



Promoting the Right to Education
for Children with Disabilities

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Defining the concepts

What is a barrier to learning?

A barrier to learning is anything that stands in the way of a child being able to learn effectively. A learner may experience one or more barriers to learning throughout his or her education. A child with a disability will experience that disability as an intrinsic barrier to learning and will require varying levels of support to accommodate their disability in order to reach their full academic potential. Barriers to learning are not limited to intrinsic barriers. They can also be societal/environmental barriers. For example extreme poverty, abuse or neglect will all act as barriers to a child's learning.

Collaboration is essential - but not optimal in South Africa right now

Systemic barriers to learning are barriers created by the education system itself. Most often in South Africa, children with disabilities bear the most severe consequences of an inadequate, under resourced education system.

Some of these Systemic barriers in a South African context which impact on children with disabilities include:

- Overcrowding in classrooms
- Inappropriate language of learning and teaching
- Long waiting lists at special schools
- Insufficient training of educators to manage diversity in their classrooms
- Lack of funds for assistive devices
- Lack of teaching assistants
- Long delays in assessment of learners
- No incentive in the form of weighting or increased subsidy for mainstream schools or ECD Centres who include children with disabilities.
- Inadequate facilities for children with disabilities in schools ie physical access for children in wheelchairs, teaching material in braille, etc.
- For Deaf children the barrier is access to a natural language. Educators of Deaf children need to be fluent in South African Sign Language (SASL). They should also be able to study SASL as a learning area.

Weighting explained: In Special Schools different disabilities carry a weighting so that for example a child with Autism carries a weighting of 6. If the ratio of educators to learners is 1:30 and the class had 1 autistic learner then the class size would be 24.

What this means for children with disabilities

The South African education policy stipulates that children with disabilities have the right to be given an opportunity to reach their full learning potential by being accommodated in the most appropriate education setting according to their level of support needs. The practical implementation of this right has failed to achieve the goal of affording children with disabilities a quality basic education.

The Department of Education acknowledges that 27 000 learners are incorrectly referred to special schools where they could be mainstream educated. This has placed an unnecessary burden on Special Schools and waiting lists are unacceptably long. The result is that children with high levels of support needs are not accessing the Special Schooling they need. The consequence of this is that the majority of these children remain out of school.

Inclusion is
what is called
for, exclusion
is too often
what happens -
children face
numerous barriers
to learning.



Promoting the Right to Education
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An education system that promotes the full participation and inclusion of children with disabilities maximizes their personal development and enables their ongoing participation and inclusion in society.

In order to be placed at a Special School learners are required to be assessed by an educational psychologist. Waiting lists for children to be assessed are inordinately long. Whilst awaiting assessment or placement in a special school these learners are most often not receiving proper support in their current education setting. This is unacceptable and the entire system of assessment for placement needs to be addressed.

In addition children that should be mainstreamed and who would benefit from inclusion in their local neighbourhood school are either in special schools, on waiting lists or not receiving quality education at school due to the educator being inadequately trained to adapt his/her teaching to meet the needs of the learner.

Mainstream schools that do accommodate learners with disabilities do not benefit from the weighting system which applies in special schools. So Educators in mainstream classes that are already overcrowded may have the additional responsibility of providing extra support to a learner with disabilities without the benefit of fewer other learners in her class.

In Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres, the Department of Social Development gives one standard subsidy rate per child per day and also makes no provision for an increased subsidy for centres which include learners with disabilities. As a result mainstream schools and ECD Centres do not have any additional funds or resources to be able to give appropriate support to children with disabilities.

An overall lack of resources means that there is not adequate provision of classroom assistants, assistive devices, wheelchair accessibility and other means to provide quality education to children with disabilities.

Suggestions / Recommendations

- A review of the weighting policy by the Department of Education. This has financial repercussions for the Department as it may result in the need for additional posts.
- A review of the allocation of subsidies by the Department of Social Development for inclusive ECD Centres.
- A serious commitment at District level to shifting from assessment for placement to multi-disciplinary assessment and support at the school where the learner is currently placed.
- Improved training of Educators so that they are better equipped to include learners with disabilities in their classes.
- A review of assessment policies for admission to Special Schools.
- Embracing the concept of Universal design.

Additional Resources

1. www.include.org.za
2. Education white Paper 6
3. www.thutong.doe.gov.za