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ABSTRACT

This paper considers teacher education for teachers of learners with severe to profound disabilities (SPD) in South Africa, in both formal and non-formal learning programmes within a disability studies in education framework. Qualitative data were collected from a range of education stakeholders including non-governmental (NGOs) and disabled people organisations (DPOs). Based on a thematic analysis, findings show limited pre-service teacher education programmes focused on teaching learners with SPD. In-service teacher training through education departments and NGOs and DPOs, is usually through basic short courses or workshops and are not complemented by on-going support. We argue for a reconceptualization of teacher education in South Africa to prepare teachers to meet the diverse needs of learners, including those with SPDs within an inclusive education context. Skills in addressing barriers to learning should be infused throughout initial teacher education, in line with the principles of universal design for learning while impairment-specific knowledge can be offered in related modules that focus on reasonable accommodation for children with disabilities. In-service education can occur in formal and informal programmes and should empowers teachers to become lifelong learners.

Inclusive and special education

This paper begins by recognising the trajectory that inclusive education has followed from being closely associated with disability toward a much broader understanding which concerns addressing exclusion from education on any number of grounds, such as race, class, ethnicity and so forth (Florian 2019). In this vein we adopt the broad definition of inclusive education as proposed by Roger Slee for the 2020 Global Education Monitoring report:

> Inclusive education refers to securing and guaranteeing the right of all children to access, presence, participation and success in their local regular school. Inclusive education calls upon neighbourhood schools to build their capacity to eliminate barriers to access, presence, participation, and achievement in order to be able to provide excellent educational experiences and outcomes for all children and young people. (Slee 2018, 8)

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Our interest is in the way that disability is configured in this understanding and for this purpose we adopt the definition of disability from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) for our discussion: 'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (United Nations 2006, 4). Putting these two definitions together helps to frame our discussion of teacher education. We are interested in what teachers need to know in order to remove barriers that disable children with impairments in education and to promote not only access but also their full participation and ultimate success such that they are able to participate equally in society with their non-disabled peers. In order to frame this discussion, we need to explore how special education falls short of this goal and the reasons why.

According to Florian (2019) the practice of special education is predicated upon the idea that most children require a standard from of education, while some require additional support. It is those children who have either difficulties in learning (for a multitude of reasons) or disabilities who are identified as needing additional support and special education. Clearly where the line is drawn between most and some children is variable, but it is this line which marks the divide between ordinary and special education. The perceived need for targeted support, which is different and additional to what others receive, supports a logic of exclusion and special education. This is most strongly apparent for children with disabilities, with elaborate separate special education systems constructed that offer little disruption to (and in fact maintain) the general education for most children (Florian 2019). On the other hand, inclusive education seeks (as we have defined it) to do away with this line altogether, not in the sense that there might be specific needs, but that these needs are not perceived as additional but rather as part and parcel of the general education system. This applies to all learning needs and implies an expansion of education systems to combat exclusion by catering for diversity.

Given this background, we would argue that within an inclusive education system where disability is considered on a par with other forms of diversity such as ethnicity or language, there is an attendant risk of not recognising that different forms of diversity may require different specific approaches (Norwich 2014). Considering the stigma associated with disability and the history of segregation, it is likely that children with disabilities might find themselves once again marginalised within an inclusive system (Norwich 2014). We follow Ashby (2012) in noting that:

> Considering disability as a social construct does not signify a denial of difference. There are differences in the ways people move through the world, the ways people access print, and the ways people process new information. However, it is the meaning we make of those differences that is important. (92)

In order to understand how difference is perceived we draw on the notion of 'dilemmas of difference', a legal concept introduced by Minow (1990) where she grapples with the tension between attending to the right to be treated with regard to individual needs and the need for group membership. In relation to education she notes that:

> This dilemma of difference arises because of the constant reiteration of a norm against which individual student differences are compared; ignoring a student's difference may

extend equal treatment without accommodation, but identifying a student's difference risks producing exclusion, stereotype, or shame. (Minow 2009, x)

Simply put this refers to the balance to be achieved between a negative view of difference which eschews labels as stigmatising and leading to unfair treatment as against a positive perspective that recognises difference as a precursor to meeting individual needs. Norwich notes that: 'The dilemma is that both options – to recognise and respond to, or not to recognise and respond to, difference – have negative risks.' (Norwich 2008, 291). To apply this to our current discussion the dilemma relates to how teacher education needs to be reconceptualised to address the needs of all children by recognising and responding to difference in a way that enables them to address 'barriers to access, presence, participation, and achievement' (Slee 2018, 8). Achieving this will require a consideration of overall imperatives of inclusion for all as well as impairment specific approaches and strategies. We argue that these twin aims are supported by global initiatives, the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNCRPD.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 is comprehensively inclusive in its aim to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all', with targets directed toward reaching those who are most marginalised, including children with disabilities. Article 24, on the other hand, is more specific in how this might be achieved specifically with respect to disability, stating that: 'States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community' naming some of these skills as learning braille, sign language and augmentative and alternative communication (United Nations 2006). Thus the UNCRPD is unequivocal in its commitment to both full participation and attention to differences.

Minow (2009) proposes that the approach of universal design for learning (UDL) has the potential to reconfigure how we deal with difference in classrooms by placing diversity and difference at the centre of curriculum planning rather than as an add-on at the periphery. It achieves this through recognising that children learn differently and that adjustments to the curriculum are needed for all students, not only those with disabilities (Meyer and Rose 2000). These adjustments are related to the ways in which students are expected to access, process, and represent their learning, while maintaining the same learning goals for all students (Katz and Sokal 2016). In our ensuing discussion we aim to explore how teacher education programmes are called upon to deal with the tension between changing institutional practices in a broad inclusive education sense while at the same time recognising that certain forms of impairment may require specific curriculum adaptations or reasonable accommodation.

South African inclusive education policy and practice

Within South African inclusive education policy, the move away from educational provision based on disability category toward meeting identified support needs has rendered reference to disability as problematic and even counter to the broad vision of inclusive education. Inclusive education is viewed as being about everybody and is distanced from a narrow focus on disability which now becomes an aspect of diversity on a par with gender, race, language and so forth (Norwich 2014). The reasons for this move

can be related to the negative effects associated with labelling practices (Baglieri and Shapiro 2017). However as Norwich (2014) points out: ' … inclusion/inclusive can be used in the wider "for all" sense, doing so carries the risks of not recognising that different education approaches and considerations may apply across these areas of difference.' (497.)

In South African policy, a distinction between different types of barriers (or 'areas of difference', as Norwich (2014) puts it), remains within policy between those barriers that are extrinsic to the child (for example, social and curriculum barriers) and those that are intrinsic to the child (impairment related) (Walton et al. 2009). It is notable that in our context children with so-called intrinsic barriers who are deemed to have high support needs are most likely to be placed in special schools and least likely to be welcomed into regular schools (DBE 2017). Within this group of children, the following types of disability are usually found: those with low vision or who are blind, D/deaf of hard of hearing, and those with severe to profound intellectual disability. We group them under the label of severe to profound disability (SPD) as our focus for the purposes of this discussion.

In the frame of a dilemma of difference we therefore refer in this paper to (a) barriers to learning or inclusive education in broad terms and (b) impairment-specific support needs as disability related. Whereas there are other barriers or forms of difference beside disability that might need specific attention, our focus here is on impairment-specific support needs within an inclusive education framework. However, we believe that disability is a very significant barrier (at both intrinsic and extrinsic levels in the parlance of South African education policy) in light of the origins of inclusive education and in the continuing existence of segregated systems of education on the basis of disability (Slee 2018).

Inclusive teacher education in South Africa

Despite the strong policy commitment in South Africa to achieve quality education for learners with SPD, progress towards achieving this commitment has been slow, with a key hindrance being that there are very few teacher education programmes focused specifically on impairment-specific support needs within education (Engelbrecht et al. 2003; Kelly and McKenzie 2018). Against this backdrop, this paper aims to establish a better understanding of the current status of teacher education that addresses the impairment-specific support needs of learners with SPD. We begin with an overview of education for children with disabilities before discussing teacher education in South Africa, specifically focusing on inclusive education training and impairment-specific training. In doing this we highlight both formal and non-formal training opportunities. Thereafter, we present the research design and methods of the paper, followed by the findings and discussion.

Background to education of children with disabilities in South Africa

In the South African context under the apartheid regime, access to education for all children with severe disabilities was determined by the race of the child, with black children receiving the least attention. Under the democratic constitution of the country in 1994,

basic education for all children became a right for all who live in South Africa. The validity of this right was confirmed in a 2010 court case number 18678 /2007 (Western Cape Forum for intellectual Disability v Government of the Republic of South Africa and Another 2011), which compelled the Department of Basic Education and other arms of government to be accountable for ensuring that all children (including children with severe to profound intellectual disabilities) gain access to quality education (Wood et al. 2019). Thus, the constitutional and legal environment is unequivocal about the right to education.

The policy framework which is set to achieve this is Education White Paper 6, setting out an inclusive education framework that aims to identify and support all children who experience barriers to learning (due to differences arising from any number of dimensions), including those with SPD, such that they can achieve their potential. The policy acknowledges the central role of teacher education in achieving this goal, stating that: 'educators will need to improve their skills and knowledge, and develop new ones. Staff development at the school and district level will be critical to putting in place successful integrated educational practices.' (DoE 2001, 18).

According to inclusive education policy, teacher education should equip teachers for four types of public schools: (a) public ordinary schools also known as mainstream schools, (b) special schools which are defined as 'schools equipped to deliver a specialised education programme to learners requiring access to high-intensive educational and other support either on a full-time or a part-time basis.' (Department of Basic Education 2014, xi), (c) special schools as resource centres which have the additional role of providing a range of support services to ordinary and full-service schools as part of the district based support team (Department of Basic Education 2014), and (d) full-service schools (defined as 'schools and colleges) that will be equipped and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs among all our learners' (DoE 2001, 22).

In terms of educational provision within these schools, public ordinary schools will prioritise a differentiated curriculum and deal with learners with behavioural problems, while special schools will: 'focus on problem solving and the development of learners' strengths and competencies rather than focusing on their shortcomings only' (DoE 2001, 18) and when identified as a resource centre they will also prioritise: 'orientation to new roles within district support services of support to neighbourhood schools' (18). Full service schools: 'will include orientation to and training in new roles focusing on multi-level classroom instruction, co-operative learning, problem solving and the development of learners' strengths and competencies rather than focusing on their shortcomings only'. (19). In 2016 there were 25,574 public ordinary schools in South Africa, and 455 special schools (Department of Basic Education 2018) and there were 715 full-service schools in 2015 (Department of Basic Education 2017). Unfortunately neither full service schools nor special schools as resource centres are recognised as distinct school types within the South African Schools Act of (Republic of South Africa 1996) making it difficult to align these school types and their human resource needs within education policy.

Teacher education for inclusive education

Teacher education policy as presented in the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) (DHET 2015) specifies that initial teacher education

must ensure that graduates are knowledgeable about barriers to learning showing competence in identifying barriers and in curriculum differentiation to address these barriers according to learners' individual need. However, it offers no further specifics for addressing impairment-specific support needs in the range of school types.

Phasha and Majoko (2018) found in the context of South African higher education institutions (HEIs) that the majority of programmes adopted what they called the 'silo approach' where teaching of inclusive education occurs in separate (stand-alone) inclusive education modules and relatively few offered an integrated approach where inclusive education philosophy and strategies permeate the curriculum. Furthermore, inclusive education modules were optional rather than core modules of the initial teacher education (ITE) programmes (Phasha and Majoko 2018, 55). This elective stand-alone approach does not reflect the policy recommendations about the design and delivery of ITE programmes made by the MRTEQ (2015). Moreover, it does not take into account recommendations that an integrated, embedded approach may be more effective in ensuring that inclusive education is an essential component of teacher education courses.

In a qualitative study of teachers preparedness for inclusive education in a rural area of South Africa, Themane, and Thobejane (2019) found that teacher education for inclusive education needs to take into account that teachers will be operating with limited resources and therefore teacher agency to implement inclusion should be fostered in initial teacher education. This should include equipping teachers to work with parents and other stakeholders. Savolainen et al. (2012) note a link between skills and attitudes suggesting that attitudes towards inclusion may change gradually if teachers are given the concrete tools to meet the range of learning needs.

While this literature refers to changing institutional practices and relationships in a broad inclusive education approach, Kelly and McKenzie (2018) conducted a study with an emphasis on teacher education addressing the educational needs of learners with SPD; that is impairment-specific support needs. They found that ITE programmes do not equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to offer impairment-specific support to children with SPD, despite the need for teachers to have such knowledge and skills as outlined in the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support policy (SIAS) (DBE 2014) and the Draft National Guidelines for Resourcing an Inclusive Education System (DBE 2018). Kelly and McKenzie (2018) suggest that the lack of focus upon barriers to learning arising from specific impairments in teacher education courses may be due to the belief that impairment-specific support needs could be addressed by the generic approach to offering support to diverse learning needs. Teacher education programmes do not account for teachers who might be responsible for the education of children with SPD, either in special or ordinary schools. We contend that this tendency arises from an understanding that these impairment specific needs will continue to be addressed in special schools, for which additional training would be needed with little no consideration given as to who would provide such training.

In this paper we examine the experiences of stakeholders in teacher education about the mix of general inclusive education around barriers to learning and impairment-specific support needs. The question that we are addressing is: 'In what ways does teacher education, both formal and non-formal, prepare teachers for addressing impairment-specific support needs?'

Methodology

This study is part of a broader research project – Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion (TEDI), a partnership between the University of Cape Town and Christoffel Blinden Mission (CBM), and co-funded by CBM and the European Union. Between 2017 and 2018, the broader project conducted two related studies:

(1) A situational analysis of the educational needs of learners with severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments. Here data were collected from six special schools and two full-service schools across three provinces in South Africa, interviewing learners with disabilities, teachers and school management team members, parents, and district and provincial education officials (McKenzie, Kelly, and Shanda 2018).

(2) An analysis of the availability of teacher education offerings specific to teaching learners with disabilities at higher education institutions (HEIs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and disabled people organisations (DPOs). Here, data were collected through university handbooks, online surveys with directors of NGOs and DPOs and deans of education, as well as interviews with centres of excellence (Kelly and McKenzie 2018).

Research design

Both studies above drew upon a qualitative research design, with the aim of exploring how people make sense of the world around them – their subjective experiences of the world (Willig 2008). In so doing we paid attention to descriptive and interpretive validity through providing an accurate description of events that would fit the view of most people who observe the event and providing an interpretation of the subjective meanings that participants ascribe to these events (Sandelowski 2000).

Methods

The analysis in this paper draws upon data from the following participants who were purposively selected on the basis of their experience – whether personal, professional or both – in relation to teacher education for teachers of learners with severe to profound disability:

(1) 39 teachers and eight school management team members (SMTs) in six special schools and two full-service schools across three provinces in South Africa.

(2) 13 district officials and six provincial officials employed by the department of education and located within these provinces whose work specifically focuses on inclusive education.

(3) Six deans of education at higher education institutions

(4) Eight directors of NGOs and DPOs.

(5) One member of a university based centre of excellence[1] specialising in neurodevelopmental disorders, and two members of a centre of excellence specialising in visual impairment.

The teachers, education officials and staff at the centres of excellence participated in individual face to face interviews (McKenzie, Kelly, and Shanda 2018) while the deans of education and members of NGOs and DPOs completed electronic surveys (Kelly and McKenzie 2018).

Data for this study were analysed using thematic analysis, a process of methodically classifying, putting together and providing an understanding of the patterns or themes in a dataset (Braun and Clarke 2006). This was done with the support of Dedoose, an online application used to analyse qualitative and mixed methods research data.

Initial coding of the data which we draw upon for this analysis was undertaken by the TEDI research team, consisting of experienced qualitative researchers. These codes were then combined into categories that addressed the project's research questions as over-arching themes. Themes were generated from this coded data based on this papers focus; namely, teacher education for teachers of learners with severe to profound disabilities.

Ethical considerations

The University of Cape Town Faculty of Health Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for the two broader research projects within which this study falls (HREC REF: 151/2017 and HREC REF: 486/2017). The studies adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki abiding by the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and beneficence (Willig 2008).

To ensure confidentiality, codes were assigned to each participant (Table 1):

Findings

The findings of this research study focus on participants' views on teacher education offerings in South Africa, with a specific emphasis on inclusive education, impairment-specific training, and formal and non-formal learning. In discussing these themes, we highlight what training is available to teachers and where there are gaps.

Teacher education for inclusion: addressing barriers to learning

We make a distinction between inclusive education as (a) a systemic approach to address barriers to learning and (b) addressing impairment-specific support needs as a specific component of the broader approach. This theme speaks to the ways in which teachers

Table 1. Participant codes and explanations.

Code	Explanation
UD1-6	University dean
NGO1-8	Non-governmental organisation or disabled people organisation director
COE1-2	Centre of excellence member
T1-39	Teacher
SMT1-8	School management team member
DO1-13	District official
PO1-6	Provincial official

learn about and understand inclusive education as a systemic approach as well as the significance of this topic in general education.

Some university deans and centres of excellence recognised the importance of making inclusive education a fundamental focus of pre-service teacher education offerings as opposed to an 'add on' feature. For example, this dean said:

> UD6: Teacher education should generally shape a teacher's mind, heart, values. Inclusive education is not an add on. It starts with a way of seeing and being. The knowledge and skills are of course important … Inclusive education should be infused in the whole programme and not be an add-on that relegates the idea to a few lecturers and modules.

Part of infusing inclusive education into teacher education programmes, according to the following participant, is to unpack the discourse or philosophy of inclusive education within South Africa's socio-political context and history:

> COE2: There must be, for example, discourses about the philosophy of inclusive education, discourses in inclusive education … For us, this is really crucial in that we must understand where does this come from? Why are they all these discourses? Why are we having this issue in South Africa?

Findings from this research study provide some evidence that in-service teachers are becoming more familiar with inclusive education and incorporating it into their teaching practices. This provincial official said:

> PO1: I must just say that we have been holding a lot of interviews recently that it [knowledge of inclusive education] is coming through. Now when we ask questions about inclusive education, specialised education support people are able to answer in the language of the SIAS [Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support], the language of inclusive education. So it is just one indicator for me that it is getting through into the system

Teacher education for inclusion: impairment-specific support needs

This theme relates to comments around teacher education that prepares teachers to address impairment-specific support needs. As part of the shift in South Africa towards inclusive education, much of the specialised training on teaching learners with disabilities was done away with. In commenting on this, one participant said:

> UD6: It was a grave mistake … to stop the specialised training. Most universities lost precious knowledges, skills, resources, and programmes which will be very difficult to recover. It had a negative impact on the teachers teaching at special schools. Working with many school and principals – this is a question. Where do they send teachers for specialised training?

Indeed, there is a severe lack of teacher training focused on teaching learners with SPD; specifically, learners with severe to profound intellectual disability, deaf and hard of hearing learners, and low vision and blind learners: 'So few universities are offering these courses. So you find that the older teachers they still did the specialisation courses, but the younger ones haven't had the opportunity to do it anywhere' (PO1). As a result of a lack of formal training, many newly-qualified teachers who have completed their initial teacher education training arrive at a special school or full-service school setting without any specific training on the nature of impairments and their associated pedagogy: 'That is a problem. When a teacher comes here then we need to provide that training for them' (T9). As this teacher said:

> T1: The first challenge is that as a teacher when I was trained, I was not trained to teach these kind of learners, so when I come to the school … then I come across these kids who are having difficulty in hearing then it becomes a challenge for me.

This has serious implications for teachers' ability to adapt and differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of their learners. For instance, this teacher at a school for the blind said:

> T2: Something that was difficult was that as I am teaching Maths, we deal with tables and diagrams, geometry. It was difficult because I didn't have experience in teaching geometry for blind learners, so I had to make means of how to deal with them.

Participants clearly recognised the need for more in-depth training specific to each impairment. For instance, when talking about training in hearing impairment this SMT member said: 'I think through the trainings, if the teachers could understand deafness itself [as a condition] … we could be able to relate better to our children and to impart knowledge better because we understand the degrees of hearing loss' (SMT3). Participants felt that this training should be offered not only to teachers in special and full-service schools, but also to teachers in mainstream schools. One participant, for example, when talking about being a teacher in a mainstream school, said: 'If there is a learner with an intellectual disability or hearing impairment, how does the teacher deal with that particular learner?'(DO2).

Formal learning

According to the South African teacher education framework, MRTEQ, formal learning refers to 'learning that occurs in an organised and structured education and training environment and that is explicitly designated as such' and that leads to a qualification or part qualification (DHET 2015, 6). At an initial teacher education level there are only two formal teacher education programmes in South Africa that have an impairment-specific focus and 11 qualifications at a continuing education level (Kelly and McKenzie 2018). In commenting on this, this SMT member at a school for learners with intellectual disability noted that:

> SMT2: The generation [of teachers] that is leaving now did the special diploma for severely intellectually disabled children through UNISA [University of South Africa] years ago. And now teachers are doing the inclusive model that is offered at UNISA, which touches on mentally handicapped but doesn't explore it in the depth that the old qualification did.

Some universities touch on impairments within their current programmes, but as this university dean notes: 'This is such a large subject area that all the impairments can't be discussed … And the impairments that are part of the curriculum are just introductions, identifications and some support ideas – not in depth' (UD2).

Across the participant groups, the general sentiment was that higher education institutions should provide more formal, specialised training with respect to specific impairments. For example, this NGO director noted: 'The institutions of higher learning must make means to train such specialised skills' (NGO2). And this education official said: 'I think the universities that are preparing students to become teachers need to look into the issue of having to train them in a particular specialisation in terms of learners with disabilities' (DO2). Specific suggestions include 'providing additional courses for severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments that [are] elective modules

[and] provide in depth training for severe to profound sensory or intellectual impairments', as well as making it 'compulsory for a B.Ed. degree … to have basic knowledge and skills about learners with impairments' (UD2).

NGOs and DPOs express the need for more partnerships to ensure that learners with specific impairments receive the specialised education that they need:

> Training on disability should not be the responsibility of the NGO and DPO sector only. All training offered at universities and colleges towards a qualification where persons will be working with the public should include training on disability in general, including intellectual disability (NGO6).

Non-formal learning

To address the lack of formal impairment-specific training teachers engage in non-formal learning opportunities provided by education departments, higher education institutes, NGOs and DPOs, or the schools themselves. According to MRTEQ non-formal learning refers to planned educational interventions that are not intended to lead to qualifications or part qualifications (DHET 2015). This teacher noted: 'The department has come on board, trying to empower us through workshops, through [the] university, or NGOs. At least one feels that being here, it's not like being thrown here without the tools, so they have been helping us' (T6).

Indeed, education officials recognise the importance of upskilling teachers in special and full-service schools, and offer some training focused on specific impairments:

> The profile of students in the classroom is changing and we need to capacitate as many teachers as we can in how to deal with it. That's the kind of training that is going on now. Intellectual disability, autism, the remedial course, and obviously we have short workshops here and there as well (DO2).

Basic training in South African Sign Language (SASL) and braille is also offered, either through NGOs or DPOs or departments of education. As this NGO noted: 'All the educators in the LSN [learners with special needs] school for the blind have acquired braille skills from us through our member organization' (NGO1). This teacher discussed SASL training she received via the department of education at a provincial level:

> I attended two to four workshops that had been arranged by DBE [department of basic education], national workshops whereby all the provinces combine and then we are taught how to teach this language. Because this is a language on its own, it has its own grammar, its own vocabulary and we have got to respect this language (T4).

Although training is usually done via workshops and short courses, teachers feel that this is not always sufficient. When talking about training in braille, one teacher noted: 'We are attending workshops during holidays and it is a short time, just for a week. So we can't even learn everything in a short period' (T7). In addition, where the training is offered via the departments of education, teachers do not feel supported by the district after the training has taken place: 'The district officials, to be honest, because there is no one at the district level with knowledge of sign language, so they don't really monitor sign language courses that we've done' (SMT3). This indicates that teachers are not receiving the ongoing support that they feel that they need in building their capacity to address the educational needs of learners with SPD.

Some participants felt that teacher education should not only be the responsibility of higher education institutions and other stakeholders like departments of education but also that NGOs or DPOs should be involved:

> Everything can't be taught through university modules. Role players need to become involved and teach the practical implications of inclusive education. The DBE [department of basic education] needs to play a stronger role with in-service training and starting with the youngest children at Grade R level. These teachers need assistance with supporting, identifying and intervening in possible learning barriers as early as possible (UD5).

The feeling among NGOs/DPOs was that teachers benefited from their informal courses by gaining insight and skills in working with a specific disability:

> Many participants have expressed that the training has informed them about many things that they were not aware of. Many had prior to the training felt that they were not equipped to teach children with Down syndrome but after the training were more positive on implementing the training (NGO3).

However, cash-strapped organisations are not able to offer courses on a regular basis unless they are suitably compensated. In addition, these courses are often not accredited or recognised as official teacher education courses (Kelly and McKenzie 2018). They therefore would not affect employment or promotion prospects and teachers would have few incentives to do the course other than their own professionalism and desire to meet the learners' needs. As this NGO noted: 'There needs to be internal motivation from individuals in order to acquire skills' (NGO5).

Another way in which non-formal learning takes place is through teachers collaborating with one another. This teacher, who is proficient in sign language, discusses how the teachers at her school come together to provide one another support and guidance:

> T8: Some teachers come into my class and ask … how to sign and they invite me to sign at their classroom, and now the interpreter, they ask him to interpret for a new teacher. We help each other here, the teachers and the other teaching assistant, we say: "Oh! I don't know how to do this, help me.

Similarly, this teacher at a school for intellectual disability noted: 'You say "so and so has done this, what do you think I should do about this?" And you sit and brainstorm. So that is all training. It's exchanging ideas and thoughts of how to deal with children' (SMT2).

Discussion

The implementation of inclusive education depends on teacher education where teachers are knowledgeable about what inclusion means, and the strategies for implementing it. Our research indicates that the place of learners with disabilities in the education system remains tentative as they are taught by teachers who are not trained to meet their specific learning needs within an inclusive setting. The evidence from this study suggests that training in inclusive education as an overall strategy for dealing with the full range of difference and marginalised students is not enough to meet the needs of children with SPD in regular and full-service schools. Even when these children are placed in special schools, they currently cannot expect to have

teachers who are skilled in addressing impairment specific barriers to learning as there are insufficient formal qualifications in this area. Regarding non-formal opportunities to train teachers in addressing impairment specific barriers, NGOs and DPOs offer valuable training, albeit on a small scale. However, teachers do not always use these impairment-specific training opportunities, especially if these courses are not accredited.

As concerns formal qualifications, consideration needs to be given to the professionalisation of impairment specific teacher education within an inclusive education system. For example, the University of New Mexico in the United States of America offers a unique ITE dual licence programme in general and special education (Keefe et al. 2000). This means that teacher students from that institution graduate with dual majors in the ITE programme, one in general education and one in special education.

These same teachers need to understand the requirements for reasonable accommodation for individual learners and how to work with specialist support staff in making such accommodation. The General Comment (United Nations, 2016, 13) notes that: 'Failure to provide reasonable accommodation constitutes discrimination on the ground of disability'. This discrimination will continue if specialist teacher skills relating to impairment specific needs are not developed and meaningfully distributed across the education system, by whatever means suited to the particular country.

The reconceptualization of ITE programmes (including preparing teachers to address the needs of learners with SPD) at South African HEIs needs urgent attention. We propose that we take guidance from SDG4 and Article 24 of the UNCRPD. Inclusive and quality education as articulated in SDG 4 must be an essential component of teacher education programmes. It must drive this reconceptualization; it must be the bedrock on which ITE curricula are reconceptualised. At the same time the UN General Comment 4 can guide us on what needs to be done to ensure that disability is not marginalised within an inclusive system by urging us to pay attention to reasonable accommodation and support for disability.

Fundamental to making this shift is the understanding of how difference is constructed by institutional practices that favour the norm (Minow 1990). While this might entail significant attitudinal shifts, Minow (2009) argues that UDL is transformative as: 'Its set of principles exposes and proposes remedies for several fundamental biases in a traditional curriculum that imagines a 'normal' student and hence marginalises anyone who does not comfortably fit that norm'. (Minow 2009, x).

We conclude by promoting the need for considering both the overall imperatives of inclusive education and also being cognisant of the need for impairment specific teaching approaches and strategies. Teachers face the challenge of reconceptualising difference, not as a source of difficulty and exclusion that may require technical procedures but rather as the centre of their planning and practice. In this the adoption of UDL can guide practice by starting off with diversity and planning for it from the get-go. Skills in reasonable accommodation and adapting the curriculum to meet impairment specific needs such as those indicated in the UNCRPD need to be developed further in the South African education sector and distributed strategically so as to broaden the range of diversity that can be accommodated in increasingly inclusive environments.

Note

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