

INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA



Inclusive
Education
SOUTH AFRICA

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**Inclusive
Education**
SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION



Director's Welcome

Further to my accepting the post as the new director of Inclusive Education South Africa I am delighted to introduce myself to you. I am a passionate individual who has been appointed to use my range of skills, knowledge and experience to add value to the works and vision of IESA. In the process of familiarising myself with the content of the organization and the work that is and has been done, a very glaring question was birthed. What is Inclusion? What is the limits of this terminology? What are the defining characteristics, connotations, academic and layperson's understanding and definitions of the term?

As society evolves, as our democracy evolves and as our awareness regarding our rights evolve, how do we as an organization define work and the space that we actively engage? How deep and

broad do we involve and interrogate an "excluded" incident/person/topic? The accumulation of articles and papers presented in this journal would help us to constantly refine our parameters as an organization, thereby adjusting to what the core need is in society based on our ability to respond through our resources, capacity and specialized knowledge. It is an opportunity for you as the reader to gain a broader perspective and insight based on the contributions from partners across the full spectrum of "Inclusivity". This literally means that you take what you need and make a difference in your space. Through our engagements and joining of all relevant stakeholders, we would like you to be able to digest what is beneficial and empowering for you.

Peter Ivan Barendse, Director - IESA



1. The 'UNLESS' principle

By Jolene Ostendorf: Remedial teacher
Director: Inclusion Matters
MEd UKZN

*"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."
The Lorax, Dr Seuss (1971)*

Every school has a different reason for not implementing inclusive education, yet they are all very similar reasons; not enough financial resources, not enough suitable teachers and backlash from the community about falling academic standards. However, every single one of these reasons can be overcome in very simple, practical ways. On the back of research into the implementation of inclusive practices in Durban schools, the UNLESS principle was developed specifically for schools and teachers that wish to implement inclusive practices in their schools, but feel ill-equipped to do so. The principle emphasises that every school can implement inclusive education regardless of the human and financial resources available to them. The UNLESS principle, used as an acronym, gives schools practical tips on how to achieve the implementation of inclusive education.

As an acronym, UNLESS stands for Unique, Now, Learn (as-you-go), Enthusiasm, Staff and Support. It emphasises that a passion for inclusive education is more important than access to resources, such as the most qualified staff. One of the aims of the UNLESS principle is to move schools away from the idea that in order to be inclusive they need to have specialised remedial units attached to the school or highly trained specialist staff who are especially equipped to deal with the needs of children experiencing barriers to learning. The emphasis of UNLESS is to shift focus onto the unique landscape of each school and to use the strengths of the passionate, dynamic staff that already exist within the teaching body to spearhead the changes that

need to be made in order to embrace inclusivity. Simply put, unless the community makes the effort to implement inclusive education, the plight of children experiencing barriers to learning is simply not going to change in our communities.

To break the acronym down into its various parts, **U is for Unique**. Educators across the globe are keenly aware of the seemingly sudden surge in barriers to learning in our learner population. Inclusive education in broad terms is a call to include all children experiencing disabilities into mainstream classrooms. However, while this is an admirable long term goal, it is simply not realistic immediately and even the most committed advocate for inclusive education questions whether this is possible for all children. The reality is that inclusive education is an evolutionary process. If you start out from nothing, aiming to be a fully inclusive school, you are likely to become despondent when it turns out to be harder than expected. The schools that are enjoying success in their implementation of inclusive education all started out on this exciting journey by looking at the unique circumstances within their community. Schools should begin by looking at what the most prevalent disability in the community is: the issue that is forcing children to be educated elsewhere, and start by tackling that specific issue. By focusing on how to accommodate the needs of this initial group of children, the school evolves to adapt to meet the needs of children with a wider array of disabilities. Each school is unique and this unique quality can be used to unlock the greater world of inclusive education.

The N from UNLESS is for Now, and this highlights the immediacy of implementing inclusive education. It is highly unlikely in any school that there are no children experiencing barriers to learning. These children can be the starting point for implementing inclusive practices. Schools can start by addressing the needs of these learners with whatever limited capacity that may already exist in the school. If schools wait for the right resources or the correctly qualified staff, inclusive education will simply not happen! Schools that attempt to implement inclusive practices on a broad scale from the outset, generally fail in their honourable endeavours, because of the magnitude of the undertaking. The key is to identify one or two children that obviously need assistance, and who are amenable to the support that will be offered. These children will be your 'inclusion pioneers'. It is also important to track the progress of these children as they are being supported. A positive improvement in overcoming their difficulties is a fantastic motivator for the ongoing growth of inclusive education in schools. Inclusion is not something that needs to wait until the next intake of learners or the next budgeting period. The implementation of inclusive practices can start in any classroom, at any time of the year.

L is for Learning (as-you-go). There is a wealth of information about inclusive education and the various barriers to learning teachers may encounter in the classroom. In fact, there is so much information available that it can become overwhelming. Again, schools should start with the same initial group of children who were identified to be the 'inclusion pioneers'. The teachers of these learners should be encouraged to research their learning history. Where available, they can start with specialist reports and assessments of the child with a view to critically analysing the diagnoses that they have been given. This should be done in comparison to how the child is presenting in the classroom. Argue against the diagnosis, and then motivate for it. This is the most valuable learning tool at your disposal. So often teachers are too scared to disagree with the information they have been given by other professionals, presuming that their own academic background is inferior. For our schools to become successful inclusive institutions

we need to reassure our educators that their classroom observations are just as valuable as the diagnostic tools used by other professionals.

Once the barrier has been identified, teachers can look at how other schools have accommodated similar needs in their own student population. By looking at these supports, teachers can consider what would be practical within their own unique environments. Schools that successfully implement inclusive education try to implement some of the accommodations and strategies discovered without fear of failure that something may not work. This is part of the learning process.

Enthusiasm is quite possibly the most important of the factors determining how successful a school will be in implementing inclusive education, which is why the E of **UNLESS is for Enthusiasm**. More than qualifications and more than knowledge, the one factor that determines how successfully a school will implement inclusive education, is enthusiasm. Becoming an inclusive school requires more than just for teachers to educate children; it needs educators to become advocates for people with disabilities. Every child needs a teacher who fights for them, who is willing to go the proverbial 'extra mile' for them, in spite of this having been said so often. This can be a little more difficult when dealing with children who experience barriers to learning because so often their behaviours are misinterpreted in such a way that makes them that much harder to appreciate. However, schools should never lose sight of the fact that these are the very children who need someone to advocate for them.

As we near the end of our acronym, the **first S is for Staff**. So many schools fall into the trap of believing that in order to implement inclusive education they need to employ the services of a specialised staff – psychologists, speech and language therapists and remedial teachers, amongst others. While these professionals are useful and can add a vital dimension to any professional group, schools should also not lose sight of the title these people carry within a school. In schools, these people are known as para-professionals. They work alongside the primary professionals – the educators. In any school the teachers should be the people who

work to implement inclusive education and again, these do not need to be the most experienced educators available. This is one area of teaching where a passion for working with children who experience barriers to learning is more important than having specific qualifications.

The final S of UNLESS is also related to staff, but it is more specifically about how to support the staff in a school. **S is for Support**. The greatest challenge schools face when implementing inclusive education is getting whole staff support when adopting more inclusive practices. The key to getting this right is support. In many cases the ‘naysayers’ in a school are those who are not confident of their own abilities to teach learners experiencing barriers to learning, or they are unwilling to admit that they simply do not have the background information needed to understand these barriers. For this reason, it is vital that schools initially appoint a staff member to spearhead the implementation of inclusive education. This person should be charged with making it as easy as possible for their colleagues to assist these children.

One of the things that they can do is to sift through the reams of reports and assessments about the child requiring support and summarising it for the teachers involved with the child. The sheer volume of information available about some children is in itself daunting. They can give this information to their colleagues in a simple manner, rather than giving them a great pile of information through which a teacher who is more than likely already stretched, must wade. Even

better, it could be summarised into a teaching strategy and given to the teacher concerned. A good teaching strategy gives the teachers a summary of the barriers to learning that the child is dealing with and what their particular learning strengths are so that these can be built upon; it shifts focus from the child’s disabilities to their abilities. The final point with regard to support is to never assume that everyone in your staffroom is familiar with the various learning disabilities and the associated jargon. If teachers do not understand the disability, they cannot understand how this hampers the child’s ability to learn.

In conclusion, the implementation of inclusive education does not need a ‘100% buy in’, so to speak, in order to be successful. When educators start succeeding with children who were previously misunderstood by schools and educators in the past, they will start to understand the ideals of inclusion because at our core as educators we all have a desire to see our students succeed. In the words of Dr Seuss, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” (1971). In South Africa, we are all keenly aware of the need to continuously improve the standard of education in our schools. Inclusive education is probably the greatest change to the philosophy of education that we will see in our time and every single one of our educators has the potential to revolutionise the way teaching and learning happens in schools.

Source: Seuss, D. (1971). *The Lorax*. New York: Random House



2. Key findings of the evaluation of the Pilot New Teacher Induction Programme, 2019

By Eginés Mudzingwa: Master of Demography
Researcher: Inclusive Education South Africa

Introduction

Inclusive Education South Africa (IESA), in partnership with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the European Union, has developed the New Teacher Induction Programme (NTIP). The aim of the induction programme is to promote inclusion and to support new teachers to respond to diversity in the classroom.

The objectives of the NTIP are to:

- develop an efficient and effective inclusive teacher
- retain new teachers by equipping them with good inclusive practice
- boost teacher morale and collegiality
- minimize teacher isolation
- develop a professional identity as an inclusive teacher
- facilitate a smooth transition from Initial Teacher Education to first year teaching
- put inclusive theory into practice
- encourage self-reflective practice
- welcome fresh inclusive ideas and initiatives

The induction programme provides the new teacher with three types of support: personal, social and professional. **Personal support** is given to develop professional identity as an inclusive teacher through mentor and peer support. The new teacher is supported in an accepting environment where new skills can be developed and put into practice. The new teachers are also provided with **social support** to become members of the learning community of the school and to develop good relationships with their colleagues. It also involves the understanding and acceptance of the way things work and are organized in the school. They are also given **professional support** to acquire confidence in inclusive teaching as well as basic teaching knowledge and skills. The inclusive education induction programme aims to provide the new teacher with the vital skills and knowledge to teach to a diverse classroom.

The three types of support are given through **four support systems**: the mentoring system, an expert system, a peer system and a self-reflection system. In the **mentoring system**, an experienced teacher is given responsibility for helping the new teacher on a personal, social and professional level. The **expert system** uses external expert input and advice in order to expand knowledge and teaching skills. This could take the form of seminars, professional learning communities, participation in programmes as well as accessing support materials, resources and guidelines. The **peer system** involves making opportunities for teachers to work together and to support each other in the school. The **self-reflection system** encourages the new teachers to look closely at their own teaching practice and to note where it is successful and where it may need improvement. Self-reflective practices will help the new teacher to critically evaluate her/his professional development.

The NTIP is a 12 month programme commencing immediately after the school has completed the 2-week orientation programme for the new teacher. It is SACE endorsed and both the mentor and the new teacher can obtain CPTD points. Currently, the programme is being piloted in the three provinces of Northern Cape, North West, and Free State.

Objectives and approach of the pilot NTIP evaluation

The overall objective of the evaluation was to provide an assessment of the impact of the pilot NTIP. The evaluation was designed to answer questions around the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of the NTIP. The results from the evaluation offer key insights and lessons around the successes and challenges.

The programme evaluation adopted a structured questionnaire approach which allowed the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from the beneficiaries. The beneficiaries that were targeted were the new teachers, their mentors and representatives of the School Management Team (SMT). All the beneficiaries

were given an opportunity to participate in the evaluation. However, due to various limitations, some of the beneficiaries could not participate in the evaluation. Table 1 shows the response rate by the beneficiary group. The response rate among mentors was very low, at two in every three mentors.

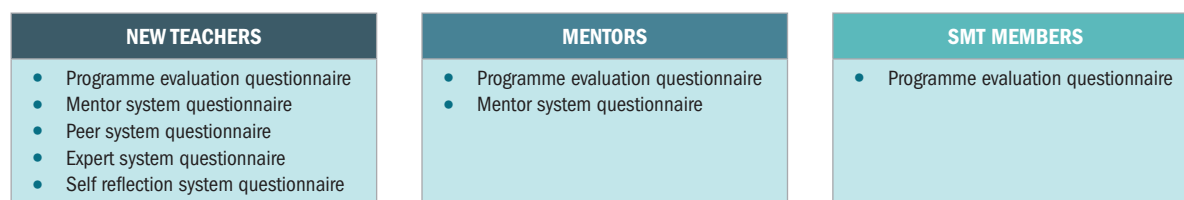
Table 1: Number of interviews conducted by beneficiary

BENEFICIARY GROUP	REALISED SAMPLE	TARGETED SAMPLE	RESPONSE RATE
New Teachers	53	66	80%
Mentors	25	36	69%
SMT Members	23	28	82%

Group interviews were conducted with teachers. IESA facilitators simplified the completion of questionnaires by explaining each question to the group while each teacher completed an individual questionnaire. The same approach was adopted in conducting interviews with mentors.

Face to face interviews were conducted by IESA facilitators with SMT representatives from each school. Data collection tools were developed for each beneficiary group as shown in Figure 1: Data collection tools per beneficiary below.

Figure 1: Data collection tools per beneficiary



Summary of evaluation findings

Relevance of support provided through the NTIP

The dominating view among all the groups of beneficiaries is that the NTIP has provided the support that the new teachers needed to transit from university to the classroom. The results of the evaluation show that beneficiaries perceive university education to be more focussed on learning methods and theories of handling diversity while the NTIP bridges the gap between university education and the classroom. The NTIP is a formal support system that takes the new teacher on the transition journey while bringing a range of stakeholders together to provide support. Thus the interaction between the new teacher and peers (including seniors) is facilitated on the programme and therefore blending into the school

community becomes easier for the teacher. However, it is important that the programme should be introduced as early as possible so that by the time the teachers enter the classroom, they are already receiving programme support. Beneficiaries requested for an extension of the programme beyond the current 12 months in order to give the new teachers sufficient time to put the skills developed into practice, while still under the programme guidance.

Extent to which initial teacher education prepares for the realities of the classroom

According to the beneficiaries, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) did not adequately prepare new teachers for the realities of the classroom. It mainly provided an introduction to inclusive education practices. The classroom was found to be more challenging than anticipated during ITE training. The same was said of the Post Graduate

Certificate in Education. Thus ITE is perceived as inadequate in providing pedagogical knowledge and skills for the new teacher to prepare for teaching a diverse classroom. This is frustrating for new teachers when they get to the classroom and this is the gap that the NTIP is addressing. Perceptions are that it is important for all new teachers to be exposed to the programme to gain accompanying skills. The programme should also extend to all teachers (even those who are experienced) as they will benefit from the programme.

Understanding inclusion

The majority of the beneficiaries' views on diversity changed after participating in the programme. They were better equipped with strategies for dealing with diverse classes. Even though there are some areas that still need refining, the majority identify themselves as inclusive teachers as a result of the programme. A minority who do not recognise themselves as inclusive teachers reported that this is mainly because they perceive the one-year training as insufficient to master all the skills. However, they acknowledge that they will continue using the resources which they were equipped with and the support system established by the programme to become inclusive teachers. Mentors reported that their understanding of inclusive education increased. The NTIP refreshed their inclusive education skills. Consequently, their strategies for dealing with diverse classes and identifying learning barriers have changed. Overall, the NTIP is perceived to have improved the beneficiaries' understanding of inclusive education.

Adequacy of time

As alluded to above, some beneficiaries found the 12-month time period was insufficient. They needed extended time to develop the skills and knowledge gained on the programme. They would have preferred the programme to be of three years' duration and that beyond the first 18 months it would be focussed on monitoring

the implementation of the skills received in the classroom. However, beneficiaries pointed out that the resources that were received on the programme should support the implementation beyond the 12 months. Amount of time allocated to the training of mentors should be increased as mentors explained that there was a lot to learn and implement in a short time. Mentors further advised that it would be better for them to be trained before the training of teachers is initiated so that they are well equipped and ready to mentor the new teachers.

The individual experience of the programme

The support and skills received on the NTIP were considered motivation for teachers to stay in the teaching profession. The new teachers perceive that they are now more determined to assist the learners regardless of the learning barriers that they, the learners, may be experiencing. Plenty of practical guidance to implement inclusive classroom practice was received by new teachers and therefore there is less frustration in dealing with diverse classes. However, other persistent challenges like large classes and lack of classroom resources to implement the strategies continue to dampen their enthusiasm to stay in the teaching profession. The training received was judged to be sufficient but training time should be shifted from after school when teachers are generally exhausted to earlier in the day. The language of engagement during workshops should not exclude any participants and a re-look at the location of the venue is required in order to reduce traveling time to programme workshops. The training of mentors should come earlier than the training of mentees so as to equip them for the mentorship role. Mentors benefited enormously as their skills were refreshed and their traditional approaches to inclusive practices were challenged. Much self-reflection and introspection took place among the new teachers, mentors, and SMT members. Beneficiaries pointed out that it is important to schedule the programme workshops carefully so as to avoid delivering them late to beneficiaries.

District/school-based mentor

The school-based mentor model is the most preferred among the beneficiaries. The mentor is able to assist and support the mentee more frequently, understands the school context and it is also easier to conduct classroom supervision. It builds team spirit (bringing teacher, HOD/mentor, peers, and SMT together) with more contact time even for classroom demonstrations. It is also easier to meet outside school hours for further discussions, including weekends. In cases where the mentor teaches the same subjects or grades as the new teacher, the mentorship became more effective and efficient. However, it is important for the mentor to be sensitised and therefore be motivated, in order for them to allocate adequate time for their role as a mentor and to make it a priority.

Handbooks

The handbook was hailed as a useful resource in providing expert input. Beneficiaries explained that it contains a wealth of useful information, is well-structured and has easy-to-follow guidelines. It is a useful resource for documenting experiences on the inclusive education journey and helps with self-reflection and preparation for meetings. It is a useful reference resource for understanding the SIAS process and developing individual support plans. The handbook was identified as an important resource by both mentors and new teachers. The handbook will assist the beneficiaries with expert information beyond the 12-month life of the programme. However, it was emphasised that some sections are repetitive and time-consuming to complete. Therefore, it was recommended that all the forms and exercises in the handbooks be reviewed to address any repetitiveness.

Balancing programme demands and teaching schedule

Beneficiaries explained that they found it difficult to balance programme demands and teaching schedules as the teachers are already experiencing overloaded from the curriculum.

Preparing lesson plans in an inclusive way takes more time. The mentors' personal workload made it difficult for them to dedicate more time on mentoring the new teachers. Stretching the programme beyond 12 months would ease the workload and will give teachers more time to engage with the programme activities. The planning of the programme deliverables and workshops should not coincide with the time periods when schools are too busy.

Preparedness of the school to receive the new teachers

Schools prepare for the arrival of the new teachers and their inclusion on the NTIP. SMT members explained that the schools already have a school induction programme for the new teacher and they only had to add an inclusive education component to it. Mostly, they identified and allocated the mentor who would take a leading role in the school induction process. In some schools the mentor was relieved of other activities so as to create more time for the NTIP induction mentorship role. In most cases, the professional development needs of the new teacher were assessed as early as possible and immediately the process to address them commenced. However, there were a few schools that did not prepare to receive the new teachers and enrol them on the NTIP. Some schools had received communication about the programme late while some had no financial resources to fund the attendance of training workshops by the teachers and their mentors. It is important for communication to be delivered to the school as early as possible so that the schools have more time to prepare for the arrival and enrolment of the new teachers on the NTIP.

The four support systems

The four support systems are deemed effective and smooth the journey to inclusive teaching practices for the new teachers. They provide a general support structure for a successful transition from university to a diverse classroom. However, to support the four systems, it is important to reconsider the availability and

workload of mentors before they are appointed to the programme. Their commitment is important to the success of the programme and training should be sufficient and be delivered before the new teachers start on the programme. The peer support system, which is the most highly rated support system, opened opportunities for peer learning and sharing of ideas. In some cases, it was easier for teachers to approach a peer, before approaching the mentor. Everything about the handbook was hailed as highly useful and relevant. The only concern that was raised related to the seemingly repetitive sections which should be reviewed so as to avoid adding extra activities to the already overloaded work schedule. The same concerns were raised on the self-reflection system where some of the activities stipulated were viewed as repetitive. The four support systems were viewed as the pillars of the success of the NTIP

Conclusions

The NTIP pilot was a success. The programme is very relevant as it bridges the gap between initial teacher education and classroom practice. It puts in place an effective support structure and skills for the new teacher to adopt inclusive practices as they handle diversity in the school system. The benefits of the programme are seen as a benefit to the peers and the mentor. The NTIP programme is sustainable because not only does it target the new teacher but their peers, school-based mentor, and SMT members who contribute to the viability of the programme. The handbooks are a useful resource that can be used as a reference by the new teacher, the mentor and future new teachers who will join the school in the coming years. The programme capacitates the school to induct new teachers and this legacy remains within the school. The experience of the new teachers, mentors, and members of the school management teams shows that the NTIP programme is a necessity for all new teachers.



TESTIMONIAL

NKOSINATHI'S JOURNEY ON THE NEW TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAMME



Nkosinathi Mbandlwa is a teacher at Mfidikwe Primary School in the North West Province.

What did you gain from this programme?

Inclusive Education is when all learners, irrespective of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighbourhood schools to receive high quality instruction, intervention and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum. I have learnt that a successful inclusive education happens primarily through accepting, understanding and attending to physical, cognitive, academic, social and emotional needs.

NB: this does not say that learners never need to spend time out of regular education classes, because sometimes they do for a very particular purpose, for instance, to improve their speech through speech or occupational therapy.

How did the Induction programme help me?

This programme played a significant role in my profession not only as an educator, but as an individual as well to be able to accommodate those learners who are having barriers to learning and to treat them equally and also providing necessary support needed for them.

How did having a mentor to guide and support you help?

Being assigned a mentor within my workplace also played its role in ensuring me that whatever challenge I have in my classroom and around the workplace, I must feel free to ask for guidance and assistance. During my first two to three

months of my teaching practice, I had challenges dealing with hyper-active learners but through the assistance of my mentor I was able to deal with them.

Were you able to know your learners well by using the information in the teacher handbook?

Yes, the handbook came in very handy as it had all the information of how to deal with learners with barriers, how to identify and how to diagnose/support them through the SIAS process.

Did your understanding of inclusion and diversity help you to understand the needs of the children you had to teach?

My understanding of Inclusion and Diversity helped me to understand the needs of each and every learner and also how to promote inclusivity and diversity by means of:

- Promoting a positive classroom climate – providing a welcoming atmosphere.
- Embracing learners' diversity – valuing and embracing diversity; not just diverse talents; but diversity in ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation and language.
- Encouraging learner interactions – the more academically and socially connected the learners feel to the school, the more likely they are to persist.
- Fostering a community of learners within our classes – by encouraging learners to collaborate and cooperate with their classmate.

continued...

**Did the strategies on teaching practice help you improve yours and how?**

The strategies on teaching practice helped me a lot, especially with learners who are hyper-active and those who often do not complete their tasks. It also helped to manage my classroom and limit unnecessary movement in the classroom.

How did your mentor help you through the challenges you faced?

I must say that one is truly blessed and privileged to have such an amazing mentor who went out of her way in ensuring that I feel comfortable and welcomed in the workplace. In most cases, with hyper-active learners and learners who are

misbehaving in class, I learnt that I need to reach out to them and understand the background they are coming from.

What did you learn from your peers during this first year?

I have learnt from my peers that although we are in the same profession, most of the challenges we face in our different schools are not the same and we need to learn from each other on how to tackle those issues.

Did class visits from your mentors assist you?

Yes, the visits encouraged me to work on my weaknesses, improve more on my teaching and incorporate my strategies with the ones from the school.



3. Can Professional Learning Communities help teachers to build the capacity to teach more inclusively? Evidence from South Africa.

By VVOB South Africa – Education for Development

Introduction

This article reflects on whether Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are effective in bringing Special school teachers and Full-service school teachers together with their peers from neighbouring schools to strengthen teachers' inclusive teaching practices. Deliberations can be framed between two key strategic educational documents from the Department of Basic Education (DBE): Education White Paper 6 *Special Education Needs: Building an Inclusive Education System* (2001) and the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (2011–2025). White Paper 6 oversees the transforming of the education system to effectively respond to and support learners, parents and communities by promoting the removal of barriers to learning and participation in that education system. The White Paper commits government to provide access to education to all learners notwithstanding the economic, social, language, class, behavior or any other barriers to learning they experience. The White Paper outlines that government will place an emphasis on supporting learners through Special schools that cater for learners with special learning needs and full-service schools that serve as flagship inclusive schools. 'Full-service/inclusive schools are first and foremost mainstream education institutions that provide quality education to all learners by supplying the full range of learning needs in an equitable manner. *They should strive to achieve access, equity, quality and social justice in education*' (Guidelines for Full Service Schools, DBE, 2010, p 7).

In the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (2011–2025), DBE identifies PLCs as important instruments to strengthen teachers' inclusive teaching practices and address pedagogical barriers. PLCs make an important contribution

to school-based professional development, due to their collaborative, cost-effective and self-driven nature. The framework defines PLCs as "*communities that provide the setting and necessary support for groups of classroom teachers, school managers and subject advisors to participate collectively in determining their own developmental trajectories, and to set up activities that will drive their development*" (DBE, 2011:14).

In this context, partners collaborated on a PLC pilot to determine whether PLCs could contribute to strengthening inclusive practice by bringing neighboring schools together to develop inclusive teaching practices. In 2017–2018, the South African DBE, in collaboration with VVOB South Africa – education for development, set up 12 pilot inter-school PLCs in the provinces of Free State, North West and the Northern Cape, gathering together teachers from grades 1 to 6. These inter-school PLCs were comprised of ordinary schools, Full Service Schools (FSS) and Special Schools that were selected from across the quintiles and had urban, peri-urban and rural schools represented. A key focus area of the PLCs was how teachers could apply inclusivity in their daily practice.

In this paper, we analyze to what extent these pilot PLCs have contributed to nurturing peer-learning on inclusive education between teachers from full-service and neighbouring schools. To gather data, we use PLC observations, in combination with focus group discussions and chat-box stories that capture teachers' perceptions of effectiveness. Our findings show that PLCs stimulate collaboration among teachers and support inclusive teaching in the classroom.

In what follows, we first briefly discuss the literature on how PLCs can support inclusive teaching followed by a description of the PLC pilot project in South Africa. Next, we present our

methodology. In the third part, we analyze the results and discuss their implications. This is followed by the conclusions.

The effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities to support inclusive teaching practices

It is necessary to deliberate on whether research points to the fact that PLCs can contribute to the improvement of inclusive teaching practices. Literature cites the importance of collaborative learning to build knowledge, skills and attitudes to teach inclusively. According to Florian (2014), PLCs enable students and teachers to develop a shared repertoire through mutual engagement in a joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998). By creating positive interdependence between teachers, the latter gain new knowledge and develop new identities (Phillips, 2014) which can heighten a communal “commitment to the support of all learners” and the belief in promoting learning for all children” (Florian, 2014, p. 291). If real educational change is to occur, however, conversations about teaching and learning should be deep, sustained, and challenging (Du- Four & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2001; Hord, 2009; Schmoker, 2006). Research from Chimhande & Brodie (2016) further confirms that PLCs contribute to the development of content and pedagogical knowledge and support talk on different foci: learners, content and practice. The focus on learners allows the facilitator to integrate discussions on teaching inclusively. Educators need the time and space to be able to have difficult discussions to examine their underlying assumptions about learners’ languages, cultures, and experiences and how they can integrate these students’ assets in ways that better prepare all students for our increasingly global world. Research findings point to the value of teachers collaborating to create new knowledge and bring about change in the way children are taught.

Theoretical Framework

As highlighted in the literature, PLCs help to ensure an inclusive classroom environment by contributing to the creation of a culture of

mutual engagement and collaborative learning. The Profile of Inclusive Teachers, developed by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2012), encapsulates those characteristics that promote collaborative learning and therefore inclusive practices. The document identifies four key competencies that are essential in inclusive teachers: valuing diversity, supporting all learners, working with others and personal professional development. The profile has been developed around a framework of core values and areas of competence to promote inclusive teaching. Under the core value, ‘Valuing learner diversity’ learner difference is considered a resource and an asset to education. Under the core value ‘Supporting all learners’, teachers promote the academic, practical, social and emotional learning of all learners and develop effective teaching approaches for heterogeneous classes. The core competence ‘Working with others’ calls for collaboration and teamwork with colleagues and other stakeholders. ‘Personal professional development’ as a key competency points to teachers as reflective practitioners and lifelong learners.

For the purposes of evaluating the effect of PLCs on inclusive teaching practices in this pilot, findings were measured against this profile of inclusive teachers encapsulated by the four key competencies.

Methodology

This study examines what are the effects of PLCs on inclusive classroom practices. The study uses a mixed-method design. To gain insight into the perception of teachers of how PLC participation affected inclusive classroom practices, we conducted 12 post-PLC FGDs of max. one hour. Although conducted in English, teachers could respond in their mother tongue. To minimize social desirability bias, we also gave the teachers an opportunity to record individual chat-box stories at the end of the PLC pilot: teachers were invited to anonymously share a story about their participation in the PLC pilot by means of a tape recorder and in the language of their choice. During these recordings, no data collectors were present. We also collected quantitative

data during 24 PLC session observations (2 per PLC), making use of a rubric informed by the PLC guidelines (DBE, 2015). The mixed-method approach enables triangulating teachers' testimonies with their actual conduct during PLCs. In subsequent sections, we describe the ways in which professional learning communities (PLCs) are a foundation of our approach to preparing inclusive education teachers.

Results and Discussion

PLC meetings were facilitated by an experienced facilitator who kept the dialogue focused and productive for inclusive education and structured conversations around teaching all learners. This is in keeping with findings from (Brodie, 2016; Katz, Earl, & Jaafar, 2009) who find that inquiry in professional learning communities is usually supported by a facilitator or 'critical friend', who participates in the professional learning community and supports learning by asking for critical reflection on issues, probing for justification, challenging assumptions, pushing for deeper thinking and interpretations, reminding participants of what has been achieved, and guiding the direction of the ongoing conversations. Topics of discussion during the

PLCs ranged from content specific topics, to classroom management and discipline as well as ADHD, epilepsy, dyslexia, behavioral barriers, hearing impairment – all the while keeping the inclusive focus.

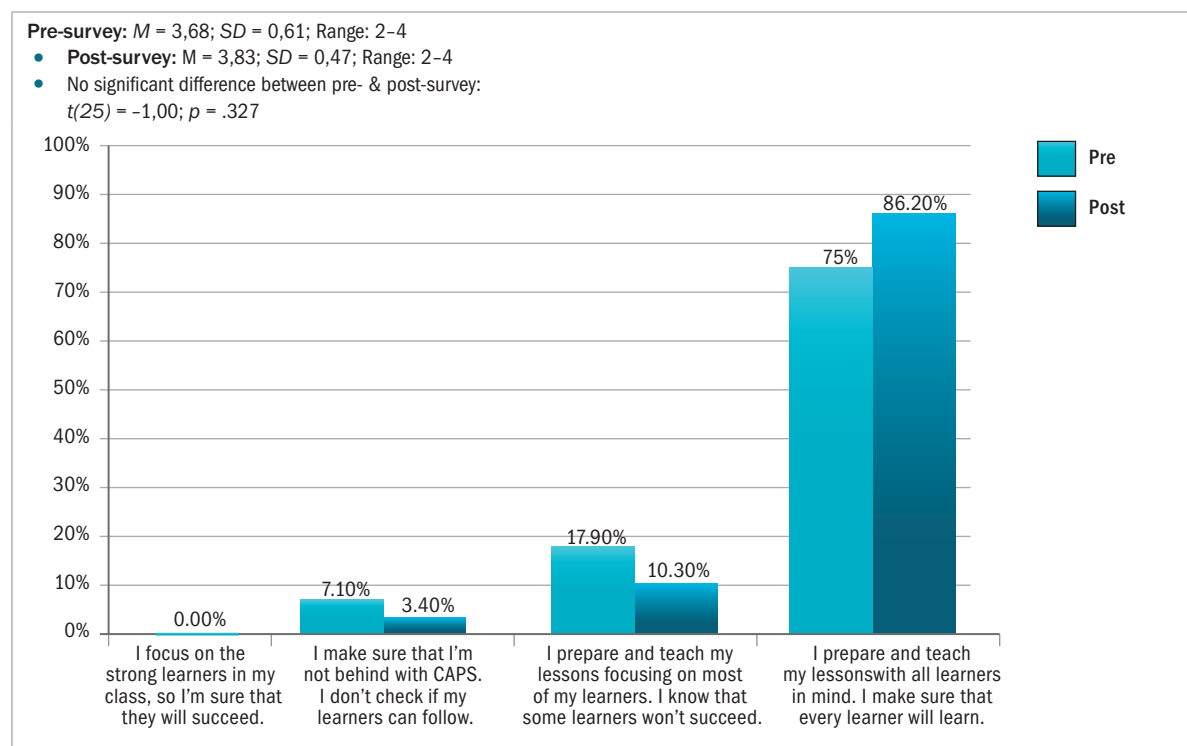
The following improvements were profiled during interviews and observations in terms of the four core competencies of inclusive teachers.

Valuing Diversity

Results of chat-box stories and focus group discussion supported findings of teachers valuing diversity and more learner-centered teaching. Teachers reported '*better addressing learner needs*', the '*importance of other aspects besides academic results*' and '*teaching to cater for all learners*'. Teachers also cited '*becoming a better inclusive teacher*.' Teachers shared the sentiment that '*every teacher can be an inclusive teacher*'.

Supporting all learners

With respect to the core value 'supporting all learners', we observed an increase in adapting teaching strategies to teach all learners when comparing results from a pre- and post-survey.



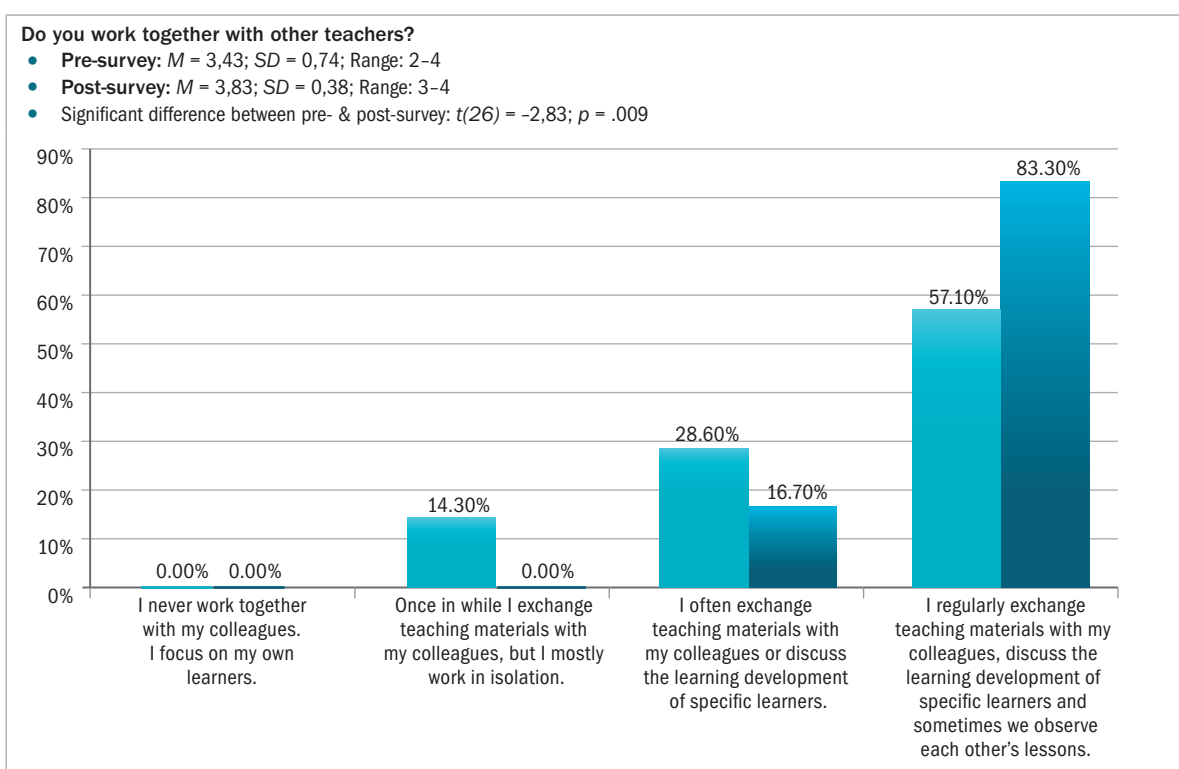
Teachers cited improved knowledge and skills to teach inclusively. They valued the sharing of strategies, methods and resources and reported on implementation of the new strategies, in particular mentioning differentiation and better support for learners with barriers to learning. This included 'recognition of behaviors in learners' and 'better management of children with learning

difficulties'. Change to practice included 'more hands-on teaching' and 'improved classroom management' with a focus on reaching all learners.

A teacher shared: *It made a difference in my classroom, I see different results in assessment, different every time you learn something new*".

Working with others (& self- reflection)

Teachers value collaboration, such as the sharing of teaching materials and discussion of learner development.



Results of chat-box stories and focus group discussions reported teachers feeling less isolated and more supported to deal with diversity in the classroom: *"I would say we were a close group that worked well together and supported each other with new ideas and also made us feel that we are not alone in the system."* This indicates that participation in a PLC encourages collaboration between educators and also improves self-reflective practices. Teachers are quoted: *'feeling better as a teacher in the classroom'; 'it revived my teaching'; 'due to the implementation of new strategies and methods I feel more goal-oriented - I have hope'*.

Personal Professional Development

Results pointed to teacher reflection on practice and an open mindedness to learn new things: *"The PLC helped us a lot; it gave us confidence, it gave us hope. That helping each other there will be light in future and we have confidence that we can help our learners."* Teachers are quoted as saying: *'having more insight into own strengths and weaknesses', 'Implementing new teaching methods' and 'more learner centered'*.

This indicates that for the majority of the participants PLCs promoted professional development of teachers.

Key Ingredients of successful PLCs

Furthermore, results of the external observations, chat-box stories and focus group discussions identified additional key ingredients of PLCs. First of all, successful PLCs were identified as being needs-driven. Teachers valued the autonomy on content, the practice-oriented, interactive approach and the opportunities to share case studies and strategies from the classroom with colleagues. This is in line with international research: “*in order to have the greatest effect on student learning, the focus must (...) involve a problem of practice based on learner needs* (Brodie, 2013:6).

Secondly the study established the importance of an external facilitator. The role of a skilled facilitator who participates in the professional learning community and supports learning by asking for critical reflection on issues, probing for justification, challenging assumptions, reminding participants of what has been achieved, and guiding the direction of the ongoing conversations.

Conclusions

In this paper we analyzed to what extent PLCs can contribute to nurturing peer-learning on inclusive education between teachers in South Africa. Using the The Profile of Inclusive Teachers, developed by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2012), we analyzed teachers' perceptions of participating in a pilot PLC study in the provinces of Free State, North West and Northern Cape. Based on chat box stories, focus group discussions and survey results, we found that PLCs can play an important role in developing positive attitudes, knowledge and skills towards inclusive teaching. Participation in PLCs was found to have an effect on the four competencies that support inclusive teaching (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012), i.e. to value learner diversity, support all learners, work together and continuously invest in professional development. In addition to these findings, the study showed that effective PLCs should be needs-based and require the involvement of an external facilitator to strengthen collaboration among educators.

In conclusion, PLCs are a useful model to promote inclusive teaching practices and develop the related knowledge and skills.

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TESTIMONIAL

THABANG'S JOURNEY ON THE NEW TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAMME



Thabang Seanego is a teacher at Mokwena Primary School in the Free State Province.

The programme was of really big help to me and I believe it made me into a better teacher. One that understands that we are not all equal intellectually and economically at homes and that leads to the different personalities that a teacher comes across in the classroom. I have really learned to appreciate diversity and learned to use it to get through to the learner rather than trying to change them.

How did the programme help you to become a better teacher?

I always struggled with class management and one of the modules in the programme was class management. They really helped me with the skills to better manage my classes from how to calm them when coming from break to dealing with the different behaviours and personalities in class.

How did having a mentor to guide and support you help?

Having a mentor that was school based was really a helpful thing. I could just leave the class when I come into a problem to her office and back to the class with a solution within a few minutes. Plus, she could easily observe me and guide me where she sees I need help.

Were you able to get to know your learners better by using the information in the handbook?

By greeting the learners at the door, asking them to say their names before answering really helped a lot which was one of the strategies mentioned in the handbook.

Did your understanding of inclusion and diversity help you to understand the needs of the children you teach?

Working through the handbook and attending the expert and

mentor sessions really helped. I did not know how to handle the progressed learners. How do I teach the learner that did not understand the previous grade? They taught me about scaffolding where I simplify the content for the learner and help them gradually improve and get to the standard of the grade that they are in.

Did the strategies on teaching practice help you to improve yours and how?

The strategies have really helped me become an amazing teacher overall. I am still learning and when I come across something new I reference in the handbook.

How did your mentor help you through the challenges you faced?

My mentor was very supportive. She would help me with my classes when she sees that it was out of control. She would ask other teachers to check on me whenever they can and she also helped with standardising my tests and assignments.

What did you learn from your peers during this year?

My fellow teachers were supportive. They helped me with filing and class management. Whenever I needed help I knew I could always count on them. There is a lot that university does not teach you. The programme and the support of fellow teachers really go me through my first two years of teaching.

Did class visits from your mentor help you?

Having my mentor visit my classes every now and then was a really big help. She could recognise the mistakes I make, be it content related or class management, and she would advise on how to handle them better than next time.



4. Challenges facing the implementation of Inclusive Education in South African schools

By Z.S Magodla

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Introduction

There has been a growing global shift towards educating all children together in inclusive school settings located within their society (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). Professional teacher training has always focused on catering for the educational needs of average learners who are perceived to be “normal”. South Africa has embraced inclusive education since 1994 as part of the broader democratisation process. In so doing, it adopted a social ecological model (Landsberg, Krüger & Swart, 2011). This model reflects the strong socio-political motivation that underpins the move to inclusive education in the South African context. It has resulted in several systemic changes being made to address this crucial issue of providing quality education and adequate learner support (Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2010; Department of Education, 2001). The National Planning Commission, Republic of South Africa (2011:264) reaffirmed its vision for education “to ensure that all children can access and benefit from high quality education.” Legislation alone, however, is not enough to bring about changed perspectives or to ensure implementation. To bring about the desired changes it is imperative that both policies and practices become contextually responsive. To ensure quality education and support for all South Africa introduced a continuum of support model. However, in a country faced with vast contextual differences in the provision and access to quality educational support the teachers in certain communities are faced with many challenges. While the country boasts some of the most advanced policies on inclusion and education as a basic human right there is still a vast gap between policy and implementation (Dreyer, 2008; Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007).

Inclusive education is an approach that considers how to transform education systems to remove the barriers that prevent learners

from participating fully in education rather than being a marginal theme on how some learners can be integrated in regular education. These barriers may be linked to ethnicity, gender, social status, poverty and disability. In some contexts certain ethnic minorities face discrimination in the classroom; in other contexts, poverty might make it difficult for a family to afford sending their children to school (Barton, 2003).

The South African Department of Education has discarded the use of a dual system of education, which was composed of mainstream education and special education. Instead, it has provided for a single system of education that is inclusive to everyone, creating opportunities for all learners, including those with special needs or disabilities. This is done by adopting an inclusive education model which fosters personal, intellectual, emotional and social development of all learners, according to need. Many schools for specialised education do still exist, but in South Africa, the concern that has been raised is that most educators have not received any training in special education. Also, within the South African context, inequalities resulting from apartheid and economic deprivation have had a significant impact on the provision of education for learners traditionally seen as having special education needs (Forlin, Douglas & Hattie, 1996). Some of the challenges that educators are faced with are a movement to accommodate diverse groups in the country. Many educators who were trained under the old traditional or conventional system, which was teacher-centred, should adapt their teaching style to the new outcomes-based system, where learner participation is encouraged (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002). However, the education system in South Africa is not as developed or as well-resourced as are its European or American counterparts, so many learners with high-intensive support needs continue to find themselves in under-resourced mainstream classrooms, with teachers who do

not feel competent or qualified to provide for their educational and supportive needs (Dreyer, 2008; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel & Tlale, 2015). Traditionally in South Africa, as internationally, teachers were not trained to cope with learners who experienced barriers to learning.

In an investigation Engelbrecht (2000) revealed that overall the most stressful issues for educators regarding the implementation of inclusive education related to educators' perceived professional self-competence, administrative issues and those related to the behaviour of learners. In addition, limited contact with parents as well as the parents' perceived lack of understanding of learner's capabilities and long-term prognosis, inadequate pre-service or in-service training and the reduced ability to teach other learners effectively also proved to be stressful.

Implementing inclusive education implies a development of broad learning strategies to accommodate and include learners with special needs. This is based on individual perceptions of special needs and the focus that is put on the school's organization and culture (Armstrong & Moore, 2003; DoE, 2005b; 2005d). The schools must be committed to and responsible for the process of restructuring themselves in response to the diversity of learners.

The barriers to inclusive education may be caused by several different factors, such as cultural and environmental (e.g. inaccessible environment, inflexible curricula, inadequate support service, evaluation, language differences), socio-economic (e.g. poverty), gender and individual factors (disabilities) (Guijarro, 2000, p. 41). Amadio (2009) finds that there exist deeply-rooted negative social attitudes and discriminatory social practices, monetary limitations, lack of resources and a gap between principles and curriculum and classroom practices.

Educators find it difficult to respond to the mandate to integrate students with disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate in general settings; and they may perceive this as an additional burden on their already stressed workloads (Dupoux, Hammond, Ingalls & Wolman,

2006). Many are not well equipped and tend to educate themselves. It has been reported that male educators' attitudes toward integration are more negative than female educators (Alghazo & Naggar Gaad, 2004). Factors related to administrative support have been linked to educators' attitudes toward inclusive education. Educators consider the presence of organizational support and resources as critical in forming positive attitudes toward inclusive education (Kruger, Struzziero & Vacca, 1995). An additional component of positive attitude is related to class size. Mainstream educators reported that reducing class size to 20 learners would facilitate their inclusion effort (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

In various countries like Japan and America, inclusive education was initiated by parents of children with disabilities. Although parents' motives to place their disabled child in a regular school might vary, they mainly choose a regular education setting because of the possibilities for their child to participate socially in the peer group.

The two areas of most concern to teachers in a study by Forlin (2008) included their own perceived professional competency and classroom issues. This study involved an investigation of mainstream teachers' concerns in relation to coping with inclusion and is typical of much of the research which reports teachers' views on the barriers to inclusion. Forlin et al. analysed concerns regarding inclusion identified by 228 teachers from 11 schools within 16 districts across Western Australia. Teachers' perceived professional competency included issues such as: insufficient pre-service training to cater adequately for a child with an intellectual disability in their classroom, difficulty monitoring other students when attending to the student (with SEN) and reduced ability to teach other students as effectively as they would like when including a student with an intellectual disability in their class (Forlin, 2008, pp. 255–256).

A major concern reported by the teachers was their lack of competence in teaching and assessing students' progress. Interestingly, Forlin et al. found that teachers' concerns regarding

their professional competence increased, rather than diminished, with age and experience of and involvement in inclusive educational practices.

Most educators in South Africa do not have adequate training to provide such support (Donald & Hlongwane, 1993). The latter poses a big challenge to schools and educators because the Human Rights Foundation of Inclusive Education suggests that a learner should be able to choose his or her classroom and school preference, and that adequate support should be provided in that chosen classroom (Hay, 2003). The degree to which special and general classroom teachers are prepared to work in inclusive settings greatly determines the ultimate success of inclusive programmes (Luseno, 2001).

Parental involvement: The lives of many learners with disabilities are restricted and diminished more by the negative attitudes, beliefs and prejudice of their neighbours and local community than by their own limitations (Buckley, Bird 1992). "Really the child is not progressing at that school, even the doctors confirmed that he cannot be taught at such schools he needs special kind of education. This will enable him to learn at his own pace and to get teachers who are trained to train and take care of children like him." This is an extract of interviews conducted with parents in a rural Limpopo province of South Africa by T. Thejane. (1999). These were the main reasons why parents enrol their children in ordinary schools even though a learning barrier has been identified:

- Attitudes of the community
- Advice by professionals
- Assumptions about special schools
- Transport challenges
- Lack of trust in teachers' willingness to be accommodating and supportive
- Lack of information on Education Policy
- Lack of empowerment.

Conclusion

Most educators have negative attitudes, experiences and perceptions of inclusive education. They are not receiving adequate support and appropriate resources for the successful implementation of inclusive

education. Most educators are not even well informed on remedial teaching and special needs education. Because they have not been trained in inclusive and special education, the educators feel incompetent and they feel that they cannot appropriately serve the learners with barriers to learning. They cannot pay adequate attention to all learners in their inclusive classrooms because the class sizes are too big. As a result, educators are flooded with heavy workloads.

It is recommended that school districts working in conjunction with educator training institutes provide mainstream educators and those working in inclusive schools or one inclusive class per mainstream school with training in remedial teaching. This training would be aimed at bringing about a mind shift and the acquisition of new skills for educators. Information sharing workshops and adequate in-service training designed to enhance their knowledge of legal aspects of inclusive education and strategies for teaching learners with barriers to learning should be organised and facilitated. These should focus on adapting and adjusting the curriculum; how educators can work collaboratively; examine ways on how to manage an inclusive classroom. Additional training also needs to be provided for school managers, education specialists and district directors. It should focus on the definition of inclusion; special education law; and strategies for assisting, evaluating, motivating, and scheduling educator duties so that co-educators would have time to plan together and/or share information. An Inclusive approach aimed at bringing about a mind shift and the acquisition of new skills for educators due to the growing number of special needs learners in schools should also be added to the Bachelor of Education (B-ED) degree which is the primary teacher training degree. Finally, all necessary efforts should be made to ensure a successful implementation of inclusive education, providing quality education for all as all learners have a right to education.

It is recommended that educator, school, and district capacity to meet the needs of educators teaching learners with barriers to learning be built, while ensuring that the educators' workload remains manageable. This can be achieved by providing adequate funding, distribution of

appropriate resources, good equipment, support personnel and teaching material suitable for included learners and by reducing class sizes. It is proposed that schools should establish a School Based Support team that is responsible for the

provision of learning support and together with the teachers be involved in a learner's teaching and learning. This team should liaise with the District Based Support Team.

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Makinita Letlhogonolo is a teacher at Paardekraal Primary School in the North West Province.

How did the programme help you to become a better teacher?

The inclusive induction programme helped me to become a better teacher because it made me aware of how children are side-lined because of their barriers to learning and how they should be included. The programme also empowered me with different methods of teaching and solving problems in the workplace. It made me aware of how diverse children are in their learning abilities and how to cater for their learning needs.

How did having a mentor to guide and support you help?

The teaching programme (inclusive induction) helped with the transition from varsity into the workplace. The transition went well because everything was formalised because of this programme. We were assigned mentors, who were there to assist us where we struggled with challenges at the workplace. We also had to sit down and discuss challenges that we as new teachers faced in the workplace with our mentors and write the solutions we came up with down in our portfolios.

Were you able to get to know your learners better by using the information in the handbook?

I was able to know my learners better, not only in terms of identity but their abilities. The handbook made me aware that my learners had different learning abilities but should all be treated in the same way. They come from different cultural, social, economic and religious backgrounds and should all be included in the learning process.

Did your understanding of inclusion and diversity help you to understand the needs of the children you teach?

My understanding of inclusion and diversity after the induction programme improved. I learned that all my learners come from different backgrounds; religious, cultural, social and economic backgrounds and should all be treated the same way, with love and respect for their diversity. I learned that they all have different ways of learning and different abilities and should all be included regardless of their different learning abilities.

Did the strategies on teaching practice help you to improve yours and how?

The strategies I learned did help me to improve my own teaching strategy because they influenced me to see group learning differently. Group learning or social learning is one of the strategies. This learning and teaching strategy is good because you mix learners with different ability groups together. They help each other and learn from one another. In a group "copying" is not a bad thing because you copy to improve yourself as a learner. The learners socialize and discuss ideas and solutions together, they even feel more comfortable in this setting.

How did your mentor help you through the challenges you faced?

My mentor not only offered moral support but also work related support on tasks at school. How the tasks should be compiled, how my Educator's file should be compiled and other files such as C.P.T.D and I.Q.M.S. My other mentor helped me to understand IQMS and how it worked. We had to sit for hours, talk and discuss the challenges I face at school and how I could improve as a teacher or where I needed to improve. If there is something I do not understand I ask my mentor for example; with the school policies and committees, she explained the roles and functions of the different committees at school before I could choose which one would suit me best.

What did you learn from your peers during this year?

During the programme I learned that my peers also faced the same challenges I faced, therefore we are all in the same boat. We sat down at the inclusive induction programme meetings and discussed the challenges we faced as new educators and came up with different solutions. This empowered me as a new teacher and we exchanged ideas and solutions with peers and our facilitator.

Did class visits from your mentor help you?

Class visits from my mentor helped me a lot because she would observe me teaching then advise me on where to improve to become better. If I struggle with managing my classroom, she would offer her classroom management strategies with me, for example creating routines for learners. Your learners must be familiar with routines as this minimizes chaos in your classroom and keeps discipline.



5. Are visible rewards congruent with Inclusive Education?

By Shakira Akabor

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Abstract

The current neoliberal agenda that pervades educational systems throughout the world has encouraged a market-like approach to the way schools function and perform. As a result, schooling is characterized by high levels of competitiveness and justifies the notion that a meritocracy is the only way to academic success. Postcolonial countries are grappling with the implementation of inclusive education within this context and South Africa is no exception. Given that the ideals of inclusive education are rooted in social justice, collaboration, supportive learning communities, and participation for all, it is not difficult to see the disparity between the environment within which our schools currently operate, and the ideals to which we aspire in terms of realizing inclusive education. Visible rewards is an umbrella term encompassing badges, trophies, certificates, different items of clothing and listings on honour boards. This paper argues that reducing the mechanisms supporting academic competition can encourage collaboration and cooperation, thereby creating environments that facilitate inclusive communities at schools. In particular, visibly rewarding learners via elaborate ceremonies using symbolic representations of academic achievement are considered. This does not mean a reduction in the pursuit of excellence in academic achievement, but rather prioritizing the participation and achievement of all learners, where every learner is equally valued and the dignity of all learners is upheld at school. The ways in which we currently reward and award learners therefore needs revisiting.

Introduction

South African schools have seen four major curriculum changes since 1994 with an institution of radical reforms at national, provincial and local levels via ample legislation (Chrisholm, 2004). Whilst attempts at redressing our previously unequal and racially stratified education system

have been varied and multi-pronged (Walton, 2011), our schools have not yet overcome the issue of providing equitable education for all. South Africa is one of 92 countries that adopted the Salamanca Statement in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994). The statement outlines strategies and policies for including all learners at schools (UNESCO, 1994) and remains an important framework that provides a source of inclusive education policies in various countries worldwide. The aims and ideals of inclusive education are associated with values such as access and quality, equality and social justice, democracy and participation as well as the balance between unity and diversity (Norwich, 2014). Whilst the aims and ideals of inclusive education are similar to those values espoused by the postcolonial constitution of South Africa, they appear to be in contradiction with the neoliberal system within which our country finds itself today. In acknowledging that inclusive education is not without critique (Van Rooyen & Le Grange, 2003; DBE, 2015), I provide a backdrop for the necessity of inclusive education in South Africa. Further, I argue for the reduction in mechanisms supporting academic competition, identified as a manifestation of the neoliberal doctrine in schools. The paper examines how these discourses are manifested in the competitive academic environments found in South African schools by rewarding learners visibly with symbolic, tangible awards.

Inclusive values versus neoliberal principles

Given that the neoliberal discourse is focused on providing good choices by maintaining standards and competitiveness according to an economic rationale it stands in sharp contrast with the principles of social justice and equity at schools (Grimaldi, 2012; Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse, 2008; Spreen & Vally, 2006). The current situation of competitiveness, elitism, stratification and labelling that are inherent

in a neoliberal schooling system form part of the neoliberal framework. On the other hand an inclusive school culture is premised upon collaboration, cooperation, participation and the sharing of information for the benefit of all. It also aims for openness and willingness to reflect and respond, to be dynamic rather than static, and to remove any possible barriers to learning (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Norwich, 2014; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Furthermore, the use of learner collaboration within groups at schools greatly benefits their inclusivity when inclusive education is framed as participation (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2018). Equality of opportunity, equity, human rights and democracy are concepts associated with inclusion at schools (Nilholm, 2006). Thus it can be argued that collaboration rather than competition is necessary for inclusion. An essential aspect of actualizing inclusion in group work is to develop conditions that support mutually respectful interactions (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2018).

South African schools are faced with a tug-of-war situation – on the one hand we have educational policies promoting inclusion, equality and learner collaboration that must be implemented. On the other hand, we have a schooling system that is competitive, run like a business and is focused on outperforming other schools in terms of academic results. Competitiveness with regards to academic results is seen as necessary by schools in order to attract a specific type of learner (or more importantly, the parent) from a middle class background as future cohorts of the school. This tends to be a complex situation, whilst the consumer is often seen to be the parent in a neoliberal schooling system, this is not always the case. Gulson and Fataar (2011) argue that in South Africa, learners from child-headed homes are in fact the consumers as they find themselves transacting school choice.

I argue for the questioning of practices such as rewarding learners based on the tensions between inclusive education and neoliberal schooling and the complex situation in which South African schools find themselves. In a schooling system underpinned by values that are consistent with the aims and ideals of inclusive education it is inconsistent to have competitiveness and

hierarchical structures within schools. Although there is no data available, ceremonious award functions and the distribution of symbolic awards occur at many schools throughout South Africa.

In a report on the condition of Gauteng's inclusive education implementation over the last two decades, Walton (2014) recommends that in order to improve their support of learning, schools should ensure that competitiveness does not result in the exclusion and marginalization of learners who experience barriers to learning. Walton (2014) refers specifically to the level of competitiveness prevalent amongst high schools, to such a degree that learners who might affect the averages of the school are excluded from exams in an attempt to maximize the school's matric pass rate and maintain their lofty rankings. It is not uncommon for schools to exclude and deny learners the option to even try working towards writing a matric under the school's name for fear of failures that would translate into a downgrade in rankings, given that South African schools have a strong culture of awards and rewards. Thus the way in which the rewards and the awards culture has infiltrated our schools points to an overzealous preoccupation with winning at all costs, and has eroded our sense of fairness and justice towards the learning of all learners in our schools.

This article is based on my current doctoral study at two public high schools in Gauteng. Among the perspectives from the learners were the following: winning at any/all costs might benefit the small number of learners who do win awards and it is of no consequence to the majority of learners who do not win awards. Some learners expressed the view that not making the criteria to win awards has contributed to their resentment towards the reward system at schools. Despite these learners' views however, the school stands to benefit the most: when the select few award-winning learners win multiple awards, they are maintaining the school's image of providing excellence in academic achievement. These award-winning learners contribute and are even beneficiaries of the pride that schools carry when they are ranked highly for the number of A's they produce at matric level.

In arguing for a less competitive schooling environment Watkins et al. (2003, p.193) posit that “a school culture that displays honor rolls and rewards the top students at prize-giving ceremonies is likely to...undermine classroom teachers’ attempts to foster intrinsic motivation.” Among the findings from Watkins et al. (2003) study at two Gauteng schools which aimed at looking for motivational differences between learners of varying ethnicity, it was found that creating a learning environment that encourages interest and hard work leads to higher quality learning outcomes. Higher quality learning outcomes for all learners is in line with the aims and ideals of inclusive education. It seems then, that despite a decade of inclusive education research, very little attention has been given to exploring the competitive nature of schools in South Africa. Thus I attempt to question the acceptance of the traditional practice of rewarding and awarding learners for academic achievement visibly and publicly.

Visible Rewards

The term “visible rewards” is what I have used to refer to an umbrella of practices involving tangible rewards given to learners as recognition of scholastic achievement. This includes, but is not limited to, badges, trophies, certificates and listings on honour boards that are linked to academic achievement, usually presented publicly at a ceremonious occasion attended by the school staff, parents and learners. It must be noted that whilst an abundance of literature exists on competitive structures (Kohn, 1992; Kohn, 2007; Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Chong & Graham, 2017; Ball, 1993; Walton, 2014) and cooperative structures (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2010; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Hattie, 2009; King-Sears, 1997) within schools, the literature on rewards and incentives is not as exhaustive, with the focus being on rewards for learner motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 2001; Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999) and on the variety of rewards available (Jalava, Joensen & Pellas, 2014). In particular, there is a paucity of literature available on the rewarding of learners in the way that occurs in South African schools,

which is a culture of individualistic rewards and the giving of prizes for academic excellence.

Rewards exist in a variety of forms at schools. Broadly, rewards can be divided into two categories: prize-based or privilege-based (Fefer, DeMagistris & Shuttleton, 2016). Prize-based rewards might cost money, are tangible and symbolic, whilst privilege-based rewards given to learners generally do not cost any money, such as extra free-time, no homework for the day, or small coupons that can be collected and exchanged for a privilege. The act of rewarding learners at schools is also described in the literature as incentives or incentive schemes (Bigoni, Fort, Nardotto & Reggiani, 2015). Rewards can either be based on individualistic incentives, where individual learners are rewarded for outdoing their peers, for instance Top 10 learners in the grade, or they could take the form of a tournament, where groups of learners are rewarded for outperforming other groups of learners, for example groups of learners working together on a project that will be judged at the science fair (Bigoni, Fort, Nardotto & Reggiani, 2015). Tournaments tend to be less common in the South African academic setting. South African schools prefer individualistic and highly competitive incentive schemes involving symbolic rewards. Many schools in South Africa have a strong culture of rewarding learners and are a great source of pride for teachers, parents and learners, as well as members of the community. By providing symbolic representations of the sought-after school culture, these schools contribute not only to the entrenchment of value and commodification in the school, but ties in well with Gulson and Fataar’s (2011) argument that historically white schools are privileged.

Whilst no mention is made of the practice of visibly rewarding learners in the Gauteng review (Walton, 2014) reference is made to the unhealthy competitive nature of high schools as being a source of exclusion for learners. Visibly rewarding learners is a manifestation of that competitive culture as it encourages, supports and rewards learners for outdoing their peers. As a result, the school creates elitist hierarchies by lauding the success of a small group of learners to whom importance is given, whose voices are heard, who are the learners that Slee (2011) refers to

as “smiled upon”, whilst simultaneously sending out the silent message that those learners who do not meet the minimum criteria for the school’s standards for receiving visible rewards may be excluded or made to feel inferior, less talented, or less significant in the life of the school. When learners do not see importance in others or in themselves they are experiencing marginalization (Messiou, 2012). Inclusion, exclusion and marginalization are inextricably linked, and an absence of inclusion results in exclusion and marginalization. Learners who do not win awards can become resentful of the rewards, and may show a “don’t care” attitude towards schooling in general. They would probably experience labelling and know that the low expectations of their achievements means that they are not seen as valuable to their schools and may thus feel marginalized. Therefore it can be seen that a competitive schooling culture and its related practices of rewarding learners visibly and publicly, needs to be viewed in light of the possible harm it may bring to learners, namely exclusion and marginalization. This is in complete contradiction to the aims of *White Paper 6* (DoE, 2001). Given that an awards/rewards culture is an inherent part of the South African schooling experience, is it possible to reward learners in an inclusive way? I explore the possibilities below.

Rewarding learners and inclusion

The awards/rewards system at our schools needs to be questioned in the light of its symbolism – not only of the academic achievement of the learners which in itself might have issues regarding the criteria and the processes. More broadly, questions need to be asked concerning rewards and awards as a meritocratic method of sorting society and as an entrenchment of neoliberal values that privilege some and exclude others. There is some indication that reward ceremonies can be used to realize social justice by rewarding a variety of categories of learners such that everyone wins a prize (Hay & Beyers, 2011). Similarly, Marks, Cresswell and Ainley (2006) believe that school systems that reward ability and effort rather than social origin might substantially reduce the extent of social reproduction between generations of learners.

On the contrary, schools that assist less talented and less motivated learners from advantaged backgrounds may increase social inequality and create barriers for academically able learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Marks, Cresswell & Ainley, 2006).

The questioning of the awards/rewards indicates an iceberg scenario. Whilst the tip of the iceberg could be likened to the actual visible reward, the underlying dangers not visible to the eye could represent the attitudes, beliefs and practices at schools in which visible rewards occur. A competitive environment is promoted by schools that visibly reward learners – as learners work towards their own goals of achievement, they will inevitably have to work against their peers to win coveted top prizes. Such a schooling structure prioritizes competition and selfishness over cooperation (Kohn, 1992), whereas cooperation and collaboration are the necessary elements for an inclusive school culture (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

In a more collaborative, or cooperative situation, an award would only be given if in a particular class every learner has achieved a minimum requirement, for example 65% in a particular subject, therefore the class as a whole gets rewarded, with an award for every learner. This reward scheme takes on the tournament or team reward structure outlined by Bigoni, Fort, Nardotto and Reggiani (2015), such that the success of all is considered valuable and worthy of recognition, rather than the success of a few individuals. Thus the efforts towards higher achievement of the class would change from concerns about individual learners’ success towards the success of the whole group before any awards can be given.

Another possibility is to use a model that rewards the bettering of one’s own previous personal best, with no comparison to other learners’ and their achievements. This model may work to reduce the effects of a competitive environment, but is a radical change from the formative way in which we assess learners at schools. Called ipsative assessment (Mabry, 1999; Hughes, 2011), it requires a change in the entire assessment process, and not just the rewards

process. Ipsative assessment has been known to increase motivation in learners (Hughes, 2011), which addresses previous concerns about the reduction of motivation to learn in rewards – based programmes (Deci & Ryan, 1999; Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 2001).

Re-looking at the awards/rewards systems at schools can be a creative process that schools must engage in with all stakeholders, including the learners themselves. This process is not easy, but is necessary. As noted by Engelbrecht, Oswald and Forlin (2006) during their use of the *Index for Inclusion* in Western Cape schools, the honest reflection on school cultures, policies and practices can be a painful process at times. Revisiting and rethinking the awards programme is a process that is necessary for schools. The removal of the current system of visible rewards might sound drastic, but it has the potential to make schools seriously interrogate competitive practices that they might consider benign and beneficial to a few, towards a school culture that is collaborative, cooperative and is genuinely concerned with raising achievement for all. Whilst there is little evidence in the literature of South African schools following this system of no rewards, alternative pedagogies such as Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio Emilia are known to be non-competitive environments that promote the learning of each individual learner without drawing attention to the achievement of others (Edwards, 2002). Therefore, a variety of possibilities exist for schools to rethink and reframe their rewards systems to enable inclusive schooling environments.

Conclusion

South African schools have come a long way from their historically disgraceful past. However, greater emphasis needs to be placed on questioning the practices of schools that are taken for granted and considered normative and part and parcel of schooling. The current rewarding of learners visibly and publicly, within a competitive school culture can be seen in two ways: as a means of upholding of the traditions of the past as well as a manifestation of the neoliberal market-driven norms prevalent in South African education today.

In rethinking and questioning the traditional practice of visibly rewarding individual learners towards rewarding the entire class, we can perhaps attempt to reform our schools by chipping away at one of the last edifices of the school structure that are reminiscent of apartheid schooling days. In this way, it is hoped that the possibility of creating school environments conducive to the implementation of inclusive education and thus the prioritization of the learning needs and the achievement of *all* learners can become a reality.

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Boikanyo Moletsane is a teacher at Mfidikwe Primary School in the North West Province.

How did the programme help you to become a better teacher?

It helped me to be a pro-active teacher and to prevent unnecessary situations to occur in class, to be inclusive and to always practice inclusive education and to think critically. I learnt to know my learners better and to implement classroom management strategies effectively.

How did having a mentor to guide and support you help?

It helped me to adjust to my workplace quickly. Having someone to guide me and provide advice when needed helped make the transition from varsity to workplace easier.

Were you able to get to know your learners better by using the information in the handbook?

Yes, there were classroom management strategies that were helpful. Differentiating and scaffolding methods were effective too. I am still referring to the handbook to help me get to know my new learners.

Did your understanding of inclusion and diversity help you to understand the needs of the children you teach?

Yes, I learnt that learners are different individuals, they should not all be placed in the same category. They come from different socio-economic backgrounds, cultures etc. and as

a teacher you need to embrace such diversity and ensure a safe learning environment for all learners. You need to utilise various methods of teaching to cater for all learners' needs.

Did the strategies on teaching practice help you to improve yours and how?

Yes – to be pro-active. To use different teaching strategies to cater for all learners as they have different learning styles, to set activities/tasks/tests that are differentiated, to challenge those with high cognitive levels and still ensure that those with average/low cognitive levels are able to complete the test/task.

How did your mentor help you through the challenges you faced?

With time management

What did you learn from your peers during this year?

That planning is essential for effective teaching and learning: arrangement of classroom furniture for a crowded class, incorporating different teaching strategies, planning remedial work, how to achieve the goals set in a given time, how to use good assessment techniques.

Did class visits from your mentor help you?

Yes, she provided feedback and guided me on how to approach various situations.



6. The Transformative Potential of the 2019 Amended Admission Regulations in Gauteng

By D. Petherbridge

Attorney: Equal Education Law Centre

Introduction

Section 29(1) (a) of the South African Constitution protects everyone's right to basic education. However, the ability of learners to access quality basic education equally is a critical part of realising this right. Although South Africa transitioned from Apartheid to a democratic state in 1994, unchanged discriminatory spatial planning has played a negative role in the way poorer learners have been able to access quality basic education, particularly through the implementation of school feeder zones that merely reinforce past inequalities. In 2019, the Gauteng Department of Education ('GDE') introduced a new methodology in determining feeder zones that has the potential to improve how learners are able to access better performing schools and a higher quality of education. This article will discuss why the GDE embarked on amending its previous approach to delimiting school feeder zones, and the significant steps it has introduced that may potentially assist in redressing these inequalities.

The 2012 Admission Regulations

In 2001 the GDE published regulations to govern the way learners were admitted to public schools. Almost 12 years later, the GDE amended these regulations through the publication of the Regulations Relating to the Admission of Learners to Public Schools, 2012 ('2012 Admission Regulations').¹ A number of these amendments were argued to be unconstitutional, and in 2016 the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools ('FEDSAS') challenged the constitutionality of specific amendments before the Constitutional Court.² Equal Education ('EE'), represented by the Equal Education Law Centre ('EELC'), acted as *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) in the matter and raised its own concerns that the 2012 Admission Regulations indirectly discriminated against learners trying to access a better quality of basic education in the province.

In particular, EE highlighted Regulation 4 of the 2012 Admission Regulations that governed the way feeder zones (the area from which a school receives its core intake of learners) should be determined. In terms of this Regulation 4(1) stated that the Member of the Executive Council ('MEC') had the power to determine school feeder zones and could determine these if he/she chose to do so. In addition, Regulation 4(2) indicated that, until such time as the MEC determined a feeder zone for a school, the following default position would prevail for entry phase learners:³

"(2) ... the feeder zone for that school will be deemed to have been determined so that a place of residence or work falls within the feeder zone, if:

- a. Relative to that place of residence or place of work, the school is the closest school which the learner is eligible to attend, or
- b. that place of residence or place of work for that parent is within a 5 km radius of the school".⁴

As can be seen, if the MEC chose not to determine a school feeder zone, a learner only fell into a school's feeder zone if that school was within a 5 km radius of a learner's home, or their parent's workplace, or if it was the closest school to a learner's home or parents' workplace. As such, the only determining factor used to determine whether a learner fell into a school's feeder zone or not was where a learner's home or parent's work place was situated.

In addition to this, although the 2012 Admission Regulations permitted learners to apply for admission to any public school, schools were required to create a "Waiting List A" and a "Waiting List B".⁵ Waiting List A contained the names of all those learners falling within the schools' feeder zone, as well as those learners who already had a sibling in the school. However, all those learners unable to qualify for Waiting list A were placed on

Waiting List B, and would only be considered for placement in a school after all the learners on Waiting List A were accommodated. Consequently, the likelihood of a learner on Waiting List B being admitted into a school of choice was slim.

While these criteria of proximity may appear to be neutral EE argued that this method had a disparate racial impact on the way learners were placed into feeder zones and ultimately admitted into schools. In particular, there is still an inextricable link between race, class and geography that exists in Gauteng today despite formal desegregation which is affecting access to basic education. Specifically in the Johannesburg area, poverty is geographically concentrated in areas that were previously established during Apartheid on the basis of race and class. These areas are not only comprised of poor communities, but also host poorer, under-performing schools. In practice, this has meant that schools available to many African children often living in poor areas, are largely formerly African schools that have suffered historical disadvantage and are not well resourced or performing optimally. In addition, learners located in historically White, well-off areas would fall into feeder zones of historically affluent schools that are able to charge higher school fees, and tend to be better resourced and better performing than the former.

The GDE's 2012 Admission Regulations therefore did very little to reduce the effects of spatial inequality on poorer learners' ability to access quality education. Rather, the GDE's admission system, which prioritises proximity, has reinforced these unequal divisions and indirectly discriminated learners on the grounds of race and colour, violating their right to equality enshrined in section 9(3) of the Constitution.

Based on these arguments EE requested that the Court declare Regulation 4 of the 2012 Admission Regulations unconstitutional and invalid. In addition, EE requested that the MEC be obliged to determine school feeder zones, as opposed to merely exercising a discretion, and to do so on the basis of factors other than geographic location. Lastly, EE urged the Court to compel the MEC to determine feeder zones for Gauteng by a determined date or within a published time frame.

Although the Court did not deal with EE's argument of unfair discrimination, it did compel the GDE, by way of court order, to determine feeder zones for public schools in Gauteng in terms of Regulation 4(1) within 12 months after the order. The GDE, however, subsequently applied for an 18-month extension, which gave it until November 2018 to determine feeder zones for public schools in Gauteng.

The Amended 2019 Admission Regulations

While the Court order only obliged the GDE to determine feeder zones for public schools in the province, the GDE also initiated a process of revising how feeder zones for public schools in Gauteng are determined, which seemed to respond to the issues raised by EE.

In particular, the GDE published Draft Admission Regulations⁶ on 29 July 2018 for public comment in which it proposed amendments to the 2012 Regulations that evidenced the development of a more transformative approach to the determination of feeder zones. Eight months later the GDE published its Amendments to Regulations Relating to the Admission of Learners to Public Schools, 2019 ('Amended 2019 Admission Regulations') in which it finalised its proposals and established a new approach that could potentially address the spatial inequalities reinforced by the 2012 Regulations.⁷

Specifically, Regulation 4(3) of the Amended 2019 Regulations states that in determining a feeder zone a Head of Department must now consider a number of factors, which include:

- “(a) the capacity of the school and the schools in the vicinity to accommodate learners;
- (b) the language and curricula offered at the school and the schools in the vicinity;
- (c) information and projections regarding area populations density, learner population density and learner enrolment; and
- (d) the need for geographical and spatial transformation.”

The inclusion of this range of criteria in the GDE's decision-making processes will allow for a more considered and contextual approach to the delimitation of feeder zones which includes an unprecedented prioritisation of the need for geographical and spatial transformation in the determination of feeder zones in Gauteng.

In addition to this, the GDE has also revised the application criteria that determine which learners are able to apply to a school, and that affect how learners will be placed on Waiting List A and Waiting List B. In particular, the 2019 Amended Admission Regulations has now created five categories of entry-phased learners who can apply to a school. Entry-phased learners may apply to a school:

- a. if the school is the closest one to their home and still within the feeder zone;
- b. the learner has a sibling in the school;
- c. at least one of the learner's parents work in the feeder zone;
- d. if the learner lives within a 30 km radius of the school; and
- e. if the learner's home is beyond 30 km's of the school.

The GDE then ranks learners in the order of these categories, and in the order in which applications were received. Based on this ranking, the Head of Department must "place applicant learners that he or she intends to admit to the school on waiting list A in terms of the categories referred to in paragraphs (a) to (d)...". Learners who do not qualify will be placed on waiting list B. In theory, this ranking system opens up the possibility for learners who live up to 30 km's from a school may be accommodated on Waiting list A, as opposed to them not qualifying at all under the previous approach and placed on Waiting List B.

The GDE took another significant step in September 2018 and published a policy on the Delimitation of Feeder Zones, in which it reaffirms the criteria established in the 2019 Amended Regulations and includes additional principles that should inform the GDE's decision-making when determining a school feeder zone. These principles include the community ownership of schools, learners' accessibility to schools, learner safety, the quality of education at a school, costs involved for parents, optimal utilisation of human and physical resources and lastly, transformation issues (which include access to quality education, redressing the past, and fairness/ equity).

Conclusion

Section 29(1)(a) of the Constitution imposes an obligation on the State to ensure equal access to basic education, as well as to address the inequalities of the past caused by discriminatory laws and practices. The Amended 2019 Regulations establish a methodology of determining feeder zones that potentially responds to this obligation and ensures the consideration of critical factors that may provide learners from poorer areas an opportunity to apply and be admitted into better performing schools. On 15 November 2018, the GDE complied with the Court order and published its Determination of Final Feeder Zones,⁸ which lists those schools for whom the MEC has determined feeder zones in Gauteng. The GDE intends to implement these in 2020 and, in support thereof, the MEC for Gauteng, Mr Lesufi, has publicly stated that "We are closing a chapter in our history that was left unattended too long".⁹ In light of the significant steps taken by the GDE, it is hoped that the 2020 admission process will reflect this change, and that the 2019 Amended Admission Regulations will be a tool of transformation in Gauteng.

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3. "Entry phase learners" were defined in the 2012 Regulations as learners seeking to be admitted into Grade R, Grade 1, or Grade 8, and in cases where schools did not start at any of these aforementioned grades, then the lowest grade in a school.
4. This provision did not apply to specialist schools, technical schools, agricultural schools or industrial schools.
5. See Regulations 7(1) and 7 (2) of the 2012 Regulations.
6. EE was advised that over 11 000 commentators submit comments during this process.
7. Amendments to Regulations Relating to the Admission of Learners to Public Schools, 2019 (Extraordinary Provincial Gazette No 85 Vol 25 (18 March 2019)).
8. Provincial Gazette Extraordinary No 339, Vol 24 (15 November 2018). <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/new-feeder-zones-for-public-schools-will-cross-the-colour-line-lesufi-20181115> (15 November 2018).



TESTIMONIAL

EGNES' JOURNEY ON THE NEW TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAMME



Egnes Selemela is a teacher at Sebatatso Primary School in the Free State Province.

How did the programme help you to become a better teacher?

The NTIP reminded me of the content I learned in University. It taught me how to communicate with the learners without being angry at them, gave me classroom management skills on how to control the learners and a whole lot of other strategies. I learned how to sort my class and learners, setting up class rules and communicating them to the learners.

How did having a mentor to guide and support you help?

It helped me in many ways. The mentor helped in lesson planning, shared reading activities, and even with class observations to see what I was not doing right and supporting when needed. She supported in a lot of activities that involved the whole class. Guiding learners to the carpet, sitting arrangements, how to talk to the learners and so on. She assisted with classroom setting, helped with the file preparations and making subject files.

Were you able to get to know your learners better by using the information in the teacher handbook?

Yes, I did. I am still using the file even now for other activities in my teaching.

Did your understanding of inclusion and diversity help you to understand the needs of the children you had to teach?

Yes, a lot. Even more, it was an eye opener that it is important to know the background of the learners we teach, find

information on their home circumstances and try everything to understand them better before teaching. That helps when it's time to teach in class.

Did the strategies on teaching practice help you to improve yours and how?

Yes, they did. Identifying barriers, filling in the SNA forms; I heard that first on the NTIP session. I did not know about it. Now I am able to identify learners, fill in SNA forms and refer them.

How did your mentor help you through the challenges you faced?

She helped with English lessons and mainly on behaviour management in class.

What did you learn from your peers (other teachers) during this first year?

Other teachers helped in maths lessons, I had a particular challenge with teaching the number line and explaining to the learners what it was. Other teachers helped in this regard. Others also helped in English lesson how to speak to learners and their parents and having healthy relationships with the parents.

Did class visits from your mentor assist you?

Yes, the mentor always checked behaviour of learners and assisted when necessary. She would advise me to place restless learners next to me so that I may attend to their needs with ease when they are sitting next to me. She also assisted with executing reading lessons.

7. Action research to support Inclusive Education in Free State Province

By Vuyelwa Khanya, Learning Support Advisor, FSDoE; Charlotte Vancaalster, Communications Officer, VVOB; Hanne Huysmans, Education Advisor, VVOB

Summary

This article illustrates how action research can be used by district and provincial officials to support educators to implement inclusive practices in schools.

VVOB supported a year-long action research process with 29 volunteering officials from the Free State Department of Education (FSDoE). The officials investigated the effectiveness of their own practices to support schools and teachers to provide quality learning for all. The process aimed to influence the officials' own practices, the practices of teachers, and, the quality of learning of all learners.

What follows is an overview of the year-long action research process, its intended objectives and initial indications of the effectiveness of the process. A case study of the action research undertaken by a Learning Support Advisor (LSA) illustrates the resulting changes in practices. In her action research, the LSA collaborates with a school-based support team (SBST) to improve their functionality. The case study demonstrates that action research enabled the LSA to change her own support practices. It also gives an indication of how the school team perceives the LSA's support and the changes in practices in the school. Qualitative research methods were used, including in-depth interviews with the action researcher and journal analysis.

Background

VVOB, an international development organisation in education, has been supporting the Free State Department of Education (FSDoE) in the improvement of the quality of in-service professional support to teachers and school leaders since 2014. In 2017, FSDoE partnered with VVOB with the goal to ensure that school

leaders and teachers in primary schools have the competences to respond to learner diversity by applying inclusive pedagogy for numeracy and literacy. Inclusive education is approached in its broadest sense, i.e. ensuring that all children learn. Figure 1 visualises the components that guide this vision, based on a self-reflection tool for inclusive pedagogy developed by FSDoE and VVOB.

Figure 1: Inclusive Education Framework



In March 2018, VVOB and FSDoE teamed up with expert facilitators of the Community Development Resource Association (CDRA) to support a group of volunteering officials from the FSDoE with a year-long action research process with a focus on responding to diversity in the classroom or school. The process aimed to develop the capacities of participating provincial and district officials to:

- operationalise the understanding of inclusive education in classroom (teaching) practices by reflecting on their own practice

- encourage cross-sectional collaboration and learning from each other about inclusive education
- learn about the Professional Learning Community (PLC) process in practice
- build basic research skills in a practical way.

A key element of the action research process was to promote reflective practices by allowing personal reflection and personal enquiry. Reflective practices enabled the participants to learn and to monitor and evaluate their support practices.

The group consisted of 29 provincial and district education specialists from three directorates:

- Subject Advisors (SAs) from Curriculum
- Learning Support Advisors (LSAs) from Inclusive Education
- Circuit Managers (CMs) from Management & Governance.

From the group, 23 participants successfully completed the process and wrote up their findings in individual reports. The topics of the individual action researches undertaken can be categorised into the following broad themes:

1. Supporting School-Based Support Teams
2. Transitioning: Grade R to Grade 1 and Grade 3 to Grade 4
3. School Policies for Inclusive Education
4. Internal Moderation and Differentiated Assessment
5. Reading Skills and Mathematics Concepts
6. Instructional leadership for quality education for all: Addressing challenges experienced by progressed learners



Overview of the Action Research process

During the action research process, the volunteering officials were accompanied on an intentional, planned journey of inquiry, reflection, learning and change. It took the form of a year-long process which unfolded over 4 face-to-face reflection workshops of 3-day duration, interspersed with action phases of between 2 to 3 months. Throughout the process, participants could request individual coaching and writing support. *Figure 2* visualises a timeline of the process.

The **reflection workshops** created a collaborative, peer learning context and provided the officials with a stimulating space to learn from own experience, learn from peers, support one another and develop a growing sense of community. The workshops provided officials with an opportunity to step away from daily tasks, pressures and frustrations and to see the larger whole and purpose of their work/practice. They created a space for individual reflection and learning and grew as facilitators of the learning of others.

The time between reflection workshops focused on implementing planned actions for individual action research projects, the **action phase**. Each participant identified a problem (focus) area and questions through a guided process of conversation with learning facilitators and peers. The problem (focus) areas had to serve a learning need (a challenge experienced by them as education practitioners) and needed to connect with their work/practice.



Participants developed action plans that were implemented during the action phase in the field. These were undertaken as descriptive studies: they individually undertook projects with groups of educators, to investigate an aspect of their own practice with the view to bring about improvement.

Supported by *individual coaching, writing support* and tools/frameworks, participants went through a process of gathering evidence from the field, writing up and documenting their reflections, observations and learnings.

Initial indications of effectiveness of the process

Testimonies, evaluation questionnaires and written work by participants, indicate that the

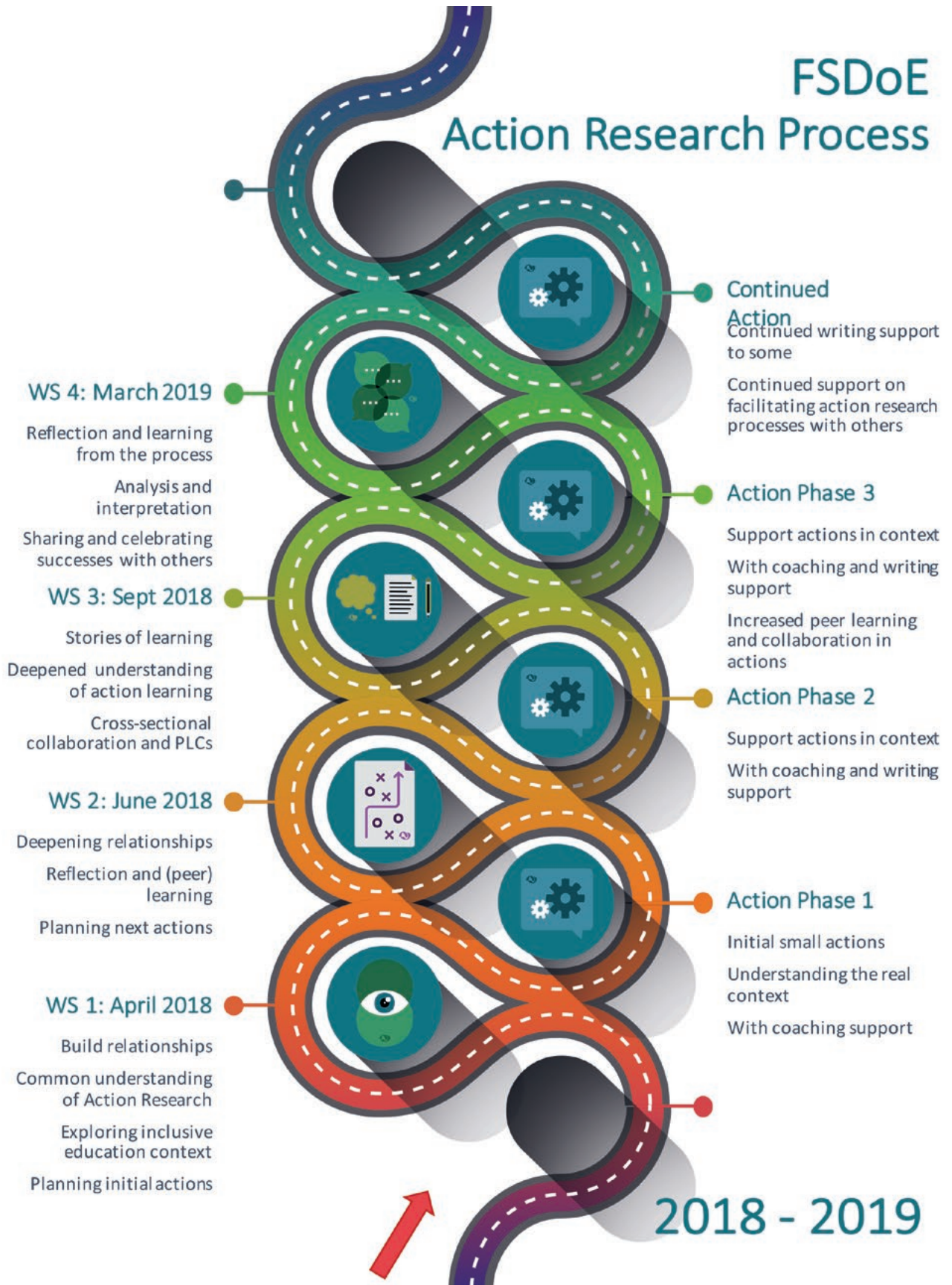
process has enhanced the skills of participants to implement self-reflective practices and collaborative and adult learning processes.

In terms of the practice of inclusion, participants have developed a deeper understanding of what it takes to best support educators and school leaders in operationalising inclusivity in classrooms and schools. The officials seem to have developed more empathetic attitudes towards educators and school leaders attempting to respond to learner diversity.

The collaborative, peer learning environment created by the action research process has stimulated cross-sectional collaboration amongst district officials. In one district, the officials organised themselves in a Professional Learning Community (PLC), a spontaneous action motivated by a strong need for peer support.



Figure 2: Action Research Process FSDoE, 2018–2019





CASE STUDY



“I’ve learned that I should be more of a listener than a problem solver. Because if teachers are not given the opportunity to say what they think, what they know, then I will not know either. I’m just going to come with what I think is going to help and even the manner in which I will be doing it might not actually fit the kind of teachers that are in that school,” testifies Vuyelwa. “I’ve grown closer to the teachers.”

Among the volunteers taking part in the Action Research process, is Vuyelwa Khanya, Learning Support Advisor in Motheo District. As a Senior Education Specialist in the inclusive education section, she supports teachers to implement inclusive education policies.

Learning barriers

According to the South African Schools Act (Act 79 of 1996, Sec.5) which states that schools must admit learners and serve their educational requirements, making sure all learners learn is the main objective of all South African schools. However, in the schools in Vuyelwa’s circuit many learners are progressed and retained learners experiencing barriers to learning are often only identified at a very late stage.

SBSTs should be the backbone of support at the school-level that ensures that learners get the necessary support. They should ensure that teachers are supported to deal with different learning barriers, and continue to strengthen their teaching skills. At a district level, the SBSTs in their turn get support from the District Based Support Team (DBST) in terms of training, support and monitoring.

However, after monitoring the SBSTs in her circuit, it became clear to Vuyelwa that they are not functioning as they should. Some indications that show that SBSTs are not fully functional are incorrect composition of the team, lack of evidence of regular meetings, insufficient referrals of learners to the SBST or DBST and a lack of Individual Support Plans (ISPs).

Research Question

In her Action Research, Vuyelwa therefore focused on two main questions: Why are SBSTs not functional? And what support do SBSTs need to function better?

“Through my action research, I hoped to improve my support to the SBST members as leaders who advocate for inclusive practices in their school. Recognising diversity among learners and valuing it by responding to it is what the SBST is all about. My action research strives to ensure that the SBST supports all learners,” explains Vuyelwa in her Action Research Report.

Action

Vuyelwa developed an action plan including actions she will take to offer support. After identifying a school, she spoke with the principal and the SMT and her ideas were welcomed with enthusiasm. “When the school principal heard about the action research, she was excited and knew that her staff will actively participate. She indicated that it gives her hope that their SBST will improve its functionality”, Vuyelwa explains.

Next, she provided training on the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) to all teachers of the school. And after that, she met with the SBST and SMT to find out how they would rate the SBST functionality, the reasons for their rating, and to explain the monitoring grid she uses to gauge SBST functionality. With the teachers she organised a training session on intervention strategies for reading and spelling. Her last action consisted of asking for feedback on the support she provided.

Listen and learn

By looking at her own practices, Vuyelwa realised that many barriers were caused by the department itself – for example because of insufficient school visits by officials due to transport challenges. She also discovered that by listening to the teachers, and by simply giving them a voice, she was able to bring about change. “Many teachers”, she explains, “have a lot of questions, but maybe there is not always a platform where they can ask them”. Vuyelwa shared her contact details so that teachers can call her when facing a challenge. A shift from imposing solutions to rather following the teachers’ suggestions took place.

Vuyelwa continues by stating she now clearly sees what she had been doing wrong. She feels empowered to do her job better, she feels more confident in her role, and she feels her facilitation skills have improved. By listening to schools, and thus understanding the school’s needs, and by knowing the kinds of teachers and learners the schools have, Vuyelwa is bringing change. Her conclusion: “Each small action leads to the next”.

Support during her action research journey

Vuyelwa strongly appreciates the support from the facilitators of the action research process. “The facilitators were wonderful,” she explains, “they were always there to help, and to ensure that I stayed focused. In between workshops, I

could chat with them through the WhatsApp group they set up. This really helped because whenever I was stuck, I could call or message or email them. Just to say: “I’m stuck here. What do you think?””

Vuyelwa also says she received a lot of support from her PLC that was initiated by some of the action research volunteers of Motheo district. Being part of this PLC has shown Vuyelwa the value of collaboration. “It helped because we would take time to discuss our Action Researches and we would coach one another. The PLC also helped me through the process because I knew that I’m not alone. I feel I am part of a group and we are all in this together, and it’s going to work.”

The benefits for the school

In terms of the effects in the classroom, teachers provided Vuyelwa with feedback on the support she gave, and how this affected their practices and their learners. Teachers say they feel more confident to stand in front of the classroom, due to the change in Vuyelwa’s support. Teachers and SMT members indicate that they improved their knowledge and understanding of inclusive education, SBST functioning and teaching of phonics. One of the teachers testifies: “Thanks to some very practical examples, teaching phonics with pictures of letters, my learners now learn through play.”

Maybe the best indication of the success of this approach is that Vuyelwa is motivated to continue using action research as an approach to her work. She plans to continue supporting the school by ensuring all teachers are aware of the roles and responsibilities of the remedial support teacher, and she plans to encourage teachers to embark on their own action research journeys. Next to continuing her support to this specific school, she intends to encourage the establishment of a PLC for SBSTs as well as remedial support teachers in her circuit. She believes that these PLCs will support more schools and teachers in the circuit to provide quality education for all learners.

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