Educators' experiences of inclusive learning contexts: an exploration of competencies

ISHMAEL MAGARE
School for Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences, North-West University, South Africa
magareish@yahoo.com

ANSIE ELIZABETH KITCHING
School of Educational Sciences, North-West University

VERA ROOS
School for Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences, North-West University

The successful implementation of inclusive education relies heavily on educators. Inclusive education is based on values such as human dignity, equality, human rights and freedom. The complexity of the interactive relationships between different systems, such as learners, educators, families, schools and the learning context, was recognised in this research and an eco-systemic perspective consequently applied. Our purpose in the research was to explore the experiences of educators in ordinary schools regarding the challenges experienced in inclusive learning contexts and to identify the competencies they used to deal with some of these challenges. A qualitative research design was chosen, using a case study. The study was conducted in North-West Province at a secondary School. Various contextual and microsystemic barriers that threatened an enabling learning environment were observed. Seven educators, one male and six female, were purposively selected for the study, and three methods of gathering data were used, namely, written assignments, in-depth follow-up interviews, and a focus group discussion. Themes and subthemes were identified through thematic content analysis. The findings indicated that the educators had competencies that enabled them to support learners and form collaborative relationships in an inclusive learning environment. Various implications for the Department of Education and school management teams are pointed out.

Introduction

The implementation of an inclusive education system in South Africa was part of the educational reforms that occurred after 1994 and which were informed by the Salamanca conference in Spain in 1992 (UNESCO, 1994; 2006). Inclusive education in this study is defined as the inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning in a regular educational environment regardless of their diverse personal or interpersonal needs, the contextual challenges and the adversities they have to deal with. It resonates with Loreman, Deppler and Harvey's (2005) definition, which emphasises the inclusion of these learners in all aspects of schooling. Inclusive education promotes the full personal, academic and optimal development of all learners (Department of Education, 2001; Engelbrecht, Green & Naicker, 1999; National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training [NCSNET] and National Committee for Education Support Services [NCESS], 1997; Rustemier, 2002). The broad principles of inclusive education as identified by Dyson (2001) serve as guidelines for defining the concept in the present study. Based on these principles, inclusive education can be considered education that is dedicated to the development of a more democratic society. It strives for a more equitable, quality education system and calls on ordinary schools to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners in mainstream education.

According to Muthukrishna and Sader (2004), inclusive education should focus on the development of enabling education systems and learning methodologies that meet the needs of all learners, and particularly the needs of those learners who experience barriers to learning. Barriers to learning include learning difficulties in reading, writing, mathematics, speech, language and communication. They also refer to developmental delays and physical, neurological and sensory impairments. Attendant implications are socioeconomic barriers, cultural prejudices, inaccessible and unsafe infrastructure, and lack of parental involvement (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006; Department of Education Directorate: Inclusive Education, 2003; Department of Education, 2001; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001).

The eco-systemic perspective recognises the interactive relationships between learners with barriers to learning, educators, families, schools and the learning context (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002; Hay, 2003). The interrelated nature of the ecological systems implies that educators with competencies are integrally involved in a learning environment where learners with barriers to learning can pursue their goals (Hamill, Jantzen & Bargerhuff, 1999; Hines, 2008). However, educators often regard themselves as lacking the necessary competencies (Rapmund & Moore, 2002).

Because the implementation of inclusive education is becoming a reality in South Africa, mainstream educators have to include learners with barriers to learning in their classes (Holz & Lessing, 2002). Prior to 1994, educators were trained only for either mainstream education or specialised education to support learners with barriers to learning (Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff & Pettipher, 2002). Despite their limited training, many educators seem able to cope with the challenges posed by inclusive education.

Against the above background, we sought to address the following research question: What competencies do educators apply to facilitate the development of enabling inclusive learning environments? Competencies in this study refer to the skills and attitudes educators require to deal with barriers to learning in an inclusive learning context. The purpose in our study was therefore to explore the subjective experiences of educators in ordinary schools regarding the challenges in inclusive learning contexts and thereby to identify some of the competencies they have to apply to deal with the challenges posed by inclusive education.

Research method and design

A qualitative research approach was used to make sense of the subjective experiences of educators regarding their competencies in inclusive learning environments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Qualitative research is based on the ontological assumption that the nature of reality is diverse and that reality has multiple facets (Creswell, 2007). This implies that educators' perceptions of the reality of the challenges are subjective and that the identified competencies to deal with these challenges are varied. It is therefore important to get as close as possible to the educators' experiences in order to present their different perspectives. This also supported the use of a case study design as it allowed the researcher in the present study to explore the educators' experiences in dealing with the barriers to learning in a specific learning context (Creswell, 2007; Smith & Eatough, 2007). The case study method enables researchers to obtain an in-depth understanding of educators' subjective experiences of the barriers associated with inclusive learning and to explore their competencies in dealing with these barriers (Fouche, 2002; Lewis, 2003).

Research context and participants

The study was conducted in North-West Province at a secondary school that serves an area populated primarily by black (Tswana-speaking) people and coloured people. The school has over 1,000 learners with an average class size of 45. Contextual barriers to learning include the fact that many of the learners have to contend with low socio-economic circumstances, which means that some learners have to walk long distances to attend school, and many also arrive at school hungry.

Other contextual barriers to learning include the impact of HIV&AIDS and the fact that many learners survive on government grants as they are either orphans or have to care for their sickly parents. Individual barriers to learning include attention-deficit disorder barriers, language and mathematical barriers, emotional and behavioural barriers, intellectual barriers and learning impairments.

Most of the 25 educators on the staff at the school speak English. Seven educators — one male and six females with ages ranging from 20 to 48 years and a mix of qualifications, experiences and cultural groups — participated in the study. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling by applying the following criteria:

- No prior training in dealing with barriers to learning/education for learners with special education needs (ELSEN).
- Active involvement in learning contexts that included learners with barriers to learning.
- Experience of learning environments consisting of a mix of cultural groups.
- Minimum qualification of a diploma in education and highest qualification of a Bachelor of Education (Honours).

Ethical considerations

Permission to undertake the study was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the North-West University (ethical clearance number 05K14) as well as from the principal of the school, the education manager for North-West Province and the educators concerned. The educators were informed about the purpose of the research, the expected duration, the procedures and their right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research once it had begun. The researcher obtained written consent from all the research participants (educators).

Data gathering

Three methods of gathering data were used: written assignments, in-depth individual interviews, and a focus group discussion.

Written assignments

The written assignments were aimed at raising self-awareness and providing the educators with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and to identify the competencies they applied on a personal and interpersonal level (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). The following statement was formulated for the written assignments: "Please think of a situation in your career where you had to deal with learners who experienced any form of barrier to learning and describe how you dealt with it."

In-depth interviews

The in-depth individual interviews were used to gain an understanding of the educators' experiences, and they also allowed the researcher to explore the meanings the educators attached to their experiences in inclusive learning contexts (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003; Ritchie, 2003). The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted at the school. Although all the educators were invited to participate in the individual interviews, only seven accepted the invitation. The following statement/question was posed to the educators (participants) at the beginning of the interview: "Please think of situations where you had to deal with learners who experienced any barrier to learning and describe how you dealt with the situations." Probing questions included the following:

- In terms of inclusive education, what are your personal strengths as a teacher regarding the implementation of the policy on inclusion?
- What do you consider to be your strengths within an inclusive setting framework?

- What are the things you have done better?
- Pick a specific situation or a specific learner experiencing barriers to learning and explain the process you went through in helping that particular child. What intervention methods did you use for such a learner?
- What internal drive keeps you going?

Focus group discussion

The seven educators also participated in a focus group discussion that allowed them to share their views and experiences and to hear other educators' experiences (Finch & Lewis, 2003; Ritchie, 2003). The following question was asked to initiate discussion in the focus group:

> The government has introduced inclusive education into the formal system. Hence, many educators have not been trained to handle learners with learning barriers yet find them in their classrooms. However, you are not sitting back. Something is being done to deal with the situation. So I would like to hear from you: what are your different perceptions regarding this issue?

Data analysis

The qualitative data were prepared for data analysis by producing a verbatim rendition of the focus group discussion as well as the individual interviews. The data were then examined for themes (Charmaz, 2003; Creswell, 2008) and the identified themes then grouped into themes and sub-themes. The researcher used the various identified themes to develop an overall description of the phenomenon (learning barriers) as the educators typically experienced it (Charmaz, 2003; De Vos, 2002). This was an inductive process as the researcher began with raw data consisting of multiple sources of data. The final research product included the different dimensions of this particular group of educators and their experiences of an inclusive learning environment.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, Guba's (cited in Shenton, 2003) propositions were used, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Table 1).

Discussion of findings

From an eco-systemic perspective, the findings indicated that the educators could facilitate different micro- and meso-systemic interventions spontaneously. On a micro-level — the system in which learners are directly involved — the learners were supported and motivated by the enabling skills and attitudes of the educators such as unconditional acceptance, focused observations, adaptability and flexibility.

On a meso-level, enabling relationships between different micro-systems were facilitated through collaborative relationships with parents to involve them in the learning process. Colla-borative relationships were also established with colleagues in the school and in the district. A more in-depth discussion of the various aspects of these relationships is provided after the visual presen-tation of the findings in Table 2.

Supporting learners

Supporting learners means emotional nurturing, building positive relationships, and communicating openly and in a trusting manner.

Unconditional acceptance

Unconditional acceptance means that the learners in the study were not accepted solely for what they were capable of doing or what they could offer. Rather, the educators expressed love and acceptance

Table 1. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness

Strategy	Criteria	Application
Credibility	Fieldwork. The researcher obtained data through engagement based on trust and good rapport with the participants in the learning environment.	Educators were visited in the school context to establish trust and rapport. Informal visits during and after the interviews allowed the researcher to spend sufficient time with the research participants (the educators) to understand their reality.
	Authority of the researcher.	The researcher is a qualified teacher and counsellor while the supervisors are qualified psychologists who have been trained in qualitative research methodologies and have knowledge of inclusive education and barriers to learning.
	Interviewing process	The researcher reframed and repeated questions to elicit full descriptions of the participants' experiences as far as possible.
	Member checking	The interviews were sent to the participants for comments and confirmation of the findings.
	Peer examination	The findings and discussions were subjected to various discussions with the educators and the supervisors.
Transferability	Selection of sample	Purposive sampling was used to recruit the participants.
	Dense description	Descriptions of methods, data gathering and analysis were given. The findings were supported by direct quotes.
Dependability and confirmability	Audit trail	All records of the phases of the interviews were filed and the procedure was described in detail.
	Dense description	Full description of research methodologies enables replication

Table 2. An overview of the main themes and subthemes of the educators' experiences of an inclusive learning environment with reference to their competencies

Main themes	Subthemes
Supporting learners	Unconditional acceptance
	Focused observations
	Adaptability and flexibility
	Motivation and encouragement
Collaborative relationships with parents and colleagues	Involving parents
	Developing collegial relations

naturally and unconditionally. One educator said the following: "*Your child is your child regardless of any negative attributes. One does not give one's own child love only because he or she does something positive*". This statement suggests that this particular educator simply accepted learners with barriers to learning unconditionally.

The educators took time to get to know the learners and their abilities and to build trusting relationships with them to boost their confidence. One educator commented as follows: "*Once I get*

a class, the first two to three weeks, I will know all of them as I become familiar with them. I do have that motherly connection, so whenever they have a problem they always come to me". Another educator illustrated her compassion for the learners by adding: "*There seems to be a lot of trust, openness and communication which goes to a deeper level where children freely share with you how they feel*".

The value of unconditional acceptance is supported in the literature (e.g. Engelbrecht & Forlin, 1998; James & Gilliland, 2005). According to James and Gilliland (2005), if educators demonstrate care and appreciation for learners, regardless of their difficulties or circumstances, the learners will be more likely to accept and respect them.

Focused observations

Focused observations mean that educators take special notice of learners who are experiencing learning barriers and plan appropriate interventions for enhancing the learning environment. The educators in the study applied holistic assessment approaches after intensive observations of the learners' achievements and their progress to set the tone for ongoing teaching and learning. The educators who participated in the focus group discussion said that they "*observed what goes on around the child and use it to create a child profile based on strengths and weaknesses and later utilised the information*". Another educator confirmed this: "*I get to know the learner's background a little more, his state of mind, and the culture…*" Through these focused observations, the educators communicated their intention to facilitate an optimal inclusive learning environment regardless of the barriers to learning experienced by individual learners.

Focused observations promote effective feedback for educators and help them develop realistic assessments of learners' capabilities, needs, achievement levels, interests and self-reflection (Department of National Education (DNE), 1998; Engelbrecht *et al*., 1999; Farrant, 1994; Mwamwenda, 2004; Centre for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2007).

Adaptability and flexibility

Adaptability and flexibility refer to educators' ability to adapt a curriculum and their teaching strategies to benefit learners. This implies sensitivity to the needs of learners who experience barriers to learning.

The educators in the study intentionally adjusted the learning content to give the learners the opportunity to engage with the learning environment. Adaptability and flexibility were demonstrated in a variety of ways and illustrated the educators' willingness to extend themselves beyond their familiar frameworks. The educators in the inclusive learning context adapted their instruction by simplifying the learning material to match the cognitive level of the learners taking into consideration the learning characteristics of individual learners with barriers to learning. For example, one educator said during the individual interview: "*I plan, move at the learners' level ... In that way you find that I achieve an 80% pass rate under most circumstances as the learners operate at their own level*". This approach seemed to create and maintain an atmosphere that nurtured the personal, cognitive and social development of the diverse learners under the educators' care (Donald *et al*., 2002).

Based on their knowledge, the educators also devised ways of determining exactly what each learner needed and selected learning activities suitable for his/her level. For instance, one educator remarked: "*I break down topics into very small units*". The educators also adjusted their methodological approach. During the interview, one educator said: "*I use the three approaches to teaching, namely concrete — using real objects, semi-concrete, drawing the pictures of those objects to the abstract, learners' writing and reading sentences that match the pictures*". This implies that the educators used their discretion in the selection of teaching methods as a way of accommodating a diversity of learning styles.

Some of the educators indicated that they slowed down and emphasised the specific skill they

wanted the learners to achieve — this approach is also supported by other research (Engelbrecht, Green, Swart & Muthukrishna, 2001). This manageable workload increased as the learners mastered the skills required (Gage & Berliner, 1992). The same approach is reflected in the following participant's written assignment: "*Instead of doing five sums, I emphasise the skill that I want them to learn*". Another participant said: "*I also change the teaching approach if the method I brought is not working*".

The educators' ability to assist the learners through different ways of teaching indicated a flexible approach to dealing with barriers to learning as they realised that one form of instruction did not cater for the learning requirements of different learners (Donald *et al*., 2002; Hamill *et al*., 1999). Some of the educators even involved peer learners to assist in the facilitation of an optimal learning environment. One educator said the following during the focus group discussion: "*I also utilise the peer's learners to explain instruction if I find that there is a problem carrying out the tasks that I have given to them*".

In an exploration of notions of inclusive education in India, Singal and Rouse (2003) also found that educators demonstrate competencies to make small modifications to their usual teaching approaches. In addition, they give learners extra attention and set alternative tasks to accommodate their needs as well as make use of peer support.

The most significant contribution of the educators in the present study was made by those who indicated that they treated learners with barriers to learning holistically. The following quotation from the in-depth interview illustrates this point: "*We do not just look at only academic activities. We also look at the performance from the extracurricular activities as some of these learners are not very much academically but do well on activities outside the classroom*".

Motivating and encouraging learners

Motivating learners means building and sustaining learners' interest and their will to achieve by praising and rewarding the desired learning behaviours. The research data revealed that the participants (educators) in the study used appropriate motivational techniques. They created supportive learning environments by assessing individual learners with a view to setting realistic expectations regarding the behaviour of those learners who experienced barriers to learning. One educator in the focus group discussion said that she "*identified strength areas through interviews and guided learners to follow their passion*". Another educator added: "*Talking to them, getting to know them is more like you are motivating. I give them some sort of assurance and hope*". The educators built small successes into every possible activity and reinforced these successes by telling the learners how they were progressing. One educator described her approach as follows: "*Children, especially the slow learners, need lots of love and lots of praise. Any achievement even if it is not that big needs to be reinforced. By so doing you encourage them to engage in their learning actively and feel as valued members of the class*".

In her study, Väyrynen (2003) found that educators who encouraged learners to express their ideas or negotiate the tasks to be completed had a more informal relationship with the learners — they made jokes, encouraged eye contact and occasionally touched learners for encouragement. The research also confirmed that rewards that are complemented by a positive educator attitude such as recognition help learners with learning barriers to develop personal and interpersonal skills (Donald *et al*., 2002; Engelbrecht *et al*., 1999). The recognition of each learner's temperament, personality, resources and interests has equally motivational and supportive benefits in inclusive learning contexts (The Centre for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2007).

Collaborative relationships with parents and colleagues

Collaborative relationships with parents and colleagues mean that parents and colleagues are involved in the co-construction of an enabling inclusive learning environment.

Involving parents

Involving parents implies valuing them as collaborators in the facilitation of their children's social and emotional well-being as well as their learning (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart, Kitching & Eloff, 2005; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). The recognition of parents as an integral part of the learning environment is clearly indicated by the educator in the following quotation: "*As an educator, one cannot achieve much without the full cooperation of the parents*". Parental involvement plays a major role in the education of learners with barriers to learning (Donald *et al*., 2002; Yang & Shin, 2008). One educator said: "*I encourage parents to communicate with learners; and ... we share with them where they could help their children. Another suggested that parents should read stories to their children*".

The educators in inclusive classrooms took the initiative in developing parent-educator partnerships as well as in recognising the contribution of parents. One educator reported: "*We call in the parents, and* [they] *know who lives with whom. We speak to them and let them know the problem of the child and how they could help the child*". Educators need to draw on the knowledge of the parents and families as they are closely involved with the particular child (Donald *et al*., 2002). Parents are encouraged to have realistic expectations concerning their children. Educators can also assess the level of support the family can offer.

As a way of engaging the parents, the educators in the study visited them in their homes when they had to deal with learners experiencing barriers to learning: "*Sometimes I go to parents' houses. I realise some are orphans, they stay with grandparents, and they are divorced. I have to be aware of such things*". Through such home visits, the educators gained insights into how to deal with individual learners.

Developing supportive collegial relations

Supportive collegial relations mean that educators plan together, use team and peer teaching, and coach and direct small group sessions (Forlin, 2001). The supportive collaboration environment does not refer only to the immediate learning context but also to outside collaboration with officials in the Department of Education and community members.

The results of the study indicated that the educators actively cooperated with colleagues and other professionals in educating learners with barriers to learning. One educator noted: "*In teaching a new group, I liaise with the previous* [educator] *and use the record available to inform my planning*". In line with Grangeat and Gray's (2008) findings, the educators (research participants) found that positive relationships and supportive interactions created enabling inclusive learning environments.

Supportive relations also refer to interactions with professional support providers such as counsellors, psychologists, social workers and learning support staff (Hamill *et al*., 1999). Hall *et al*. (2004) add that the development of supportive relationships among educators contributes to the sharing of expertise and the accommodation of the diverse needs of all learners in inclusive education contexts. One educator said: "*Sometimes I even seek help from other teachers to assist me, if I find that I am not making any progress*". Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) maintain that the power of collaboration lies in the merging of unique skills, which is also illustrated in the following quotation: "*I consult the heads of department, the former class teachers — to get a complete picture of the child, intellectual, social and emotional aspects*".

The practice of passing a learner's portfolio to the next educator helps him/her know where to start and to familiarise himself/herself with the particular learner. One of the educators remarked: "*I utilise peer teaching by other teachers*". This finding is also confirmed in research conducted by Donald *et al*. (2002) and Engelbrecht *et al*. (1999). Through such interactions, educators develop professional skills and positive coping dispositions such as perseverance and confidence (James & Gilliland, 2005; Mwamwenda, 2004).

Relevance of the study

Although this was an exploratory study, the findings suggest that despite the fact that the educators did not receive formal training in dealing with learners with barriers to learning, they intuitively explored ways of facilitating enabling learning contexts for such learners. The educators displayed the ability to adjust to diverse challenges in inclusive learning contexts. They were able to provide the learners with unconditional acceptance thereby creating an atmosphere in which the learners had the space and opportunity to develop their potential. The educators could do this through careful, observation aimed at creating an optimal fit between the learning environment, the learning material and individual learners' needs and potential. In line with Ebersöhn and Eloff's (2003) findings, it seems that these educators spontaneously applied an asset-based approach by focusing on the potential of the learners and not being paralysed by the barriers to learning experienced by the learners in their classes.

The educators evidently realised the importance of supportive, interpersonal systems. They also involved the parents as important role players in the learning environment and used the knowledge and insight that they gained to facilitate an enabling learning environment. They understood that learners with barriers to learning cannot be dealt with in isolation by focusing only on their school performance.

The educators furthermore engaged with colleagues and thereby strengthened and contributed to their own competencies. The ability of the educators to work together provided a context for co-constructing knowledge, planning and reviewing and supporting individual, group and systems efforts aimed at excelling in inclusive learning contexts.

Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

This was an exploratory qualitative study with a limited number of participants due to time and financial constraints. It is recommended that a more in-depth exploration of specific competencies is done through the application of a mixed methods approach to provide more meaningful recommendations for training and policy.

Although it became evident in this study that the competencies of the educators were important facets of the implementation of inclusive education, many areas still need to be explored with regard to such competencies. These areas include an understanding of how the educators obtained these competencies, the implications of disregarding the competencies in the implementation of inclusive education, and the learners and parents' experience of the application of the competencies.

Implications for practice and policy

In the light of the findings of this study, the Department of Education should acknowledge that educators already apply specific competencies in the development of inclusive learning environments. The educators seemed willing to engage in the co-creation of an optimal inclusive learning environment despite the fact that they had not been trained to function in such an environment. One educator said the following: "*Yes, we are not well equipped in dealing with such learners, but we do not just sit back due to such reasons*".

To ignore or deny these competencies during workshops may lead to an unhealthy power imbalance between the presenters as those who know and the educators as those who do not know. On the contrary, facing the practical realities of dealing with learners with barriers to learning often creates valuable tacit knowledge that should be incorporated into academic knowledge.

The competencies already demonstrated by educators could be harnessed by identifying these competencies in discussions prior to workshops as well as by creating opportunities for educators to share and apply the competencies in real-life case scenarios during training workshops. Educators should also sit on advisory committees to give input to the Department of Education on the development of inclusive learning environments and on future policy dialogue.

District-based support teams should promote a collaborative approach to the implementation

of inclusive education as opposed to a top-down approach. In other words, educators' expertise should be incorporated in the training and further developed to enable educators to provide professional guidance to one another in practice.

Conclusion

The research revealed that although the educators involved with learners with learning barriers had not received formal training in the development of inclusive learning contexts, they already had competencies that could assist them. The recognition of the educators' competencies opened up innovative possibilities for training aimed at the development of inclusive learning environments. Educators in general can certainly be guided to become more autonomous, creative and self-reliant in the process of implementing inclusive education. However, it seemed as if the potential and the unique ability of the educators in the study to facilitate an optimal learning context, was clouded by an educational approach that was largely top down. Maintaining a top-down approach implies that the very same principles that underpin inclusive education may be compromised since educators' competencies are not recognised and the educators are not allowed to participate fully in the implementation process.

In the light of the contextual realities in South Africa, educators should be involved in the implementation process of inclusive education and their competencies should be recognised. South Africa cannot afford to lose motivated, committed and creative educators who can play a key role in the successful implementation of inclusive education.

References

Ainscow M, Booth T & Dyson A 2006. Inclusion and the standards agenda: negotiating policy pressures in England. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 10:295-308.

Charmaz K 2003. Grounded theory. In: AJ Smith (ed..). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. London: Sage Publications.

Creswell JW 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and research design. Choosing among five approaches*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Collins J 2006. Including the silent minority. *Perspectives in Education*, 24:87.

Denzin WK & Lincoln YS 2005. Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In: NK Denzin & YS Lincoln (eds). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research,* 3rd edn. London: Sage Publications.

Department of Education 2001. *The Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training system*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of Education Directorate: Inclusive Education 2003. *Conceptual and operational guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education: District-based support teams*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of National Education (DNE) 1998. *Draft assessment policy in the general education and training phase: Grade R to ABET*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

De Vos AS 2002. Qualitative data analysis and interpretation. In: AS de Vos, H Strydom, HCB Fouche & SL Delport (eds). *Research at grass roots for the social sciences and human service professions,* 2nd edn. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Donald D, Lazarus S & Lolwana P 2002. *Educational psychology in social context*, 2nd edn. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Dyson A 2001. *Varieties of inclusion*. Paper presented at the conference VI Jornadas Cientificas de Investigacion sobre Personas con Discapacidad, Salamanca, Spain, 17-19 March.

Ebersöhn L & Eloff I 2003. *Life Skills & Assets*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Engelbrecht P & Forlin C 1998. Pre-service teachers' acceptance of interactions with people with disabilities: The South African scene. *African Journal of Special Needs Education*, 3:1-10.

Engelbrecht P, Green L & Naicker S 1999. *Inclusive education in action in South Africa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Engelbrecht P, Green L, Swart E & Muthukrishna N 2001. *Promoting learner development: preventing and working with barriers to learning*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Engelbrecht P, Oswald M, Swart E, Kitching A & Eloff I 2005. Parents' experiences of their rights in the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa. *School Psychology International*, 26:459-477.

Farrant JS 1994. *Principles and practice of education*. Singapore: Longman Publishers.

Finch H & Lewis J 2003. Focus groups. In: J Ritchie & J Lewis (eds). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. London: Sage Publications.

Forlin C 2001. The role of the support teacher in Australia. *European Journal of Special Needs Education. Special issue: The role of support teachers*, 16:121-131.

Fouche CB 2002. Research strategies. In: AS de Vos, H Strydom, CB Fouche & SL Delport (eds). *Research at grass roots for the social sciences and human service professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Gage NL & Berliner DC 1992. *Educational psychology,* 5th edn. Houghton: Mifflin Company.

Grangeat M & Gray P 2008. Teaching as a collective work: Analysis, current research and implications for teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 34:177-189.

Hall R, Campher E, Smit AG, Oswald M & Engelbrecht P 2004. Formal support in inclusion. In: P Engelbrecht, L Green, S Naicker & L Engelbrecht (eds). *Inclusive education in action in South Africa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Hamill LB, Jantzen AK & Bargerhuff ME 1999. Analysis of effective educator competencies in inclusive environments. *Action in Teacher Education*, 21:21-37.

Hay JF 2003. Implementation of the inclusive education paradigm shift in South African education support services. *South African Journal of Education*, 23:135-138.

Hines JT 2008. Making collaboration work in inclusive high school   classrooms: Recommendations for principals. *Intervention in School & Clinic,* 43:277-282.

Hodge N & Runswick-Cole K 2008. Problematising parent-professional partnerships in education. *Disability & Society*, 23:637-647.

HolzT & Lessing A 2002. Reflections on Attention-Deficit hyperactivity disorder in an inclusive education system. *Perspectives in Education*, 20.

James RK & Gilliland BE 2005. *Crisis intervention strategies*. Belmont, LA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

Leedy PD & Ormrod JE 2005. *Practical research and design*, 8th edn. Columbus, OH: Pearson.

Legard R, Keegan J & Ward K 2003. In-depth interviews. In: J Ritchie & J Lewis (eds). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. London: Sage Publications.

Lewis J 2003. Design issues. In: J Ritchie & J Lewis (eds). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. London: Sage Publications.

Lomofsky L & Lazarus S 2001. South Africa: First steps in the development of an inclusive education system. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 31:303-317.

Mwamwenda TS 2004. *Educational psychology: An African perspective*. Sandton: Heinemann.

Muthukrishna N & Sader S 2004. Social capital and the development of inclusive schools and communities. *Perspectives in Education*, 22:17-26.

National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) 1997. *EDUCATION FOR ALL. From "special needs and support" to developing quality education for all learners*. Summary of public discussion document, University of the Western Cape.

Nelson G & Prilleltensky I 2005. *Community psychology. In pursuit of liberation and well-being*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rapmund V & Moore C 2002. Enhancing learners' personal resources through narrative: Embracing diversity. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 32:22-32.

Ritchie J 2003. The application of qualitative methods to social research. In: J Ritchie & J Lewis (eds). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. London: Sage Publications.

Rustemier S 2002. *Inclusion information guide, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education*. Retrieved on 27 July 2006, from http://www.csieshopping.com/resources/pdf/IIG.pdf?

Shenton KA 2003. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for information*, 22:63-75.

Singal N & Rouse M 2003. 'We do inclusion': Practitioner perspectives in some 'inclusive schools' in India. *Perspectives in Education*, 21:85-97.

Smith AJ & Eatough V 2007. Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In: E Lyons & A Coyle (eds).

Analysing qualitative data in psychology. London: Sage Publications.

Swart E, Engelbrecht P, Eloff I & Pettipher OR 2002. Implementing inclusive education in South Africa: Teachers' attitudes and experiences. *Acta Academia*, 34:175-189.

The Centre for the Study of Child Care Employment 2007. *Early childhood educator competencies: A literature review of current best practices*. University of California. Retrieved on 7 September 2007 from http.//www.iir.berkerly.edu/cscce/index.html

UNESCO 1994. *Final report of the world conference on special needs*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO 2006. *Salamanca five years on: A review of UNESCO activities in light of the Salamanca statement and framework for action. Adopted at the world conference on Special Needs Education: Access and quality*. ED-99/WS/30. Retrieved on 7 July 2006 from http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/sne

Väyrynen S 2003. Participation equals inclusion? *Perspectives in Education*, 21:39.

Yang S & Shin SS 2008. Parental attitudes towards education. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30:1328-1335. Retrieved on 22 November 2008 from Econpapers database.