



INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION: challenges and opportunities for South Africa

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OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- Introduction
- Methodology
- International development of inclusive education

Notes on terminology

International development of IE

- Contemporary international contexts in initial teacher education for inclusion
- Prevailing international models of initial teacher education for inclusive education

Additional model

Content-infused model

- Reflections on the way forward
- Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

- Increase globally in awareness of challenges in access to education and how to address these challenges
- Result: past decades characterized by progressive shift away from special school settings towards inclusive school communities
- Implies that schools and teachers need to adapt and change
- Focus of paper: review and implications of initial professional development of teacher education for inclusion

METHODOLOGY

Overall methodology involved 3 step linear process to review literature on teacher education for inclusion:

- Various resources and databases e.g. via EBSCOhost and Google used to search reports by international organisations, peer reviewed publications using descriptive words
- Followed by more refined mapping of some areas including the identification of models of teacher education using content analysis and generally delimited to works published in past 15 years
- Finally peer reviewed research on prevailing models of teacher education for inclusion was analysed using a critical analysis framework e.g. relevant, clearly expressed theoretical frameworks, appropriate research designs etc.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Notes on terminology

- Countries of the North and countries of the South: refer to broad global differences in economic and political powers between countries based on the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

International development of inclusive education

- Historically deficit approach to learners with disabilities that originated in countries of the North and was gradually transferred to countries of the South
- Separate school placements increasingly questioned in countries of the North that lead to notion of inclusive education and advocated internationally e.g. by UNESCO

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (cont.)

- Inclusion not a monolithic concept but constructed differently across contexts giving rise to variety of 'inclusions' e.g. in South Africa and Finland
- In general an on-going dynamic process in which access to, acceptance of and participation are expanded for all despite e.g. ability, language, religion, religion and supported by teachers in mainstream classrooms (this broad perspective guides following discussion)
- Key role of participation emphasized: involves learning alongside and with others and being recognized and accepted for oneself
- Widespread acknowledgement of crucial role teachers play and the importance of respect and response to human diversity

Contemporary international contexts in teacher education for inclusion (cont.)

Contemporary developments

- Education for learners with differences traditionally based on medical deficit model, result was that initial teacher education programmes compartementalized confirming barriers between special and mainstream
- *Profile of Inclusive Teachers (European Agency for the development in Special Needs Education, 2012)*: information on what essential values and areas of competence should be developed in teacher education programmes: *support for all learners; working with others; professional personal development*

Policy developments

- Standards-based agendas for teacher education in various countries that relate to 'education for all' still expressed in general terms, compliance superficial
- Idealism of international (e.g. UNESCO) as well as national policy guidelines (e.g. Malawi) difficult to translate into reality

Contemporary developments (cont.)

- In-depth literature review as well as own involvement in various international projects indicate a fragmented approach leading to uneven outcomes for learners in inclusive classrooms
- Two major factors that play role in this regard are
Teacher education for inclusion rife with differing definitions of inclusive education and understanding of 'diversity/difference' as well as disparate interpretations of policies and practices within different countries
Influence of traditional 'expert/specialist' model of meeting needs of learners with special educational needs/ disabilities cannot be underestimated

Contemporary contexts (cont.)

Prevailing international models of teacher education for inclusion:

The additional model:

- Involves modifying existing courses by adding ‘special education’ rather than ‘inclusive education’ content in general teacher education curriculum;
- Inclusion still not located in the broader issues of the curriculum, teaching and learning, no critiques of conceptual frameworks;
- As a result in-service teachers still believe that they cannot support children who are ‘different’
- Clear demarcations in Faculties of Education between staff with special knowledge of ‘special needs’ (that focuses on disabilities and not diversity of learning needs) and general education staff

Brief case study of research on the additional model

South African case study (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel & Tlale, 2015):

- SA Constitution and resultant education policies: human rights and equity framework but teacher education for inclusion still follows additional model approach
- Results of semi-structured interviews with 49 teachers who have either recently completed their initial teacher education training or in some cases completed it several years ago: *'if you think/look at your own classroom how do you deal with all the children in your classroom?'*
- Continuous effort by teachers to align their belief in ideals of SA Constitution *'.. I do not discriminate...'* and its promise of undoing past social injustices and the realities of existing conditions in their classrooms with increasing influx of learners experiencing diverse barriers to learning

Contemporary contexts (cont.)

South African case studies (cont.)

- Majority of teachers focus on deficit based teaching and support approaches '*...they really do not belong in my classroom....*'
'*..... There are really weak learners in my classroom who should attend separate remedial classes...*' *....I try and support them in separate groups...*' *.....I am not trained to support them....*'
- Teaching and support strategies entrenched by their initial teacher education experiences
- Importance of well-skilled professional teachers who have clear understanding of a variety of barriers to learning and own responsibilities in addressing these barriers cannot be overstressed.

Contemporary contexts (cont.)

The content-infused model:

- Non-traditional content infused model slowly gaining popularity
- Attitudes, skills, knowledge traditionally included in separate additional model now spread throughout units in initial teacher education programme and inclusive education defined more broadly
- Social and educational inclusion addressed at the heart of programmes (e.g. in some universities in New Zealand, USA, Canada and Scotland)
- Although implementation still rather isolated initial evaluation research results indicate improved feelings of self-efficacy of teachers in implementing inclusive education

Brief example of research on an innovative content-infused based model

The Inclusive Education Practice Research and Development Project in Scotland (Rouse & Florian, 2012)

- An innovative approach to prepare teachers so that they could have a greater awareness and understanding of educational and social challenges as well as support strategies in heterogeneous classrooms
- Inclusive pedagogical approach: does not reject notion of specialist knowledge but rather focuses on how to make use of this knowledge in ways that facilitate learning and participation of every student

Example (cont.)

One year PGDE programme adopted theoretical and practical position that inclusive education is not a denial of individual differences but an accommodation of them within structures and processes available to all students, common core is course entitled 'Professional Studies' with following themes:

- Understanding learning
- Social justice
- Becoming an active professional

Provides students with 'cognitive map' of teaching and learning with which complex range of decisions that students as teachers would be required to make regarding diverse educational needs

More than 1500 students have already completed this PGDE over a 6-year period, impact evaluation positive

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE WAY FORWARD

Interwoven themes in analysis of international approaches to teacher education for inclusion:

- Polarised and competing debates regarding teacher education for inclusion with result that there is serious concern about conceptual and philosophical challenges in teacher education for inclusion
- Clear lack of collaboration not only within individual teacher education institutions but also nationally and trans-nationally as well as lack of partnerships with other role players (e.g. Departments of National Education)

The possible way forward within the SA context

A locally situated collaborative inclusive education approach that does not depend on solutions from countries of the North but draws on the strengths and capabilities of South Africans and makes informed use of knowledge from other countries is needed

The way forward (cont.)

A collaborative partnership framework (e.g. Blanton & Pugach, 2011) in SA could e.g. focus on development of teacher education for inclusion through reciprocal and responsive curricular designs and practise settings and important aspects in developing framework:

- Develop exploratory dialogues amongst individuals and groups within and across Faculties who may hold conflicting understandings
- Resultant development of collaborative strategies to engage and persist in learning from one another
- Careful analyses of challenges of teaching in complex settings where mandated curricula and large class sizes abound
- As a result develop explicit conceptual and theoretical frameworks regarding inclusive education and programme outcomes
- Develop specific agreed upon strategies to enhance practical implementation that can include team teaching in programme and joint supervision of teaching practicum

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS

- I fully acknowledge complexities of dynamic interactions between general international guidelines, specific national education policies and economic realities in the field of teacher education for inclusion
- Reality however remains that South African mainstream schools and classrooms are facing an increasingly diverse learning population who have the right to quality education
- Time has therefore arrived for action regarding development of comprehensive and systemic strategies for teacher education for inclusion based on a collaborative framework of equitable participation within the South African education context that reflect a deep understanding of our own unique context and its realities
- This will enable us as researchers, teacher educators and teachers to respond to individual differences in ways that avoid the stigma of judging learners as less able and therefore ignoring their right to full participation in an inclusive school community.

REFERENCES

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