



# INCLUDING A LEARNER with Cerebral Palsy (CP) in a mainstream setting

## 1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa's Inclusive Education policy is built on the belief that all children can learn and benefit from learning together at their local school. Schools that take a supportive approach to teaching and learning make this inclusive learning experience possible.

## 2 WHAT IS CEREBRAL PALSY?

Cerebral Palsy is the name given to a group of conditions that affect movement, posture, coordination and cognitive ability in various ways. It occurs as a result of damage to the brain, or part of the brain, that happens before, during or shortly after birth. Its effect can be as mild as just a weakness in one hand, ranging to an almost complete lack of movement.

## 3 HOW DOES CEREBRAL PALSY IMPACT LEARNING?

Children with CP have the same need to learn as all other children. They are first and foremost learners who are learning and growing and have a right to acceptance and understanding. Some learners with CP are able to manage a mainstream learning programme with the right support. Depending on the extent and type of CP, learning will be impacted in some of the following ways:

- speech may be impaired, and that affects interactivity in the classroom
- level of cognitive ability, which will determine functional level
- uncontrolled movements, which could limit mobility and seating options
- seizures, which break the flow of concentration.

## 4 TEACHING AND SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Teaching and support strategies for children with cerebral palsy will be wide-ranging depending on the degree to which cerebral palsy has impacted the child's learning. Below is a list of many such strategies which should be selected based on each learners' specific learning needs.

- **Give clear, brief directions.** Give written or visual directions as well as oral ones. Allow extra time for oral responses.
- **Use different teaching styles** to appeal to diverse learner interests and strengths. This will help to optimise learning.
- **Good seating and positioning** in the classroom to facilitate balance, hand-eye coordination and improve motor control.
- Some learners with CP might find it uncomfortable to sit in a desk. Give the opportunity to try out different positions, like sitting on the floor or at a table. Remember that students with CP need to change positions often to prevent muscle tension and pain.

- **Identify the real** learning needs of the learner with CP, so that you do not become stuck on the condition! The barrier is most likely to be inaccessible learning material.
- **Adjust the time for completion of tasks** as learners with CP may lose focus and tire more easily. Break tasks and assignments into short, easy-to-manage steps. Provide each step separately and give feedback along the way.
- **Provide clear expectations, consistency, structure and routine for the entire class.** Rules should be specific, direct, written down and applied consistently.
- **Provide alternatives to writing.** If handwriting is difficult for the learner, reduce expectations for copying, provide extra time for written work and explore the use of a computer and writing software.
- **Facilitate communication needs** by using more visual strategies when speech is affected.
- **Encourage peer learning** by introducing activities which build social interaction and confidence.
- **Use different formats of assessment** so that the learner with CP will be able to clearly demonstrate learning.
- **Include ALL learners in classroom activities** so that the CP learner can easily and naturally participate. For example, use multiple choice or true/false questions to reduce the amount of writing required.
- **Make sure that learners with CP can also participate in physical sports** – here advice from the physical therapist and the occupational therapist will help.
- **Develop a welcoming, respectful and non-discriminatory classroom environment** where the teacher takes the responsibility for building an inclusive classroom ethic and discourages any teasing.
- **Praise and acknowledge success** which will build confidence and enthusiasm, but bear in mind that all learners need this – the learner with CP does not need to be singled out.
- **Encourage independence in life skills and task completion for all learners** – avoid making exceptions for the learner with CP.
- **Regular therapy** to modify and correct movement challenges may be necessary.

Many of these are simply effective classroom management and teaching strategies which will benefit not only the learner with CP, but ALL learners in the class.



*Inclusion requires the teacher to believe that all students have something important to offer in the classroom and that we really are better off learning together.*

Beth Foraker



*Teaching is all about providing options and opportunities to our learners so they can experience learning in ways that have meaning to them.*

Loui Lord Nelson

## Tips

- ▶ Meet with the parents. No one knows your learner better than they do. They can help with what techniques work at home and can be one of your greatest resources if you reach out to them.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### CONTACT

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For more information about the *Teaching and Learning for Inclusive Education* project: [vovb.be/southafrica](http://vovb.be/southafrica)

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