation are academically excluded. It is stated that their pace of learning is slow, thus affecting learners who are normal. As a result, they are taught in their own classroom, which means that they are still in their isolated place in an inclusive setting. Therefore, this takes us back to the aim of this study which is to find out how inclusive is inclusive education in South African schools. In short, due to proper mentoring, teachers are not coping and as a result learners with disabilities are still in their closet and not in a mainstream class although they are in an inclusive school.
- ii) The language of learning and teaching is the issue that remains the bone of contention. The teaching privileged the majority of learners and the minority was disadvantaged and marginalized. The language policy of the school is English and Afrikaans is the second language. This shows that these four children were taught in the third language which is isiZulu.
- iii) Extra mural activities play a major role in the life a learner; therefore all learners need to participate. It appears, from this study that learners with physical disabilities are

given an opportunity to play, however this is undirected play, not intended for competition. Thus, in competitive sports taking place in the schools these children are not included. Attention should focus on developing sporting opportunities for children with disabilities, as is the case in affluent areas.

DISCUSSION

Although the country is moving towards inclusion, there are areas where inclusion is not well addressed. The three case studies indicate the exclusion of learners in academic teaching and learning, exclusion through the language of learning and teaching and in extramural activities. However, data does indicate that some learners are not excluded because of the teachers' choice. It is evident in data that teachers hold positive attitudes towards working with diverse learners in terms of disabilities and language issues. Seemingly, the situation is beyond their control since they lack relevant support and expertise of dealing with such learners.

The findings from the first case study suggest there is minimal support by district support teams to support teachers implementing inclusive education in these pilot schools. Training obtained is insufficient to assist them to deal with classes that are diverse in terms of mental and physical abilities. These findings highlight the slower pacing when children with disabilities are included. It is essential that teachers be developed through professional training, to deal with small, specific task, group teaching. This could enable them to deal effectively with these learners, according to their abilities. Besides training, teachers require physical and material resources to appropriately execute their duties. Overcrowded classrooms worsen the situation; if teachers could work with small numbers of learners, the situation would be more manageable because individual attention could be given.

The findings from the second case study suggest there is difficulty in following the Education Policy for language. Teachers should be trained to deal with diverse learners without disadvantaging other learners. There are advantages in teaching and learning in mother tongue as most studies such as Alexander (2009), Hay (2009), Biseth (2006) and Skutnabb-Kangasn (2009) refer to the benefits. The same authors attest to

the fact that learners who are not taught in mother tongue are disadvantaged and are likely to underperform in their academic activities. Parents should be educated of the importance of mother tongue teaching in the early years. School should take that initiative into consideration.

Competitive activities for learners with disabilities should be introduced in schools. If they cannot do what normal children do, at least they should be provided with an opportunity to participate in sport, have an adult to coach them and have opportunities to enter competitions. This may not be possible in some schools because learners with physical disabilities form the minority. Schools therefore should consider choosing or develop sports to incorporate and accommodate these learners. This finding is in line with Soumi and Soumi (2000), Nixon and Howard (2007) and Bailey et al. (2005) who discovered that there are barriers encountered in creating and maintaining an inclusive physical activity and sport because learners with disabilities cannot participate in all sports available at schools. They also suggest the restructuring of sports and sports settings to accommodate the participation of people with disabilities as serious competitors.

It is impossible to include all learners in terms of a language. South Africa is home to many refugees with different mother tongues. It is not possible to include learners with physical impairment in some activities, no matter how willing they may be. The pace of teaching becomes slow where children with learning disabilities are taught alongside normal children, so disadvantaging both groups because neither receives enough attention. This finding corresponds with what UNESCO (2000, 2003), H'elot and Young (2005), and Hays (2009) discovered in their studies. They reported that exclusion still exists in schools, despite the policies stressing equal treatment of all learners. To some extent, exclusion is based on attitude and prejudices people have against the disabled (Global Report 2009). Teacher identity is of much importance, teachers cannot be separated from who they are. The fact that the teacher was isiZulu had an influence on her teaching practices. Although the school is labeled as an English medium school, the majority of children and the teacher in the school were isiZulu so the teacher was then tempted to teach in her own language to accommodate the majority of learners, forgetting that these children were

sent to an English medium school because of parental preferences. If the teacher and majority of learners had been English, the school policy would have been implemented as intended.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that in sports, in the medium of instruction and in teaching and learning a certain group will always be disadvantaged. Rights of children are violated in one way or the other and hence social justice is not done. This is not intentional; it is because it is difficult to satisfy everyone with the little support provided for teachers. With the increase in teacher support, such difficulties may be eliminated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the data and the discussion above, it is therefore proposed that:

- ♦ Clear guidelines on how inclusivity should be maintained in terms of mother tongue where learners in are diverse. And almost all the official languages are represented
- ♦ Increase the number of teachers who speak different languages that are spoken by learners so that the needs of all learners are met
- ♦ Colloquia are encouraged where parents will be educated on the benefits of mother tongue teaching
- ♦ Sports for learners with physical disabilities should be encouraged in all levels of education. Currently, such activities are only encouraged in affluent areas and in upper grades

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