

## Teacher preparedness for inclusive education

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*Since the report of the National Department of Education, "Quality Education for All" was published in 1997, it has become evident that inclusive education is going to be the way forward in special (and regular) education. Both the Consultative Paper on Special Education (30 August 1999) and the Draft White Paper on Special Education (23 March 2000), which appeared subsequently, point strongly in the direction of inclusion. This investigation focused on the preparedness of teachers for this new policy of inclusion. An eventual sample of 2 577 Free State teachers was utilised from the total of 12 education districts. Through a comprehensive questionnaire an effort was made to ascertain the knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education — this measure was utilised to determine (and deduce) their level of readiness for inclusion. The results of the investigation indicate that a huge effort will have to be made by policy makers and provincial education departments to effect a paradigm shift towards inclusion. It appeared that respondents still think in terms of past specialised education models that were utilised in previous eras. They also appear to be mindful of South African related problems, and apparently do not exhibit adequate knowledge on inclusive education.*

### Introduction

A limited number of studies on the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion have been done in South Africa (Bothma 1997; Harris 1998; Wessels 1997; Swart, Pettipher, Engelbrecht, Eloff, Oswald, Ackerman & Prozesky 2000, Bothma, Gravett & Swart 2000), but none have focused on the actual preparedness of teachers or on an extensive sample of respondents from all districts of a South African province. This investigation, jointly conducted by Vista University and the Free State Department of Education, took place from the end of 1999 to the beginning of 2000.

### Problem statement

The envisaged inclusive education system, as portrayed in the "Quality Education for All" report (Department of Education 1997), the Consultative Paper on Special Education (Department of Education 1999) as well as the Draft White Paper on Special Education (Department of Education 2000), will probably come into effect through legislation in 2001/2002.

Although the expected legislation represents a major step forward in the transformation and democratisation of the South African education system, it is often asked whether educators in the class are prepared and ready for inclusive education. Analogies are often drawn between the processes of implementation of Curriculum 2005 and inclusive education — it is stated that Curriculum 2005 was perhaps implemented too hastily and without adequate educator training. The fear therefore exists that the same mistakes may be made with inclusive education.

Against this background the objective of this investigation was to undertake a thorough situation analysis of educator preparedness for inclusive education, which could be used by the Department of Education as well as other stakeholders to facilitate the successful implementation of inclusion.

### Inclusive education as South African policy

Since a democratic dispensation was introduced in South Africa in 1994, the movement towards a more inclusive society has become stronger. Exclusion on all levels during the apartheid past contributed partly to the swing towards broad societal inclusiveness. In addition, the human rights movement became an international focus after human rights had been abused for centuries. The human rights issue in education was probably the strongest protagonist for the development of inclusive classrooms, if viewed in global perspective (Dyson & Forlin, 1999:28-31).

The movements towards inclusivity as well as human rights in South Africa also spread to education — in particular special education. Policy documentation on special education since 1997 reflected the inclusive ethos of a transforming society. In the overview of the report "Quality Education for All" (Department of Education, 1997:i) it is stated that the principles of human rights and social justice for all, as well as participation and social integration will guide the broad strategies to achieve the following vision:

"The vision proposed by the NCSNET/NCESS is that of an education and training system that promotes education for all and fosters the development of inclusive and supportive centres of learning that enable all learners to participate actively in the education process so that they can develop and extend their potential and participate as equal members of society."

In the same vein, the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Office of the Deputy President, 1997:v) suggests the following in the executive summary:

"Over the past decade, disabled people's organizations all over the world have worked to reposition disability as a human rights issue. The result is a social model for disability based on the premise that if society cannot cater for people with disabilities, it is society that must change. This model requires substantial changes to the physical environment. The goal must be the right of people with disabilities to play a full, participatory role in society."

It is clear that both these documents reflect a thrust towards an inclusive society where all can participate as fully as possible.

The Consultative Paper No. 1 on Special Education (Department of Education, 1999:i) takes this move towards an inclusive education and training system a step further by stating that the Department of Education would

"embrace the call for establishing an inclusive education and training system that accommodates all learners ... Yet at the same time we acknowledge that establishing an inclusive education and training system cannot be achieved overnight but only through taking definitive and bold first steps".

This seems to be an acknowledgement that the implementation of inclusive education is a complex and multi-faceted issue that will have to be planned with meticulous detail. Determining the level of preparedness of teachers will therefore play a major role in successfully planning the implementation of inclusive education.

The Draft White Paper 5 on Special Needs Education (Department of Education, 2000:5) echoes the sentiments of the previous

paper — “the ministry ... sees the establishment of an inclusive education and training system as a cornerstone of an integrated and caring society and an Education and Training System for the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. This paper consequently focuses strongly on practical steps to implement inclusive education in a gradual manner, e.g. establishing 500 full-service schools where support staff and assistive devices will be available.

The Draft White Paper (Department of Education, 2000) acknowledges that the development of the appropriate and necessary capacities and competencies at all levels of the system should receive priority, but does however not indicate in detail what this would entail.

### Teacher preparedness for new policies

Teachers are the key role-players in determining the quality of implementation of any new education policy (which includes the new policy of inclusion) (Fullan, 1993:127). Too often change in education has failed because insufficient attention had been taken of the current practices and needs of those who are expected to put it into effect (Wearmouth, Edwards & Richmond, 2000: 36). It appears that the empowerment of educators/teachers is once again neglected in the South African policy documentation on inclusive education. If the implementation of changed policies fail in a so-called developed country such as Britain where educators are generally adequately trained (Wearmouth *et al.*, 2000), this could also be true of South Africa where a large percentage of educators are insufficiently trained. The implication is that current practices and needs of inadequately trained teachers (such as in South Africa) deserve serious consideration (when compared to that of developed countries) when implementing new policy.

But what is meant by teacher *preparedness*? According to the Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1999) *prepare* means “to make or get (someone or something) ready for something that will happen in the future”. Within the context of this article it implies a period of “ready-ing” a teacher for change, such as proceeding to inclusive education. The concept *preparedness* differs from *prepare* since it indicates how well someone (like a teacher) has already been prepared for something that is imminent. It may be translated in this context as the “state of readiness” of a teacher for inclusive education, i.e. has the teacher been prepared with regard to skills, and the cognitive and emotional level for the anticipated inclusive education?

### South African teachers and inclusive education

A comparison of three studies, done in Gauteng and the Western Cape to determine teacher attitudes towards inclusion, indicated the following patterns (Swart, Pettipher, Engelbrecht, Eloff, Oswald, Ackerman & Prozesky, 2000):

- Inadequate knowledge, skills and training of teachers to implement inclusive education effectively;
- Lack of educational and teacher support;
- Inadequate provision of facilities, infrastructure and assistive devices; and
- Potential effects of inclusive education on learners with special educational needs as well as other learners in the mainstream.

From this the deduction can be made that few teachers have made the paradigm shift towards inclusion.

Engelbrecht and Forlin (1998:2) cite three studies of regular education teachers (with relatively little formal training to work with learners with special needs), who responded negatively to inclusion (Bagwandeem, 1994; Engelbrecht & Forlin, 1997; Bothma, 1997). These researchers are also of the opinion that relevant pre-service training can go a far way in shaping positive attitudes towards learners with special needs. They conclude their investigation by expressing the hope that pre-service training of teachers will be developed around

a philosophy that incorporates a clear vision of inclusion and promotes acceptance of all learners, regardless of ability (Engelbrecht & Forlin, 1998: 8-9).

An interesting study on the stress areas and coping skills of South African teachers in implementing inclusive education was undertaken by Eloff, Engelbrecht and Swart (2000). Two main themes emerged in the findings: the first being that teachers who include learners with cognitive disabilities experience significantly more stress than those who include learners with physical disabilities. The second theme relates to the high incidence of ‘Does not apply’ and ‘Not stressful’ answers on the implemented questionnaire “Teacher Stress and Coping Questionnaire” — this pattern challenges the assumption that teachers experience stress when including learners with special needs. The researchers concluded that teachers experience stress in a particular and individual way, and not always in terms of the areas highlighted by the questionnaire.

When addressing the conference on “Towards Inclusive Education in South Africa” in the Western Cape, Thomson (1998:10) emphasised that the effective implementation of inclusive education depends on high quality professional preparation of teachers at pre- and in-service levels to equip them for and update their knowledge in meeting the needs of a diverse classroom population. This was (and is) the experience in Europe. Thomson further indicated major obstacles that hamper the implementation of inclusive education worldwide: large classes, negative attitudes to disability, examination-oriented education systems, a lack of support services, rigid teaching methods, assessment dominated by a medical model, a lack of parent involvement, and a lack of clear national policies.

In a recent study Bothma, Gravett and Swart (2000) investigated the attitudes of primary school teachers towards inclusive education — the sample consisted of two groups of primary school teachers ( $n = 8$  and  $n = 7$ ) from middle class suburbs of Gauteng. The study concluded that these groups of teachers seem to harbour misconceptions about the South African policy of inclusive education and that their attitudes towards this policy seem to be negative. The researchers believe that if teachers’ beliefs about and their attitudes towards inclusive education are not intentionally addressed, these beliefs and attitudes could become a critical barrier to learning and development and the successful implementation of the policy of inclusive education.

### Investigation

#### Research methodology

Data for this investigation were collected through a questionnaire for educators which was developed by the authors. The items in the questionnaire provided mainly basic quantitative data supplemented by qualitative data.

The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions about issues related to the inclusive approach in South African education. These questions could be categorised as follows:

- Issues relating to the **educational milieu** of the respondent, including questions on the work setting, experience in teaching and educational phase in which the respondent predominantly works.
- Issues relating to the respondent’s **knowledge of concepts** related to inclusive education.
- Issues relating to the respondent’s **previous experience and training** in working with learners with special educational needs.
- Aspects relating to the respondent’s **perception of his/her own preparedness** to deal with integrated classrooms where learners with special needs are included in the mainstream.
- Aspects relating to **support received and referrals** of learners with special educational needs.

These aspects will be dealt with following discussion of the compilation of the sample.

### Sample

A total of over 2 900 questionnaires were received back from the 12 education districts of the Free State Education Department. It was unclear what the response rate was, as master copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the 12 district offices, which in their turn sent questionnaires to their district schools. A number of the returned questionnaires had mistakes, such as missing pages, making it impossible to obtain meaningful information from them. The final number of questionnaires containing data that could be used numbered 2 577. A database was developed in Microsoft Access and the responses to the questionnaires were entered into the database.

The sample consisted of educators from 12 districts in the Free State province. The number of respondents per district is depicted in Figure 1.

### Educational milieu

As mentioned previously, questions on the respondent's educational milieu centred on the work setting, experience in teaching, and educational phase in which the respondent predominantly works.

Respondents were asked to indicate their work setting by initially selecting one of the following:

- Teacher at ...
- Head of Department at ...
- Deputy Principal of ...
- Principal of ..., or
- Adviser within ...

The first selection could be completed by selecting one of the following:

- Pre-primary school
- Primary School
- Secondary/High School
- Farm School
- Special School
- Regular Education
- Special Education

Some respondents added the categories: combined school and intermediate school and some of the respondents also left this section of the questionnaire blank. The work setting of the respondents is summarised in Table 1.

From Table 1 it is clear that the largest proportion of the respondents (2 090) are regular teachers and 2 042 of the respondents teach in primary schools. Only 63 are from special schools and 17 indicated that they are advisors within special education. One could assume that the sample is representative of teachers in regular education.

Respondents were also asked to indicate how many years teaching experience they have in either the primary or secondary sector in education. It must be noted that some respondents indicated their years experience in both sectors. In these cases the sector with most years experience was chosen to be entered into the database. The numbers will therefore not correspond exactly with those indicated in Table 1.

Table 2 indicates the average number of years of experience per respondent for each of the two sectors, as well as the median (number in the middle when years of experience are arranged from lowest to highest), mode (most frequently indicated number of years of experience), range (the difference between the highest and lowest number of years of experience indicated), and number of responses in each of the sectors.

From Table 2 it is evident that the average number of years of experience for teachers in the primary school sector (from which the largest number of respondents came) is 13.29 with a median of 13.

Respondents were asked to indicate in which education phase they worked mostly. Table 3 indicates the responses to this question.

Once again it is evident from Table 3 that most of the respondents taught primary school grades ranging from Grade 1 to Grade 6. Only a small number of respondents (127) were involved with learners with special educational needs in special classes, remedial teaching and special schools. In the following section of the questionnaire respondents were asked about their knowledge of concepts related to inclusive education.

### Knowledge of concepts related to inclusive education

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had heard of inclu-

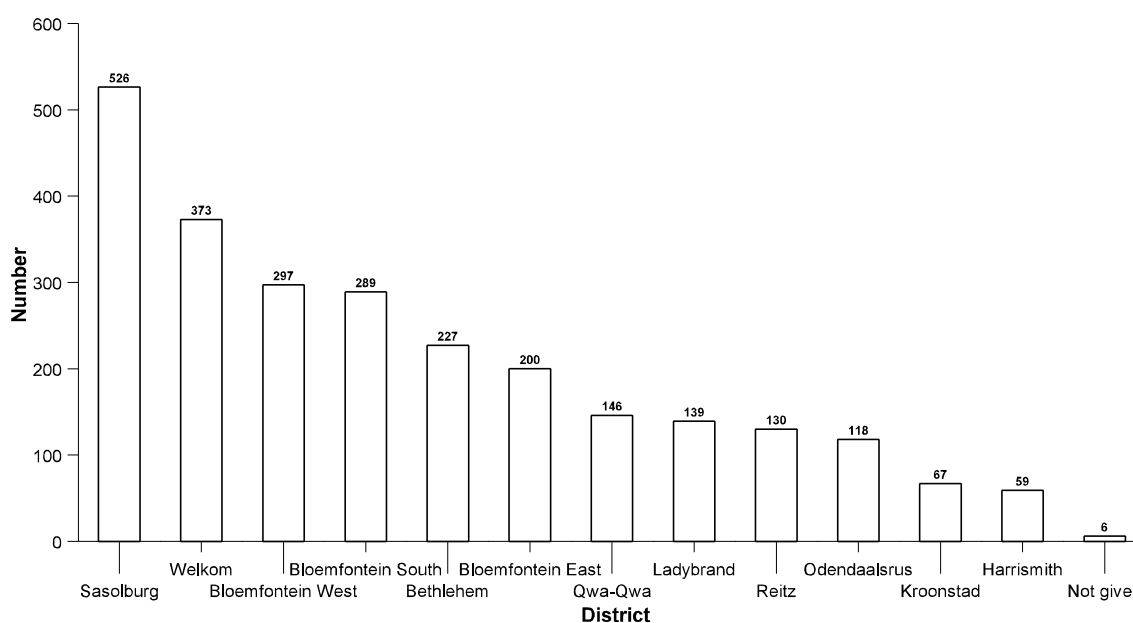


Figure 1 Number of respondents per district

**Table 1** Work setting

	Deputy						Total
	Teacher	HOD	Principal	Principal	Blank	Advisor	
Pre-primary	19	0	0	1	0	0	20
Primary	1722	203	41	76	0	0	2042
Secondary/ High	257	29	6	15	0	0	307
Farm school	8	1	0	12	0	0	21
Special school	44	10	4	4	0	1	63
Combined	13	1	0	2	0	0	16
Intermediate	22	3	0	1	0	0	26
Blank	2	0	0	0	11	0	13
Regular education	0	0	0	0	0	52	52
Special education	3	0	0	0	0	14	17
Total	2090	247	51	111	11	67	2577

**Table 2** Years of experience in phase

	No level indicated	Primary school	Secondary school
Average	2.72	13.29	11.16
Median	0	13	10
Mode	0	10	3
Range	28	48	36
Number	92	2135	350

**Table 3** Education phase

Phase	Number
Grades 1 – 3	865
Grades 4 – 6	769
Grades 7 – 9	244
Grades 10 – 12	176
Special class	48
Special school	40
Remedial teaching	39
Not indicated	56
Various	340
Total	2577

**Table 4** Had heard of concepts

	Inclusion	Main- streaming	Whole school	O B E
No	1567	1379	1983	211
Yes	1010	1198	594	2366
Total	2577	2577	2577	2577

sive education, mainstreaming, whole school approach, and outcomes-based education. They were then asked to describe each of the concepts. Table 4 shows the responses to the question whether participants had heard of these four concepts.

In the case of inclusive education, mainstreaming, and whole school approach, Table 4 clearly indicates that 1 567 (60.8%), 1 379 (53.5%), and 1 983 (76.9%) educators, respectively, had not heard of these concepts, whereas a mere 211 (8.2%) had not heard of outcomes-based education.

When asked to describe these concepts, the information in Table

5 was obtained, indicating the number of respondents who answered the question, those who answered it sufficiently and those who did not answer the questions.

**Table 5** Description of concepts

	Answered (%)	Sufficient (%)	Not answered (%)
Inclusive education	1133 (43.97)	924 (35.9)	1444 (56.03)
Mainstreaming	1190 (46.18)	267 (10.4)	1387 (53.82)
Whole school approach	574 (22.27)	17 (0.7)	2003 (77.72)
Outcomes-based education	2110 (81.88)	1930 (74.9)	467 (18.12)

Only 1 133 of the 2 577 respondents described the concept inclusive education. After the answers were scrutinised to determine their correctness, it was evident that only 924 of these answers were correct or partially correct.

In the case of mainstreaming, slightly more of the respondents answered this question, but only 267 of the answers were correct.

Only 0.7% of the respondents knew what a whole school approach was, whilst 74.9% of the respondents knew what outcomes-based education was.

**Previous experience and training in working with children with special education needs**

Respondents were also asked to indicate the amount of experience they had in teaching fourteen different categories of learners with special educational needs. Responses were indicated on a rating scale from 1 to 5 :

1. no experience;
2. a little experience;
3. moderate experience;
4. more than average experience; and
5. vast experience.

Table 6 summarises the participants' rating of their experience with different categories of learners with special education needs. The researchers added a zero rating for *Not indicated* after it was noted that a few respondents had not indicated ratings in all the categories. The rows refer to the different categories of special needs and the columns indicate the number of respondents who rated themselves under each of the levels of experience.

It is clear from Table 6 that most respondents rated themselves as having no experience in all the categories. Beyond this, the next category that received any noticeable response was that of gifted learners, where 417 respondents indicated that they had moderate experience.

Respondents were asked to indicate if they had any substantial training in teaching or working with learners with special educational needs. Table 7 shows that only 226 (8.8%) of respondents had substantial training in this regard.

**Teacher preparedness for integrated classrooms**

Table 8 depicts the number of respondents who indicated whether or not they feel equipped to teach both regular learners **and** learners with special educational needs in an integrated class. Once again a significantly low number of 245 (9.5%) of the respondents reacted positively.

The reasons why respondents did not feel equipped vary, but the response most given was that respondents had not had sufficient training to deal with these classes. Other responses, in descending

**Table 6** Experience in teaching learners with special education needs

Categories	Rating					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Severely mentally handicapped	5	2484	50	21	9	8
Mildly mentally handicapped	4	2332	142	52	25	22
Severe learning disabled	5	2379	83	49	35	26
Mildly learning disabled	4	1949	300	175	80	69
Physically disabled	4	2257	149	104	37	26
Gifted learners	4	1512	254	417	227	163
Neurologically handicapped	4	2338	119	65	29	22
Emotional and behavioural difficulties	4	1570	367	365	175	96
Visually impaired	5	2099	306	122	34	11
Hearing impaired	6	2097	318	104	42	10
Autistic learners	4	2404	112	41	10	6
Speech impaired	5	2079	324	121	38	10
Severely environmentally disadvantaged	3	1881	265	202	123	103
Other	17	2435	34	47	20	24

**Table 7** Number of trained teachers

Training ?	Number
Yes	226
No	2351
Total	2577

**Table 8** Respondents who feel equipped to teach integrated classes

Equipped ?	Number
Yes	245
No	2332
Total	2577

order of the number of times mentioned, were:

- Lack of training
- Learners with special educational needs need special attention, and not enough time is available
- Class size is a problem
- Lack of facilities
- Lack of teacher experience
- Too difficult
- Is the job of a specialist

Almost all the respondents suggested that more training needs to be given to teachers to prepare them for inclusive classrooms.

When asked whether they wanted to know more about learners with special education needs, an overwhelming 80% (2 067) of respondents indicated positively, as can be seen in Table 9. Respondents were also asked to indicate the ways in which they would prefer to learn more and their responses are included in Table 9. The most popular choice was that of a diploma dealing with learners with special education needs, followed by a certificate course.

**Support received and referrals carried out**

Respondents were also asked to describe the nature and frequency of support that they currently receive to assist learners with special needs in their classrooms, from

- remedial teachers;
- special education teachers;
- colleagues who specialised in special educational needs;
- psychological and support services; and
- district support teams.

Table 10 shows that more than half of the respondents indicated that they did not receive regular support from the possible support

**Table 9** Wanted to know more ?

	Yes	No
Know more ?	2067	510
One-day workshops	406	
In-service training	263	
Certificate course	589	
Diploma in LSEN	712	
All	9	
Blank	598	
Total	2577	

**Table 10** Frequency of support

	Regular	Sporadic	None	Blank	Total
Remedial teacher	748 (29%)	301 (125)	1516 (59%)	12	2577
SE teacher	432 (17%)	244 (9%)	1889 (73%)	12	2577
Colleague (specializing in special needs)	448 (17%)	321 (12%)	1796 (70%)	12	2577
Support services	633 (25%)	621 (24%)	1310 (51%)	12	2577

sources. Although most regular support received came from remedial teachers, this represented only 29% of the respondents. This was followed by support services at 25%. Very little support was further received from colleagues who specialise in special needs and the special education teacher, possibly because there may be a shortage of teachers who specialise in this field. It was evident, however, that an average of 63% of the respondents received no support at all.

Table 11 shows the number of respondents who indicated that they referred learners to special needs personnel, the number of learners referred by respondents, and the number of learners who were actually placed after referral.

**Table 11** Learners referred

	Yes	No
Referred ?	1046	1531
Number referred	7922	
Placed	3764	
Average referred	3.09	
Average placed	1.47	

It is evident from Table 11 that 41% of the respondents referred learners and 59% did not. A total of 7 922 learners were referred by the respondents in the year 1999 and 47% (3 764) of these were placed in alternative settings. This meant that almost half of all learners referred to special needs personnel by the respondents had been placed in situations different from the inclusive classroom. Table 11 also shows that each respondent on average referred about 3 learners to special needs during 1999.

**Summary and interpretation**

The findings of each section of the questionnaire are summarised here.

The sample consisted mainly of teachers from primary schools, who on average had about 13 years of teaching experience.

A surprisingly low number of respondents had heard of the concepts inclusive education, mainstreaming, and whole school approach.

Only 924 (35.9%) of the sample of 2 577 respondents could describe inclusive education. In the cases where the items were left blank it was assumed that these respondents could not define the concepts. Since such a large percentage of the respondents described outcomes-based education (81.88%), it can be assumed that they would have described inclusive education as well, had they known anything about it. Following this, only 267 of 2 577 (10.4%) respondents knew what mainstreaming was.

The above showed a marked lack of knowledge on issues related to inclusive education. This is to be expected when considering the lack of experience and training that the respondents had had in dealing with children with special educational needs.

The teachers furthermore felt unprepared and unequipped to teach integrated classes, and ascribed this to a lack of training, lack of time, large classes, lack of facilities, and lack of teacher experience. They indicated however that they were willing to learn more about these issues, provided that it led to a diploma or certificate.

Based on the discussion of the results above it is possible to create an image of the average respondent and his/her preparedness for inclusion. The average respondent is a teacher in a primary school with approximately 13 years of teaching experience. This teacher has not heard of inclusion, whole school approach, or mainstreaming (is also not able to define these concepts), but knows about outcomes-based education. This teacher has no or very little previous experience with learners with special education needs and has had no training in this regard. He/she therefore does not feel prepared to deal with the inclusive classroom.

### Conclusion

The findings of the investigation suggest that a huge effort will have to be made by policy makers and provincial education departments to effect the paradigm shift towards inclusive education. The average teacher is apparently neither prepared nor ready to teach learners of inclusive classrooms effectively. However, it is commendable that the overwhelming majority of educators are open and willing to learn more about inclusive education.

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