

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

*“We must not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we began and know the place for the first time”*

- TS Elliot -

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The entire context of South African education is undergoing a slow, yet definite metamorphosis, and inclusion is now nationally both a constitutional imperative and an unequivocal reality. Teachers are the key role-players in determining the quality of implementation of this new policy. They are expected to embrace the new philosophy, to think and to work in a new frame of reference.

Unfortunately, too often change in education has failed because insufficient attention has been paid to the needs of those who are expected to put the change into effect (Wearmouth et al., 2000 in Hay et al., 2001:214). The question must be asked whether teachers are prepared and ready for inclusive education. The following statement is relevant when trying to answer this question: “Change is difficult to realize in schools and classrooms because it requires simultaneous development of reforms in professional development, curriculum, and student support services along with a change in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs as reflected in the culture of the school” (Weiner, 2003:13).

Against this background it was the aim of this study to determine the demands placed on the teachers of children with hearing loss in inclusive education in South Africa.

**Within this broader aim, the specific aim of this chapter is to discuss the conclusions drawn from the theoretical and empirical study as described in the previous chapters and to make recommendations that have practical implications for addressing the challenges faced by the teachers of children with hearing loss in inclusive education in South Africa**

A critical evaluation of this study is provided and appropriate recommendations are offered regarding further research possibilities related to the study

## **6.2 CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.2.1 Conclusions based on the results of the empirical study**

The results obtained from this study suggest several important conclusions.

**Firstly** it was apparent from the findings that the teachers in regular education as well as the student teachers had sufficient knowledge about the theoretical aspects of inclusion but they lack knowledge regarding the child with a hearing loss. Aspects that were significantly related to the teachers' lack of knowledge was their unwillingness to include a child with hearing loss and to a lesser extent their years of teaching experience.

**Secondly** it was clear that both the teachers and student teachers appear to have negative attitudes towards the inclusion of the child with a hearing loss. The negative attitudes of the teachers were, as in the case of knowledge, significantly related to their unwillingness to include a child with a hearing loss and their years of teaching experience, but also their personal experience with hearing loss. An aspect that was significantly related to the student teachers' negative attitudes was their personal experience with hearing loss. The results further indicated trends of positive relationships between the teachers' attitudes and knowledge.

**Thirdly** the teachers' and student teachers' indicated specific needs in terms of further training and the content of training. These training needs can be seen in relation to their lack of knowledge regarding the child with a hearing loss and as a

result of their negative attitudes.

These specific results regarding the teachers' and student teachers' knowledge and attitudes imply that the inclusion of the child with a hearing loss will not necessarily be a successful process. Most importantly of all, it must be realised that the teachers themselves are facing specific challenges: inclusive education assumes that the teachers will be able to accommodate the specific learning needs of each child by adapting the learning environment and the curriculum. If their negative attitudes, lack of knowledge and need for further training are not addressed, they will probably not be able to handle these challenges.

### **6.2.2 Challenges posed to the teacher of the child with a hearing loss**

- **Child-related challenges**

Although the primary effect of a hearing loss is an inability to hear some or all of conversational speech, its impact on communication development (see Fig. 2.3) dramatically alters social and academic skill acquisition (Brackett, 1997:355). It is important that the teachers realise that communication is not an isolated (sensory) skill but that it involves the entire child, including expressive and receptive language systems, speech production and higher-level linguistic skills of reading and writing.

An effective inclusive program therefore requires that the teacher to recognise communication as the core of the program. The challenge is to address all the above-mentioned areas in the classroom, combining social /interactive communication with academic communication (Brackett, 1990 in Berry, 1992:29). A communication-based program (Siegel, 2000:64) would include aspects such as:

- Avoid focussing on specific skill development as this often does little to assist the child in daily communication. Focussing on specific skill development is often so detached from meaningful contexts that the child with a hearing loss never learns the power of communication or its value.
- Provide appropriate communication access, by providing a "language-rich

environment” and communication with hearing peers.

- Provide appropriate assessment of the child’s communication language, mode and skill development.
- Support communication development by assisting the child in developing age-level language skills.

The current study demonstrates that teachers often have limited knowledge of such aspects as the child with a hearing loss and the management of this child in the classroom. It can be assumed that the teachers also need to develop knowledge and skills concerning communication and other related aspects as indicated above.

- **Teacher related challenges**

The responsibility for the reshaping of education resulting in the successful implementation of inclusive practices is placed squarely on the shoulders of teachers. “...It is through the mediation and action of teacher voice that the very nature of the schooling process is often either sustained or challenged” (Giroux, 1990 in Lloyd, 2000:147).

Regarding the child with a hearing loss it is clear that the teachers has become the primary catalyst in ensuring effective communication development in the educational situation. The results of the current study indicate that teachers are not yet ready to achieve this status. The beliefs that teachers have about teaching children with hearing loss and beliefs about their roles and responsibilities in meeting the needs of these children may impair the progress of inclusive schooling. Most teachers are neither trained, nor knowledgeable about hearing loss and the educational needs of this population. Above all they find it threatening to have to change their proven teaching methods to accommodate the child with a hearing loss. However, all responses were not necessarily negative. This study also found that most of the teachers indicated that they were willing to learn more about the inclusive education of the child with a hearing loss

- **Environment related challenges**

Various factors in the inclusive environment are critically linked to communication and must be manipulated for positive impact. Several challenges may face teachers in the teaching environment. They may be required to do the following:

- To maximise the auditory environment in order to keep the noise levels low and prevent reverberation as an ideal acoustics environment is not typically found in most classroom situations. This would include aspects such as using materials in the classroom that can absorb sounds, like fabrics (for curtains), carpets, window shades and cork (Berry, 1992:31).
- To monitor lighting in the classroom as there is an obvious correlation between lighting and effective communication.
- To adapt the child's seating according to class format and activity as the importance of preferential seating and its effect on successful communication cannot be underestimated.
- To be comfortable and confident in using, monitoring and troubleshooting amplification systems.
- To present the curriculum in forms and at levels to meet the abilities of the child.
- To use teaching strategies and modifications that improve communication in the classroom such as repetition, rephrasing etc.

The current study found that many of the teachers had little knowledge of the above-mentioned aspects or that the possible manipulation of these aspects will influence their attitude negatively against the inclusion of a child with a hearing loss. Furthermore they also indicated that they lacked the infrastructure of knowledgeable personnel (audiologists) who can assist them in facing these challenges.

Apart from these 'general' challenges posed to the teacher, the unique South African

context presents 'specific' challenges to the teacher. This was specifically indicated in the qualitative analysis of the study. Teachers feel unprepared and unequipped to teach in the inclusive setting due to lack of time, lack of facilities, too high teacher/child ratio, too much pressure on the teachers, lack of adequate support and lack of training. They cannot keep up with the radical changes in the education system that has transformed their working environment. They are not yet acquainted with the principle of outcomes-based education and struggle to involve parents in the learning process. As a result they can feel inadequate and unprepared for the challenge of including the child with a hearing loss. (Prinsloo, 2001:345).

Regardless of these challenges it is important to realize that inclusive education *can* be an appropriate academic option for children with hearing loss in South Africa. However, the success of including children with hearing loss will depend on the extent to which these challenges are addressed. This implies that the *system* is also facing some challenges.

### **6.2.3 Challenges posed to the system**

To meet the challenge of ensuring that education is both excellent and equitable, one barrier to learning to be removed is the notion that inclusive education can be provided within the current educational system with minor changes (Lloyd, 2000:145). The reason for this is the fact that the implementation of an inclusive philosophy involves radical changes in the whole system (discussed in Chapter 2), including the roles and responsibilities of the teachers. In addition to the move towards inclusive education there have been other major educational changes in South Africa over the past years. Teachers' concerns are frequently linked to their changing roles determined by the introduction of new educational philosophies, policies and practices (Forlin, 1998:87)

In the overview of the draft guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education (Department of Education, 2002:61) it is clear that the concerns of the teachers – and the concerns based on the results of this study - are acknowledged:

“When educators are asked to change their ways of thinking, working and

reflecting on their environment, they may tend to feel inadequate, insecure or frustrated. They may feel the need for training, information and support. One of the crucial steps towards developing full-service schools is to plan for on-going in-service training, accompanied by a regular assessment of the types and content of capacity building necessary”

In the same vein, the Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education: Full Service Schools (Department of Education: 2003b: 34) state the following:

“All educators can teach all learners. Although some learners need additional support, there is no special pedagogy, which is different from good pedagogy for any learner. **However, all educators will need new skills in curriculum differentiation, curriculum assessment, assessment of potential, collaborative teaching and learning, collaborative planning and sharing, reflection on good practices and co-operation**”<sup>1</sup>

It has been suggested that the district support teams are in the key position to provide the training and support for full-service schools:

“The main focus of the district-based support teams would be to provide *indirect* support to learners through supporting educators and school management, with a particular focus on curriculum and institutional development, to ensure that teaching and learning framework and environment is responsive to the full range of learning needs. This indirect support role is often referred to as consultancy” (Department of Education, 2003a: 24),

Such an approach, including collaboration, would recognize the teachers as full partners with professionals, parents and others and will consequently help teachers in becoming more involved and efficacious in implementing effective inclusive practices in their classes. However, the important role of appropriate training must not be underestimated.

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<sup>1</sup> Author’s own emphasis, as this statement regarding the teachers’ needs for further training, was confirmed by the results of the current study.

#### 6.2.4 Addressing the challenges

It is not enough to identify the challenges teachers will have to face when including a child with a hearing loss in the regular classroom. The challenges should be addressed. In this case conclusions from the empirical study can now be made relevant by drawing answers from the relevant literature:

“Hearing-impaired children like their hearing peers begin life with the potential for achieving academic and social maturity. However, a hearing impairment imposes an invisible filter that impacts an individual’s verbal language development and in turn their reading and writing skills. Consequently, hearing-impaired students, as a result of their hearing loss, present unique obstacles to learning that require special techniques and strategies in order to achieve academic skills commensurate with their innate abilities” (Luckner, 1991:302)

In order to fully address the challenge posed to the teachers of children with hearing loss it is important that firstly, the system must begin with an understanding of the role of communication. It must be realised that failed communication leads to failed education and failed education leads to a failed adulthood (Siegel, 2000:67).

Furthermore, the inclusive approach should be based on an understanding of the complex nature of the unique barriers to learning experienced by children with hearing loss and of the many variables that must interact if the challenges are to be addressed.

Indispensable to this process is the identification of the unique barriers to learning presented to the child with a hearing loss, such as:

- Barriers in the child himself /herself (for example additional aspects that could influence the child’s ability to learn such as auditory processing problems).
- Aspects regarding the teacher’s knowledge, attitudes and skills in the class.
- Aspects in the environment such as unfavourable acoustic environments.



The identification of these unique barriers could serve as a basis for developing a system that responds to these challenges. Once the problems have been identified, strategies that address each aspect of each problem can be developed, and the people with the relevant skills and knowledge can be brought in to support the teachers in addressing the challenge.

In terms of the child with the hearing loss solutions to challenges posed to the system would include aspects such as:

- Supporting the teachers to create an environment conducive to learning for the child with a hearing loss (as discussed in paragraph 6.2.2).
- Providing appropriate pre-service and in-service training, as it is quite clear that pre- and in-service training to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching children with hearing loss are warranted. These training programs need to consider conditions that will affect the success or failure of the approach of inclusive education so that barriers to implementation of new strategies and ideals can be overcome. Apart from the traditional approaches to training, the teachers should be guided and supported in trying new teaching strategies and seeing positive outcomes: for example, these teachers may need to see other successful teachers working in inclusive environments, managing the classroom to meet the needs of the child with a hearing loss. Strategies to assist teachers in communicating with the child and in developing or modifying the curriculum will lead to realistic expectations, improved attitudes and appropriate classroom demands (Amon, 1988 in Berry, 1992:31).
- **Providing resource materials**

Teachers need adequate curriculum materials and other classroom equipment appropriate to the needs of the child with a hearing loss.

- **Adapting the size of the classes**

According to Schruggs & Mastropieri (1996:12) teachers agree that their class size should be reduced, to fewer than 20 learners if a learner with specific educational needs is to be included. However, in a developing country, characterised by limited financial resources, such a suggestion might be a plea in the wind.

- **Providing support services**

Providing direct support by educational audiologists to the teachers and the learner in the inclusive setting through effective consultation and collaboration.

In a nutshell, a new educational *communication-driven paradigm* is required to serve children with hearing loss effectively in inclusive education in South Africa. Teachers are challenged to recognise that communication assessment, development and access are central to an effective educational delivery system for these children.

### **6.3 CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE STUDY**

A critical evaluation of the study is necessary to justify the conclusions and gain perspectives regarding the implication of the empirical data obtained. The appraisal should reflect both the positive and negative aspects of the study.

The main criticism to be brought in against this study is that the data was collected from teachers, student teachers, parents and speech therapists /audiologists who are from a restricted geographic region. Their responses may not be representative of a similar sample from other regions, especially the rural areas in South Africa. However, the data revealed certain tendencies regarding the challenge posed to teachers in an inclusive setting.

From a methodological perspective this study emphasises the importance of combining two research methods (questionnaires and focus group discussions) in order to obtain strong evidence-based data about the challenges facing teachers.

The significance of this study is that it is the first study of its kind in South Africa focusing on the demands placed on the teachers of a specific population namely children with hearing loss. This study provides baseline information regarding the challenges that have to be addressed in order to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education of children with hearing loss. Based on this study, recommendations for addressing these challenges could be proposed.

This study also indirectly emphasizes the critical role of the educational audiologist within the educational system. Educational audiologists possess unique knowledge and skills regarding the child with a hearing loss and are also uniquely equipped through their training to support teachers, thus being in the prime position to bridge the gap between the sciences of audiology and education. The roles and responsibilities of educational audiologists in the total management of children with hearing loss are quite comprehensive. They are in the unique situation of providing direct support to both the child and the teacher within the inclusive setting. This support should not only consist of assessment of the child and management of amplification, but should include consultation and collaboration with the teachers in order to support them as they address the needs of the child with a hearing loss:

“Unfortunately, administrators and others in the schools are often not aware of the broad scope of practice for educational audiologists, and educational audiology services are frequently not available or are under-utilized” (DeConde Johnson, Benson & Seaton, 1997:25).

Although the changes required in the system are not easy to accomplish, the challenge is to enhance audiology services in schools in South Africa in order to ensure comprehensive services to all children with hearing loss in this unique context:

“The field of educational audiology, ...is predicated on the search of increasingly effective strategies to support the academic and social success of learners with hearing impairment. To settle for less than the best is to shortchange learners with hearing impairment and to leave the challenge of the field unmet” (English, 1995:220).

## 6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is important to realize that the current study was undertaken in the early years of implementing inclusive education in South Africa. Further changes in policies and practical implementation of the inclusive philosophy may change the scope of research in this regard. Based on the results of the empirical study the following recommendations for further research are made:

- Expansion of the current research theme to other parts of the country, especially the rural areas. Research in this regard would shed light on the possibility of including the child with a hearing loss in classrooms in these areas.
- An investigation into the success of current inclusive practices already provided to children with hearing loss in inclusive settings in South Africa.
- Research in order to determine if the goals of teacher training (pre-service and in-service) in order to ensure adequate provision for children with hearing loss are currently being met.
- Research regarding the specific accommodations and modification necessary to accommodate the child with a hearing loss within inclusive education in South Africa.
- Research regarding the challenges posed to the educational audiologist in the changing educational system in South Africa.

## 6.5 CONCLUSION

“The ultimate goal for educators, schools and other education institutions, and for those who support them, is the development of learners. Their development is dependent on effective teaching, which, in turn, is dependent on the development of effective curricula and supportive teaching and learning environments” (Department

of Education, 2003a: 10)

However, the development of an inclusive system requires more than the simple notion of all children being educated within the regular classroom. The single most significant common factor for all children with hearing loss is the importance of communication – an effective communication driven system will support the teachers in accepting the challenge of teaching these children and will meet the needs of children with hearing loss. Teachers do not only require pre-service and ongoing, supportive in-service training, but also need to be emotionally enabled in order for the necessary paradigm shift to occur (Swart et al., 2002:187).

In conclusion, the following statement made a decade ago still holds true:

*Children who are deaf or hard of hearing have the right to enter school ready to learn, to be able to graduate from high school on grade level, and, wherever possible, to continue their education at a college, university, or other postsecondary program of their choice. In order to realize this vision we need to accept the challenges to tear down our own walls, to accept and celebrate diversity, and to work together to develop and implement effective educational programs which will lead us, successfully, into the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Christensen & Luckner, 1995:30)*