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### **The training needs of South African in-service teachers regarding the support of learners experiencing barriers to learning**

Dr. Mirna Nel

North West University Vaal Triangle Campus, South Africa

[Mirna.Nel@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Mirna.Nel@nwu.ac.za)

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#### Abstract

Since the adoption of the Salamanca Statement in 1994 by 92 governments to make fundamental policy shifts towards inclusive education, the South African education system has gone through a process (and are still progressing) to change to a socio-ecological (inclusive) education system. In this system the intensity of the need of the child should be addressed and dealt with in any given context. This inclusive model has been legalized by the acceptance of White Paper 6 in 2001. Draft policies to put White Paper 6 into practice are being piloted currently. The focal point of White Paper 6 as well as the draft policies is based on the notion that all educators will have the knowledge and skills to identify and support learners experiencing barriers to learning in any given context.

This notion compels the higher education institutions to revisit their teacher training strategies with pre-service as well as in-service teachers. A **pilot study** with teachers from Secondary and Special Schools in one school district in the Gauteng province indicated that they have not been adequately trained in their pre-graduate training as well as in-service training and has a desperate need for knowledge and skills to be able to address their learners' specific needs.

#### Introduction

In 1994 92 governments adopted the Salamanca statement which declared that education should accommodate *all* children and develop inclusive education systems which "...must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different learning styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities" (Swart & Pettipher, 2006: 8). South Africa was one of the countries who undersigned the Salamanca Statement and agreed therefore to make fundamental policy shifts towards inclusive education. Since then the South African education system has gone through a process (and are still progressing) to change from a medical model to a socio-ecological (inclusive) education system. In the socio-ecological model the intensity of the need of the child should be addressed and dealt with in any given context whereas the medical model is a model of diagnosis, treatment, categorisation and placement (Swart & Pettipher, 2006: 6). After a process of negotiations, investigations and consequent draft papers this inclusive model has been legalized by the acceptance of White Paper 6, building an inclusive education and training system, in 2001. Draft policies to put White Paper 6 into practice are being piloted currently: In 2002 a document namely, A Draft Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education was produced (DoE, 2002). From this document the following followed in 2004 and 2005: Summary Outline of the Draft National Strategy For Screening, Identification, Assessment And Support (2004); Conceptual

and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education: District-Based Support Teams (2005); Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education: Special Schools as Resource Centres (2005); Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education: Full Service Schools (2005).

The focal point of White Paper 6 as well as the follow-up draft policies is based on the notion that all educators will have the knowledge and skills to identify and support learners experiencing barriers to learning in any educational context. This is where the problem arises. Currently most South African teachers are not trained to handle the challenges that inclusive education lays on their front doors.

### **Challenges South African teachers face**

To emphasize the overwhelming challenges teachers in South Africa face in an inclusive education and training system it is important to discuss in a nutshell the requirements of the policy documents steering the system and processes.

It is expected that teachers have to know their learners, seeing each learner as an individual with his own strengths, aspirations, experiences and possible specific barriers. Teachers must therefore be careful of making assumptions about learners' "special needs". The old medical model where learners experiencing barriers to learning were referred for "specialised" assessment, categorisation and placement does not exist anymore. The focus is now on the nature and the level of intensity of support needs with the main objective to design an appropriate support programme with time frames and expected outcomes. The local ordinary school should always remain the first option and the **teacher** and all who are directly involved with the learner is responsible for this process.

*"Once the **teacher** has observed the learner in the teaching and learning situation he/she can start identifying barriers that the learner might experience through a classroom-based and **teacher** driven process of **teacher** self reflection, parent consultation and involvement, identifying contextual barriers, planning learning and teaching adjustments, identifying whether an improvement in school effectiveness, provisioning, planning and collaboration will not improve teaching and learning to the benefit of all learners and identifying community resources. If this support is done effectively, there will be no need for any form of support from an agency outside the classroom". Within any classroom there is a wide range of cognitive abilities that will require a variety of responses from **teachers**. **Teachers** will have to compile assessment profiles of learners experiencing barriers to learning determining their support needs (SA, 2004).*

Inclusive education is also centrally a curriculum issue and **teachers** are the primary mediator through which the curriculum is taught. Therefore, they have the responsibility to make provision for every learner to succeed. To achieve this they need to be qualified, competent, dedicated and caring.

In order to ascertain that the above mentioned requirements are attained **teachers** need to have knowledge and skills regarding the following:

- knowledge about various forms of extrinsic as well as extrinsic barriers;
- identifying and assessing a learner who experiences barriers to learning;
- compiling an assessment profile of a learner experiencing barriers to learning;
- collaborating with all relevant role players; interviewing parents;
- implementing the intervention strategies
- keeping record of progress;
- reflection skills;
- mobilization and utilization of resources available at school;
- preventing and addressing barriers to learning arising from a variety of aspects such as:
  - the content of learning programs;
  - the language and medium of teaching and learning;
  - the management and organization of classrooms;
  - learning style and pace;
  - time frames for completion of curricula;
  - materials and equipment which have to be available;
  - a variety of assessment methods and techniques;
  - alternative assessment techniques; and
  - innovative new teaching strategies.

However, currently:

- most **teachers** are not trained to take on inclusive education and are thus unable to respond appropriately to the diverse needs of inclusive education;
- they need reorientation, support and training and assistance as well as a fundamental shift in mindsets and attitudes;
- they also need to have a common vision, a good conceptual framework and language, as well as a set of instructional and technical skills to work with the diverse needs of learners
- competency regarding collaboration skills and support strategies to understand their relative roles and responsibilities in an inclusive education system is essential.

### **Goal of study**

A pilot study was undertaken to instigate a gathering of evidence in order to motivate higher education institutions to investigate and consequently adapt their training strategies and content of students in education.

This research study is addressing the following central questions:

- What are the training needs of in-service educators with regards to the support of learners experiencing barriers to learning?

- What aspects should be addressed in pre-service as well as in post-graduate training regarding the support of learners' experiencing barriers to learning?
- What skills and knowledge does policies expect from educators regarding the support of learners' experiencing barriers to learning?

### **Research method**

A survey study was conducted. A sample of 500 closed questionnaires were randomly distributed to all types of schools in the Vaal Triangle area which included secondary schools in towns, townships, rural areas, primary schools in towns, townships, rural areas, special schools. 331 (62%) questionnaires were returned.

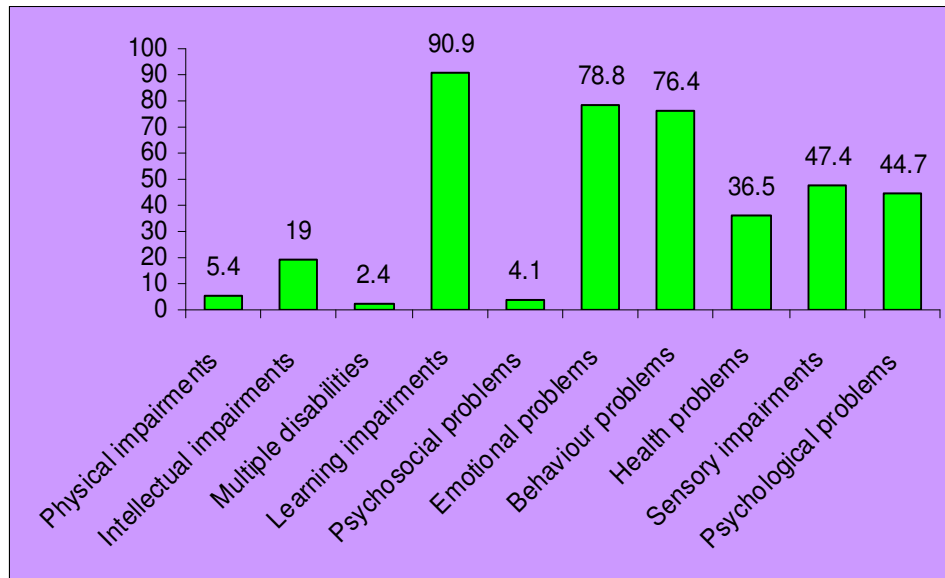
For the purpose of this paper the following issues will be briefly discussed:

- Years of teaching experience
- Qualifications related to supporting learners who experience barriers to learning
- Barriers to learning they have in their classrooms
- Pre-service training they received regarding inclusive education and the support of learners who experience barriers to learning
- In-service training they received regarding inclusive education and the support of learners who experience barriers to learning
- Sufficiency of knowledge and skills to deal with learners experiencing barriers to learning at their school inclusively
- Sufficient knowledge and skills to adapt and modify the curriculum as well as assessment strategies for learners who experience barriers to learning
- Their opinion on the importance of pre-service training of students in education regarding inclusive education and the support of learners who experience barriers to learning.

### **Results:**

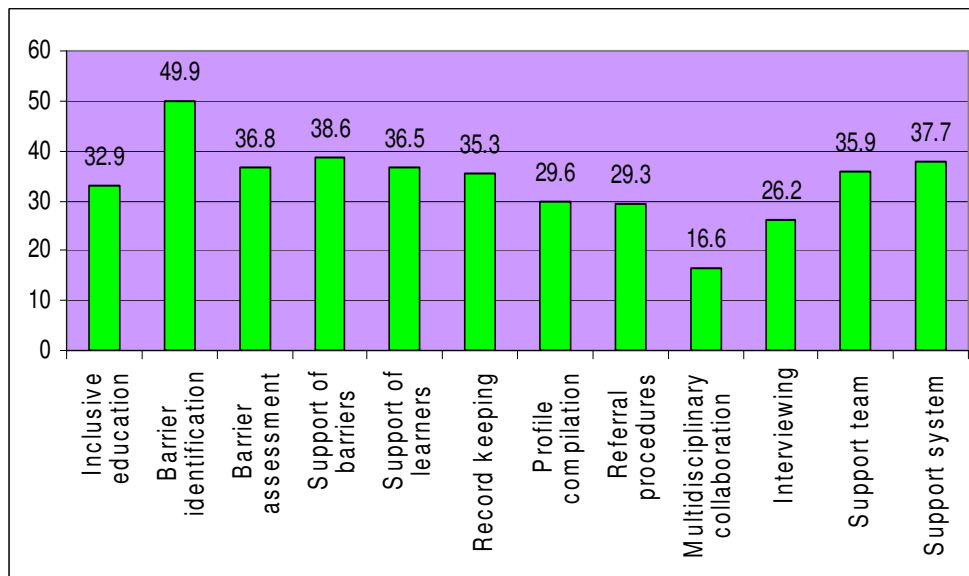
- a) Teaching years experience ranged from months tot more than 30 years – most had more than 20 years experience
- b) Qualifications range from **teacher** diplomas to degrees in different fields
  - Very few have further qualifications in inclusive education and the support of learner experiencing barriers to learning

c) Barriers to learning in their classrooms:



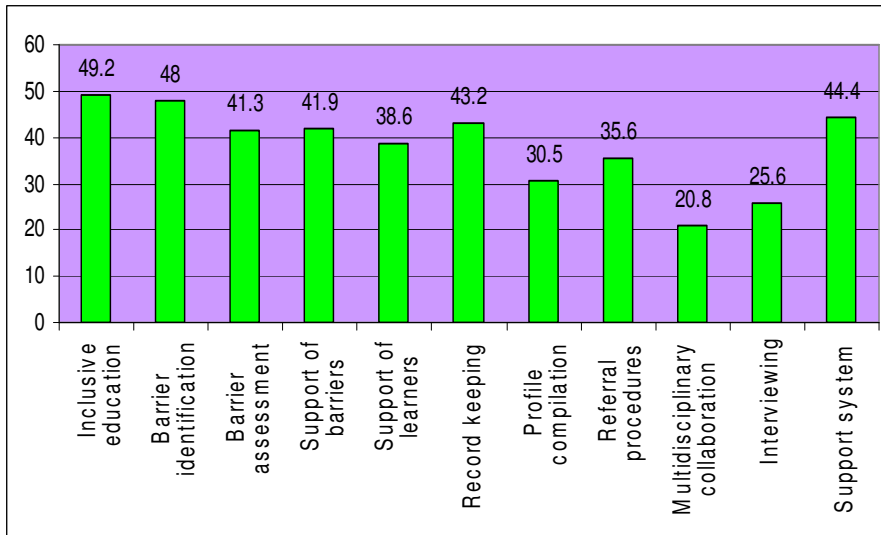
- Most (nearly 91%) reported learning impairments (e.g. spelling-, reading-, mathematical problems, Attention Deficit Deficiency [ADD], Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Deficiency [ADHD], etc.)
- Emotional problems (78%) e.g. as a result of traumatic experiences, problems at home, etc.)
- A large percentage also reported behaviour problems (76%)
- Health (TB, HIV/Aids)(36%) and Psychological (depression, etc.) (44,7%) problems as well as sensory impairments (hearing and sight) (47%) were also a relatively high reported percentage

d) Pre-service training received



- Less than 50% has received pre-service training

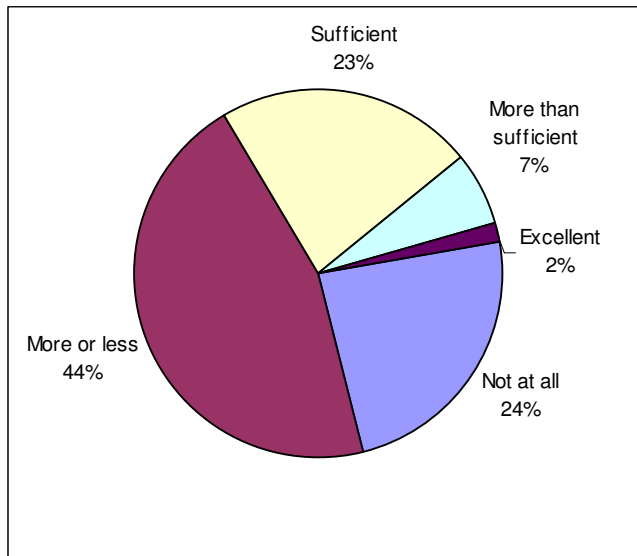
e) In-service training received



- Less than 50% received in-service training

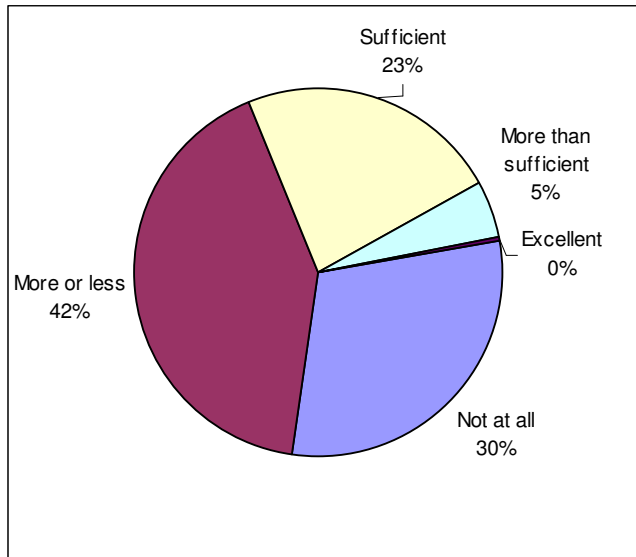
f) 60% of the respondents believed that if learners with one or more barrier to learning are admitted at their school they are not equipped to deal with these learners inclusively.

g) On the question if the respondents think that they have sufficient knowledge and skills regarding the adaptation of the curriculum for learners experiencing barriers to learning the responses were the following:



Only 32% respondents indicated that they have sufficient or more than sufficient knowledge and skills. 68% of the respondents have more or less or no skills and knowledge at all.

h) On the question if the respondents believe that they have sufficient knowledge and skills regarding the adaptation of assessment for learners experiencing barriers to learning the responses were the following:



Again only 28% respondents believed that they have sufficient or more than sufficient knowledge and skills. 72% of the respondents have more or less or no skills and knowledge at all.

i) An overwhelming percentage of respondents (82%) indicated that it is necessary on a pre-graduate level to train teachers-in-training in identifying and supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning and that it would have been to their benefit if they have been trained on a pre-graduate level.

### Conclusion

Based on the above results it is obvious that all the respondents acknowledge that inclusive education and training cannot be avoided but that most of them are not trained to deal with the challenges it bring, despite the fact that some of them have received some pre-service and in-service training and have years of experience. It is therefore, quite evident that further investigation and a full study is needed to change the training of all students in education to ascertain that all future teachers are fully equipped to deal with learners experiencing barriers to learning appropriately. It is also recommended that higher education institutions look into the possibility of accredited certificate courses for in-service teachers

Teachers are the people who make learning possible  
Their own attitudes, beliefs and feelings are of crucial importance  
They need to believe that every individual has the potential for learning  
Skills and knowledge will have a large positive influence

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