# ON THE DIRT ROAD TO INCLUSION

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*Inclusive education in the Republic of South Africa has been codified and written down in the form of White Papers. From the legislative point of view, the situation is clear. The reality however shows that the implementation of the law is still at its infancy. Students with visual impairments are practically confined to being educated in specialized schools. This article is presenting a bold attempt to establish conditions for an inclusive setting where students with visual impairments could successfully study hand in hand with non-disabled peers. A small rural school in the Limpopo Province, RSA combines the best of two worlds – an inclusive school in the residential setting. Despite basic facilities in place, the school was struggling with providing quality education for its population. A series of on-site in-services paired up with the expansion of technological facilities proved to be instrumental in forming a model for an inclusive program.*

Inclusive education has been commonplace in many countries for decades. It has transformed from what used to be called integration to even further embrace students with different learning needs. Inclusion has as many proponents as opponents (Florian, 2010; Hines, 2001; Taylor, 1996). When we look however at global trends in education, special schools are being phased out and students with disabilities are being placed in mainstream educational settings.

Despite some effort, especially in private schools (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller, 2009) , South Africa does not seem to be up to speed when it comes to propagating inclusion in K-12 education in the same shape or form as in other countries with established inclusive education policies and practices (Muthukrishna, 2002; Sukhraj, 2006; Waghid & Engelbrecht, 2002). The government issued the so called White Papers No. 6 in 2001, further revised in 2006, in which general policies, research data, and practical information related to inclusion are described (Maguvhe, 2006). It would seem that the system supports inclusive practices in various types of educational institutions. However despite the guidelines that do not differ much from what is common in the developed countries the actual realization is still incompatible with the recommendations (Pather, 2011). Brenda van Rooyen et al., (2002) notice that this piece of legislation is full of inconsistencies and mutually exclusive statements that contradict the concept of inclusion. Indeed, universities do not appear to discriminate against any disability and students with disabilities attend the same classes hand in hand with students with no disability. There are however critical voices that refute the notion of sufficient provisions for students with disabilities in higher education (Dube, 2009; Matshedisho, 2007). Elementary and secondary education is even further from putting all students under one roof. On average public schools do not have on-site specialists who would support and co-ordinate education of special needs students. The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC, 2007) recommended that the Department of Education ensure the provision of infrastructure and qualified teachers, while provincial educational offices were supposed to collaborate with individual schools in their respective regions (Walton, E. et al., 2009). It happens however that people assigned the role of support to inclusive environments have not been empowered with sufficient knowledge or experience. As of 2001 regular education teachers had little to no training in handling students with disabilities and they were taught to believe that learners with additional needs may not manage the rigor of regular curricula (Engelbrecht, Forlin, Eloff, & Swart, 2001).

The majority of young learners in South Africa attend public schools, known here as government schools. They are controlled by provincial Departments of Education supervised by the central Ministry of Education. In addition private schools offer their programs to different segments of South African

population, from affluent groups to underprivileged. However, even those institutions shy from venturing inclusion. Some schools are emerging with their first attempts to include students with various learning concerns (Muthukrishna, 2002; Ngcobo & Muthukrishna, 2011 ). In majority, those schools accommodate learners with mild learning difficulties. SAHRC reported in 2007 that it was impossible to assess the number of students with visual impairments attending mainstream schools as such statistics were not compiled at that time. At the time of writing no official statistics were available yet. SAHRC presented a rather bleak image of the implementation efforts of the inclusive education policies (SAHRC, 2007).

Among those private or independent schools there are a number of schools run by various missions. One of them is St. Bernard's Mission in the Limpopo province where two educational entities are located. The mission of the Mission is to educate learners with visual impairments and children from surrounding villages. The Siloe School for the Blind belongs to the government and aims at providing education and accommodation for students with visual impairments. The other school, known as Vrederust Independent School, is independent and serves learners from local villages as well as high school students with visual impairments who are pioneering South African inclusion. The research conducted by Walton et al., (2009) indicates that very few independent schools embark on educating students with vision concerns. The same publication reports that none of the responding schools employed or subcontracted teachers of the visually impaired. Vrederust Independent School is an interesting proposition that weds best of the two worlds, namely inclusive academic education with a residential post-curricular training. Students with visual impairments are not segregated in their educational adventure and have an opportunity to compete with non-disabled peers, at the same time having a home-like accommodation where they can learn and practice daily living skills as well as other skills essential for independent life. Discussions about inclusion have rendered a number of forms in which inclusive services are provided. Smelter, Rasch and Yudewitz (1994) have enumerated inclusion formats ranging from part time inclusion to full inclusion for all children with no special education teacher. We can derive from this that inclusion has many faces and it is debatable which is the most effective and just.

Those who manage inclusive education know that the task is neither easy nor cheap. It certainly is not enough to house students with disabilities with non-disabled peers in one classroom to call it inclusion (Sukhraj, 2006; Dyson, 2001; Engelbrecht, 1999). It does not even suffice to have adaptive equipment to boast real inclusion. Unless there are systemic changes that support this form of education, individual attempts are short of mission impossible.

At the time of writing the author has spent a year and a half at St. Bernard's Mission building and supporting a bold attempt to create and sustain the high school program with inclusive classes. At the time of my arrival the inclusive high school had been operating for a bit over a year. There were three grades with students with visual impairments. Grade 8 had eight of them, Grade 9 had three, while Grade 10 also had as many as eight. The numbers may not seem very impressive but if we consider that there was not a single teacher of the visually impaired on staff, we may understand the severity of the situation. Despite the immediate vicinity of neighboring school for the blind, there were no specialists trained in working with visually impaired students at hand. No member of the teaching staff at the Vrederust School knew Braille whether contracted or uncontracted. Students did not have learning material in an appropriate format. They did not have any devices either low or high tech to assist them in their learning.

Although a few teachers at Siloe School for the blind – a government institution on a private property – are familiar with contracted Braille, they do not have any other qualifications related to visual impairments. It is not the only special needs school that has limited human and financial resources. In fact it seems to be in forefront compared to many other special schools for the blind that do not even provide the most basic devices like Braillers. Despite discrete initiatives, like the donation of state-of-the-art assistive equipment to Filadelfia School for the Blind (HGR, 2010), majority of learners with visual impairments cannot hope for obtaining learning material in the appropriate format. A research study (Maguvhe, 2005) reports that even schools whose primary function is to educate students with visual impairments lacked both equipment and resources required to accommodate their charge in science classes. As the report further indicates, even less could be expected of mainstream schools that have students with visual impairments in their classrooms. What the author of the study also notices is that teachers still prefer a theoretical approach to learning based on lecturing and memorization. The same tendency is however present across the board not only in the aspect of teaching sciences to students with vision concerns.

Vrederust School had accumulated a variety of learning aids like posters, dictionaries, manipulatives, specialized equipment, and the like. Alas majority of support material was gathering dust stashed away in a storeroom. Students classified as blind had been trained in Braille and worked in this medium. They had been using Perkins Braillers for writing. The school had access to embossers and other devices to produce tactile learning material. The school was also happy to have a computer lab of about thirty computers. Even though it was not a complete setup for a successful inclusive program, some basics were in place. What was missing was qualified personnel that could make use of what was available. The embosser for example had not been used for four years before the author's arrival. As a consequence blind students were learning mainly through auditory channels. Because the Department of Education provides only selected tests and assessments in appropriate format, questions had to be dictated to the students before they could begin completing the assessments. The same scenario was employed to any tests or assessments done in school. To aggravate the situation, students with visual impairments share their classrooms together with nearly 40 other students. One of the recommendations for inclusive settings is a reduced number of students per class (Hunt & Goetz, 1997; O'Shea, 1999).

Teachers did not have anywhere to turn for help and at least some of them expressed their concerns about providing quality services to the students with visual impairments. The situation required immediate actions and virtually everything needed improvement. The list of tasks included training a staff member to be in charge of creating accessible format for students with visual impairments, devising an accessible format delivery system, instructing high school teachers in contracted English and Sepedi Braille, training high school teachers in how to handle students with visual impairments, providing in class support for the teachers and their VI students, diagnosing VI students' visual functioning and formulating recommendations, inventorying, organizing, and fixing existing assistive technology solutions, obtaining additional assistive technology for the school and dorm use, and training VI students in assistive software and hardware.

Since the above list contains essential and the most fundamental prerequisites for students with visual impairments to be successful in inclusion, it was nearly impossible to prioritize where to start. It was decided that the teachers will be in the focal point. The reason for this course of action was that students with visual impairments could not continue to be downplayed and left with improper educational means. As mentioned earlier the teachers in high school had no prior training, even the most basic one, in special education. As a matter of fact it turned out that at least half of them had received insufficient teacher training and they were not prepared to adjust their teaching to the new requirements of the Department of Education. Their teaching methods and techniques were based on outdated principles. The classes were very much teacher-centered with little or no active participation of the students. Many teachers were observed to lecture giving the students no opportunities for activities, discussions, questions, or even note taking. With under-trained staff to work with, it was particularly challenging to discuss the tenets of inclusive learning where individualized approach based on learning styles and differentiated instruction are key ingredients.

With that in mind, a series of professional development ongoing in-services needed to be designed. A comprehensive package of after-school classes was offered to bring the teaching staff up to speed in the latest methodologies and approaches to teaching and learning. Although it may appear that it does not have much to do with how to include students with visual impairments, in fact it was geared towards making the teachers aware of differences in individual students and how those differences affect their learning. The teaching methods training was to result in a more versatile approach to covering the learning material so that more students could benefit from their presence in school. As a matter of fact, good teaching involves a variety of hands-on, multi-sensory activities that include all the learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Besides, Soto and Goetz (1998) report that building efficacy in teaching helps teachers build more self-confidence and accept that their teaching skills may not be up-to-date. Throughout this particular training, the teachers were reminded that educators are life-long learners and as such they can never assume they know everything. With the evolution of education come new principles and methodologies that correspond with the changes. No one therefore should consider additional training as an implication of someone's incompetence but rather as a sign of never-ending progress. In order to catch up with the development of new and improved teaching techniques and strategies, teachers need to be offered opportunities. This is the reason those opportunities were created.

Concurrently, a group of teachers began a training session in contracted Braille. They had been teaching a number of students whose primary learning medium was Braille for over a year without knowing this

literary system. It was deemed necessary for the teachers to know Braille so that they could read and mark their students' work. Until then students after writing their assignments in Braille had to read them back to their teachers to be graded. The students even had to read their own tests back to the teachers. As turned out later, at least some of *the Braille students* had taken advantage of the fact that their teachers could not read Braille and misled their teachers to believe that they had done their homework. Moreover, the teachers were never able to correct their spelling, punctuation or syntax. Students knowing that no one could read their assignments had no extrinsic motivation for following all the grammatical rules. Capitalizing the first person singular pronoun *I* deemed unnecessary for some of the learners. They admitted that they saw no point in putting the dot six in front of an *i* as they were the only ones who actually read their assignments. The absence of a Braille reading teacher resulted also in a creative spelling devised by the learners. A combination of a shortage of reading material in Braille and a lack of personnel that would verify the use of contracted Braille made students conjure up their own orthography. Even though they had no difficulty with the most common words, students would come up with a unique spelling of new terms and vocabulary. Having limited access to text in Braille and no one to correct their writing, the learners were left in the dark with no references guiding their spelling.

In the USA for example, it is TVIs or teachers of the visually impaired who take a responsibility for transcribing assignments of students who work in Braille. Classroom teachers do not need to be concerned about how to read Braille. In this case such a solution would not be viable for two main reasons. First of all as of 2011, universities in South Africa did not offer programs in Visual Impairments, which results in lack of trained support staff. Having researched programs available at several major universities, I could not find a single course that would deal with students with visual impairments. One might wonder why universities steer clear from such programs, at the same time offering training for orientation and mobility instructors. It appears that complete and full-fledged support for K-12 students with visual impairments is nearly utterly neglected by major South African universities. Secondly, because of growing numbers of students who read and write in Braille, the school would have to eventually employ a minimum of two full time TVIs. The problem is – there are no TVIs in the country. Learning Braille and applying it can potentially be an additional burden on the teachers whose caseload is already overwhelming. It should be remembered that many of the classes they teach are composed of more than 45 students. Nonetheless, teachers who completed the Braille class were confident enough to check their students' work in Braille and claimed that the more they read, the faster and easier reading Braille was becoming.

Since all the teaching staff was attending the teaching methods class, training in how to accommodate students with visual impairments took a form of on the spot instructions during respective lessons. Teachers were asked to come with any questions and concerns to be helped with adapting the material and learning aids. Some visuals that would be difficult to convert into a tactile format needed to be replaced by models. Certain notions, like colors, had to be presented in an alternative form. The teachers were also learning how to structure the lesson to give all students time for note taking. Prior to the author's arrival VI students were denied the right to take notes during the class because their Braillers were making too much noise. The fact is that the Braille machines are noisy but it does not mean that VI students, called here Braille learners should not to be allowed to use them in class. It was suggested that teachers plan their classes to give VI students time and opportunities to note relevant information. Teachers were given two basic options: make note taking intermittent with other classroom activities or allot sufficient amount of time towards the end of the class for note-taking.
Although the solutions appear rather simple to implement, some teachers struggled with planning their lessons to incorporate note taking time. The author visited several classes during which the time for notes was to be given at the end of the lesson, however due to deficient teaching skills the teachers would not stick to what had been scheduled.

Another aspect of accommodating specific needs of VI students was the presentation of learning material. Per recommendations based on the functional vision assessment, the teachers were directed how to approach individual learners when presenting and modeling learning aids. The teachers were made aware of various vision conditions and the best ways of helping the students use their residual vision. Educators were informed about how particular students access textual information, whether or not images are accessible to the students, how much additional time they may need to complete homework assignments and assessments, and what type of assistive technology would be helpful.

Additionally students were receiving direct, though due to time restraints limited, classroom support from the author. That support was also to demonstrate to the teachers how to assist VI learners by

dictating what is written on the chalkboard, by explaining tactile images and graphs, by organizing material on the table. One of the major difficulties in facilitating VI students is the general number of learners in the class. Teachers are not used to considering their classes as a group of individual learners but rather as a mass. Such an approach is inadequate for students with special needs where each learner may require different forms of accommodations or modifications.

Several months of training and classroom support caused some teachers to improve their teaching skills and understand the basic principles of instructing and accommodating students with visual impairments. Despite overcrowded classes they attempted to work with those students on a more individual basis. They increased their awareness of how non-visual explanations facilitate better conceptualization and how access to information can improve their students' performance.

Yet another pressing issue was insufficient amount and inappropriate format of the learning material. Many of the VI students who had been selected to adopt Braille as their primary learning medium were not receiving text in this format on a regular basis. Some of the students with sufficient functional vision were forced to use regular textbooks with no magnification. Blind students had to rely on their classmates who read information, exercises and questions for them. Similarly all the tests and assessments had to be dictated to the students with visual impairments because they were not able to read them from the chalkboard.

The situation with the learning material needed to be changed immediately to reverse the deepening gap between the resources available for sighted students and to those with visual impairments. The school was not planning to purchase textbooks in Braille. Besides, very few titles were available in tactile format and the time needed to have a required book converted into Braille was prohibitive. The school had obtained a series of textbooks that came with the electronic version on CDs. The reason for this decision, rightfully so, was to use the embossers to produce Braille versions of those texts. In reality however some of the plans were not realized until nearly a year later. Because the school was in a possession of good quality printing equipment, it was determined that a person be trained to utilize the available resources. The training was two-fold. Firstly, a staff member was to be familiarized with software and hardware. Secondly, and more importantly, he was to receive some fundamental knowledge about the nature of tactile system, how it can and should be formatted so that the readers receive functional text. The embosser operator was simultaneously attending the Braille class.

The software and hardware training covered all the functionalities of the embosser and the main features of the conversion software. Because the facility houses two different embossers powered by different software, separate sessions were organized to cover all the essential details. Both of the systems have their advantages and disadvantages related to their functionalities. One of the embossers is Tiger Pro by ViewPlus whereas the other one is an aging ET by Enabling Technologies. The new staff was not initially familiar with Braille, which required additional supervision during the conversion process. He however was a savvy computer user and the technicalities related to digitizing and converting data did not pose any major problems. As he was learning Braille it was easier for him to understand the uniqueness of the system and he began to understand why print layout needs to be reformatted to be legible for blind readers. The system used in the printing center called CAMP for Center for Accessible Material Production allows embossing not only linear text but also text in charts, graphs, and tables. Although it is a very useful feature, the new staff had to be trained in how to reformat or redo the non-linear information to meet the needs of Braille readers. He soon showed a lot of thoughtfulness in adapting such data and devised his own ways of labeling pictorial representations.

With the changes in the classroom instruction and teachers' expectations, it was necessary to equip students with visual impairments with assistive devices. A functional vision diagnosis paired up with a learning media assessment provided data indispensable to determine the most effective literacy and learning modulation. Such evaluations aim at determining if and how effectively students can attend to different tasks visually, whether they can improve their performance through intervention, and eventually, what compensatory strategies would be the most pertinent (Lueck, 2004). The author chose to adapt the assessment included in Low Vision: A Resource Guide with Adaptations for Students with Visual Impairments by Nancy Levack (2001). The assessment was focused on students' ability to access school information. Students were to spot and identify objects from various distances, find and count simple shapes in high and low contrast images, pick up and describe verbally different items, and eventually read in Braille and/or print. That last task was to determine the most efficient reading medium.

Historically Braille was prescribed as a mandatory literacy medium without any attempt of learning media assessment or other forms of diagnosis. In some cases, the staff did not even have access to reliable medical report that would confirm students' eye conditions. In one extreme case, a student who eventually was diagnosed with hyperopia had been forced to read and write in Braille for 8 years. The only alternative to Braille was regular print not entirely accessible for many learners. It might appear that instruction in Braille should be commendable but as later observations and assessment proved, a number of Braille users had significant difficulty in reading this medium with their fingers. Instead they would read tactile writing just like print, with their eyes. Students with low vision were deprived of appropriate visual formats of learning material at the same time struggling immensely with limited offerings in Braille.

Having diagnosed the students' functional vision, the author advocated for replacing inefficient Braille with more appropriate large print format. Several students were resistant to the change fearing they would not be able to write at the same speed as on the Brailler. The fears turned out to be unsubstantiated and all those that switched to print and handwriting are coping with their school assignments with no major difficulties. As a matter of fact, students were apprehensive because they knew that teachers could read print and their poor spelling would be exposed. No formal test was administered but knowing that students had had scarce access to reading material they lacked exposure to correct written language in contracted Braille. The substandard spelling can result from various factors but researchers are in accord that there is a clear relationship between reading and writing, including spelling (Keegan, 1971; Moats, 2009; Deacon et al., 2012). Deacon et al. (2012) report that young readers' spelling abilities are acquired through their exposure to reading. Stephen Krashen (2002) opines that reading is crucial in the acquisition and mastery of spelling. It could be concluded then that the more school children read the better opportunities they have to master orthographic skills.
Additionally, several students who during the FVA were found to be inefficient Braille readers but whose eye condition prognosis was unstable were recommended to use large print as a means of intervention but practice Braille as a possible primary literary medium in the future. It was necessary to find a compromise that would let these students use efficient medium, simultaneously creating a systematic course of actions leading to the mastery of Braille.

In spite of efforts to provide learning material in the appropriate format, students sometimes needed to resort to using regular print books. Because of this and other reasons it was necessary to furnish their dormitories with magnifying tools in the form of optical magnifiers and CCTV systems. Blind students were also in need of modern assistive devices to be successful in their educational endeavors. In the ideal world, each of the students should be assessed and prescribed adaptive devices that match best their educational needs (Holton Todd, 1986; Presley & D'Andrea, 2009; Wiazowski, 2009). Special education in South Africa at K-12 levels has to however be realistic in its capacity and make do with what can be purchased rather than what every learner might require. Therefore the most flexible options and solutions had to be considered to make them shareable and useful for various groups of students.

Bearing those limitations in mind it was determined to initiate some steps in funding and purchasing equipment that would be functional and useful for different students. The school began with outfitting dormitories where students do their homework. It needs to be mentioned here that learners in both dorms, the girls' house and the boys' house, had a computer at their disposal. One of the machines was accessorized with magnifying/reading software called Dolphin Pen. It meant that one group at a minimum could read digitized information. Hard copies still had to be read with unequipped eyes. It turned out however that the school authorities hived away several Mouse Cameras that had never been installed. The kits consisted of a mouse camera, an adapter, a connector, power charger, RCA cable, software and a special graphics card. Although it appears rather complex, the actual setup does not require an engineering degree. Nonetheless, none of the mouse cameras were in use. Sadly enough, the boxes had been opened and several power charges were missing in action. One set was delegated to beef up a computer in one of the dorms to help students with low vision read minute print in their textbooks. Two other functioning sets found their home in the library where students would go for an hour a week to read. This camera does not have all the bells and whistles available in the latest magnifying systems but at least it makes the print letters big enough to be readable.

The faces of the students in the other dorm brightened up when the school procured a new CCTV with a few more features than the mouse cameras. Apart from it, a portable electronic magnifier, and two digital text reading devices were added to the shopping list. The last items mentioned above were to assist blind

students with note-taking. Students immediately found the tools expedient and valuable. They were anxious to interact with them not only for school purposes but also for entertainment.

The first milestones were set on the way to successful and workable learning environment for the students with visual impairments. Those with residual vision alas continued to struggle with accessing distance tasks in the classroom, especially with copying from the chalkboard. When the school was informed that one of the charity organizations, the Rotary Club was planning to donate a substantial amount of money for assistive technology, it was clear that a device with a flexible camera for both near and distance tasks should be obtained. The amount allowed for two Onyx CCTVs and one FarView Plus, a portable electronic magnifier with an option of taking snapshots that can subsequently be downloaded onto a computer for further use. The reaction to the Onyxes surpassed the author's wildest expectations. The students who were selected instantly learned the value of the CCTV system and benefits it brought to them. They stated that seeing what is written on the chalkboard made understanding the learning content easier. They also improved the quality of their school notes. Before they could only write down what was dictated or what they remembered when teachers were lecturing and writing on the chalkboard.

**Conclusion**

A 12 month training package resulted in several significant changes in the functioning of the school services and support system for students with visual impairments. New approach to teaching and classroom work were implemented, specialized equipment for students with visual impairments was installed in classrooms, accessible material was being provided on a regular basis. 90% of the teaching staff completed a contracted Braille course and are now able to mark their students' work. Students with visual impairments are receiving learning material in an appropriate format and understand their vision condition much better.

Although the foundation phase has brought a number of tangible improvements, the teachers, other staff, and their students will need to continue their efforts to make the changes sustainable. The ultimate concern is the lack of trained and qualified special education personnel that would serve as support for both students and staff. Since there are regulations that would enforce districts and schools to employ well qualified teachers who specialize in specific disabilities, the provision of such personnel seems at the discretion of individual entities. But even if a school wished to provide specialized services to their students with visual impairments they need to seek assistance overseas.

A need for well-trained specialist can also be illustrated by the following example. A mother of an 8-year-old daughter contacted the Siloe School for the Blind for assistance. Her daughter is a girl with visual impairment diagnosed with macular scars and nystagmus. The girl attended a mainstream private school in the nearby town. Because she was entitled for special education services she spent a portion of her school day with a special education teacher. The teacher claimed that the girl was not able to read or write due to her visual impairment and therefore she was not included in tasks related to literacy. The mother and the daughter were referred to the author who conducted a functional vision assessment and provided the parents and the school with recommendations. Several months later the author received the following personal communication from the mother: *Thank you so much for all your effort & help so far I appreciate it very much! [My daughter] has made a lot of progress thanks to the assessment & report you wrote, she is writing her letters & numbers that she never could have done & she is doing very good I can see that there is much better progress than in the past* (personal communication, October 2011).

It can be assumed that the teacher lacked sufficient preparation to diagnose and understand educational needs of this particular child. It appears though the teacher took the FVA's recommendations seriously, found a methodology to implement them into her curriculum, and subsequently was successful in her teaching. The specifics of what techniques and what particular strategies the teacher used are unknown to the author. Presumably the teacher had had relevant material but felt uncomfortable to use it with a visually impaired learner. The suggestions she received must have helped her in selecting, preparing, and incorporating accommodations that facilitated the girl's achievements.

Such on-site training, however successful, is only a patch that will provide a temporary relief to the ailing special education system. International observers remark that despite correct regulations that follow world-wide standards and quality, the implementation is virtually nonexistent due to *lack of resources and resistance from teachers, community and parents, together with the inertia of the existing system* (Rieser, 2008, p.31). Engelbrecht et al (2001) also noticed non-existence of specialized training required for effective inclusion of learners with disabilities. To reverse this disadvantageous situation an array of

obstacles needs to be overcome. The problems to tackle are lack of trained professionals, insufficient medical documentation, the misunderstanding of what inclusive education is among school administration and other staff, and insufficient support from local and provincial educational authorities Dube, 2009).

This article indicates two important points. First of all it shows how much can be done single-handedly to improve the learning environment for students with visual impairments. Yet, more importantly, it emphasizes the need for well-qualified and professionally prepared teachers of the visually impaired. It is clear that mere regulations do not cause any implementation of necessary reforms. Actions that follow effective and feasible legislature are required. The longer the bodies that govern education in South Africa keep the status quo, the more generations of youngsters with visual impairments are going to graduate with insufficient academic and functional skills.

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