

# Resilience in the continuum of support, juxtaposing inclusive education and special education systems

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## Abstract

This article reports on the trajectory of educational support within the inclusive and special education system. Reviewed literature on the trajectory of inclusive education confirms that inclusive education is envisaged as a vehicle to achieve and access quality education for all. The 1994 World Conference in Salamanca, Spain, representing international governments from 92 countries and education ministries, endorsed inclusive education as a philosophy for implementing education for all and promulgated for inclusive primary education. Conversely, since the 1930s, with the adoption of the specialised education system in America, education for all was realised. South Africa implemented an inclusive education policy in 2001 and one of the objectives is to strengthen special school access for all children. The 2013 education statistics evaluating access to education indicate a significant milestone and increase (99,3%) in achieving EFA in primary school attendance (7-13 years). The purpose of this article is to compare and contrast using Lévi-Strauss's model of binary oppositional relationships the dichotomous and oppositions in the phenomena of inclusive mainstream and special education school systems. This article found firstly that the inclusive education system is made of binary oppositional relationships between inclusive mainstream and special education school systems; secondly that both school systems provide a continuum of education support and contribute towards achieving EFA; thirdly that the presumed binary oppositional relationship between the two education systems is contrary to an inclusive education policy; and finally that progress with the implementation of an inclusive education system in South Africa is slow in strengthening inclusive mainstream schools and less focused on strengthening the well-established and flourishing special education system.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, special school, mainstream school, psycho-medical model, support, continuum of support, binary oppositional relationship

## Introduction

The right to education is a necessity and a fundamental human right. An inclusive education system seems to be the vehicle suitable for achieving education for all (EFA). The specific objective of inclusive education is to promote access to quality education for all learners. Governments and education ministries across the world have committed themselves to the philosophy of inclusive education (UNESCO 1994; 2005).

Inclusive education (IE) in hindsight is a democratic philosophy in the schooling system. However, this philosophy has proved difficult to implement across the school systems around the world. This article seeks to interpret and clarify the obstacles and factors that impede the successful implementation of inclusive education in the South African education system.

The trajectory of IE emerged with the initial world conference, titled Education for All (EFA), in Jomtien, Thailand (5-9 March 1990) (Haggis 1991) and the international Special Needs Education Conference in Salamanca, Spain (7-10 June 1994).

In July 2001, the South African Department of Education published a White Paper policy document that focused on special needs education and building an inclusive education and training system (DoE 2001). National inclusive education implementation strategies outlined in this White Paper include a commitment to systemically addressing and removing barriers to learning by converting special schools into resource centres, training education managers and teachers, establishing full-service schools, pursuing a funding strategy and developing institutional and district support structures (DoE 2001). This is against the background that, with the dawn of democracy in 1994, the South African government inherited an unequal (poorly resourced black schools) and a racially polarised education system from the apartheid government. New democratic policies were enacted to redress and provide access to quality and compulsory primary school education for all (DoE 2003). The South African Schools Act (SASA), No. 84 of 1996, acknowledges the role of the government in providing 'an education of progressively high quality for all learners' (DoE 1996).

Quality education enables countries to acquire a global competitive edge and impetus for economic growth and sustainability. Bennell & Furlong (1998: 45) assert that access and exposure to good-quality education enables a country to compete successfully in a globalised world economy and to gain high and sustainable rates of economic growth. In addressing quality education for all, the education department enacted pro-poor funding policies to resource poor schools (DoE 2003), promoted quality education approaches (full participation of all learners) in the classroom (DoE 2001, 2003; UNESCO 2005) and employed qualified teachers (DoE 2003).

UNESCO (2005: 13) defines inclusion as 'a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education'. Inclusive education is a process signified by a continuum of support provided within inclusive

school systems (mainstream and special schools). The definition above aims to address the broad goals of education, which are learning and development (individual, social and national). However, when an inclusive education system is seen narrowly and reduced to represent mainstream inclusive schools only (in exclusion of the special schools system), then a dichotomous and binary oppositional relationship between the two education systems is introduced and created.

An anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955), contends that opposition represents dilemmas of human existence. Lévi-Strauss's theoretical model of binary oppositions representing 'contrastive oppositional relations among phenomena' (Mandelbaum 1987:32) is key to understanding the binary oppositions between the phenomena of mainstream and special school education systems. IE promotes the 'continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school' (UNESCO 1994: 11) where placement into special schools is not a preferred model. Similarly, Peters (2004) believes in the significance of context in the construct of inclusive education, with a continuum of service provision (support) within a regular school context. The above definition by UNESCO (1994) clearly introduces the binary oppositional relationships between mainstream inclusive schools and special education schools based on context and the continuum of support. These continuums of support are context-specific, with the 'continuum of service' (within the inclusive mainstream schools) versus a 'continuum of placement' (found within the special schools). UNESCO's (1994) definition fails to acknowledge the significant role the continuum of placement plays in providing access to quality education for learners with severe learning disabilities. In my view, this is a contentious issue within the inclusive education research area. This is confirmed by the view of Ainscow & Miles (2008: 20) that the definition of IE is riddled with 'uncertainties, disputes and contradictions'. Again, Moberg & Savolainen (2003) mention the fluidity of the concept, strengthened by the one core dimension of social justice.

On a positive note, Education White Paper 6 on special needs education (DoE 2001: 3) confirmed and clarified the distinctive and significant role of special schools within the South African inclusive education system while committing to strengthening them and improving their quality. Special schools will be strengthened and incrementally primary schools will be converted into resource centres to support mainstream schools (DoE 2001). Significantly, special schools are part of an inclusive education system and through their specialised personnel have a specific supportive role to play in improving the quality of education for learners with severe learning disabilities (special schools turned into resource centres) (DoE 2001: 3) and achieving EFA. In essence, the implementation of inclusive education does not mean the abolition of special schools (DoE 2001). This statement confirms that inclusive education is about a mutual collaborative relationship on the continuum of educational support within the education system without binary oppositions. A special school system is significant to the success of inclusive education in South Africa.

Since the implementation of inclusive education in 2001, a review of the process of incrementally strengthening special education and ensuring access to education for learners with serious disabilities has not been undertaken. Thus, this study aims to investigate the implementation of IE using literature review and South African education statistics. These serious disabilities include visual (blind, severe visual limitations), hearing (deaf, hard of hearing), communication (speech impairments), physical (wheelchair, crutches, prosthesis), emotional (behaviour, psychological), intellectual (mental deficits – mild, severe, moderate) and multiple (combination of two or more) disabilities (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF 2012). In 2001, education statistics showed that upon the implementation of IE only 22% (79 589) of school-age children (5-17 years) from the population of 364 797 learners with severe learning disabilities (DSD et al. 2012) were in special schools (DoE 2001). Based on a lack of access to quality education, the decision to strengthen special schools was highly significant for learners with severe learning disabilities within the South African education system and an inclusive education system is core to ensuring quality EFA.

### **Constraints on the implementation of inclusive education**

Since the promulgation of education for all at the Jomtein conference and the Special Needs Education Conference in Salamanca, literature attests that IE is a difficult philosophy to implement in the schools system throughout the world. The philosophy of inclusive education argues for quality, just and equal education systems for all learners. In essence, an inclusive approach to education strives to promote quality education in the classroom (UNESCO 2005).

Internationally and nationally, many challenges exist in the implementation of inclusive education, such as the pedagogy of teacher training (Amr 2011; Johnstone & Chapman 2009; Florian 2008; Wu-Tien 2007), the structure of the education system (Ainscow & César 2006), access to educational resources and policy-making and its implementation (Acedo 2008; Donohue & Bornman 2014). These challenges cut across multiple ecologies of the education system. The critical argument informed by the above challenges is: How can inclusive education implementation constraints be addressed to improve quality education for all?

A study by Eloff & Kgwete (2007) concluded that key constraints to the successful implementation of IE included teachers' lack of formal training on inclusive education. In-service teachers could not rely on their pre-service teacher training, because it had not equipped them with pedagogy to teach learners with learning disabilities. Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff & Pettifer (2002) found that teacher training and support and the availability of resources in the education system are key enablers to the successful implementation of IE. This is also corroborated by Eloff & Kgwete (2007), who confirmed that insufficient teaching and learning resources and poor understanding of policy (inclusive education was equated with learning disabilities and insufficient

resources) impede implementation of IE. Similarly, Donohue & Bornman (2014) found that resources, adequate training of teachers, sufficient support and a positive attitude on the part of teachers are important for successful implementation of IE.

South African studies attest to the lack of specialised training for working with learners with serious disabilities during pre-service teacher training; thus pre-service teacher training is not geared for IE school systems, especially for learners with severe learning disabilities who cannot be accommodated in inclusive mainstream schools without the support of an education specialist.

Johnstone & Chapman's (2009) study on the implementation constraints of IE in Lesotho found that teachers' lack of knowledge and skills and their attitude towards students with a disability are a barrier to the successful implementation of IE in mainstream schools. Another study by Chhabra, Srivastava & Srivastava (2010: 221) on inclusive education in Botswana found that mainstream teachers felt their training did not prepare them to teach learners with severe disabilities and displayed 'frustration, anger, and negative attitudes toward inclusive education because they believe that it could lead to lower academic standards.' The above Lesotho and Botswana examples attest to binary oppositions within the IE system, where solely inclusive mainstream schools are viewed as representative of the IE system, with special schools being excluded. The two mutually significant IE school systems (mainstream and special school) are contrasted with each other (either a or b), assuming a relationship of conflict, where one school system is elevated and the other is denigrated (Lapp & Carr 2006: 143).

The study by Watson (2009) that analysed barriers to inclusive education in Ireland confirms that most teachers do not have the capacity to meet the needs of most special needs students and, because special education requires specialisation training, it makes such services exclusionary. Accordingly, barriers to the implementation of inclusive education can be laid solely at the door of the policy-makers, who fail to implement universal training or policy and address the lack of training modules on special education for all pre-service teachers (Watson 2009). This is supported by the South African study by Donohue & Bornman (2014), who critically reviewed White Paper 6: Special Needs Education Policy on inclusive education and concluded that two main constraints underlie the lack of successful implementation of the IE policy: the vague and ambiguously stated goals of the policy, which make it difficult to implement, and the DoE's lack of policy enforcement strategies (Donohue & Bornman 2014).

### **Enablers to the implementation of inclusive education**

Teachers are significant for policy implementation. Fullan (1993) emphasises that teachers are moral agents for change and proper training is essential to equip them to be proper change agents. A pre-service teacher training programme is expected to

empower teachers to implement educational policies and effect change in the lives of students, parents and the communities they serve. However, change is a process and continuous, which calls for continuous development and training of teachers (Harland & Kinder 1997), as in any profession. Fullan (1993) views teaching as a moral profession, which is significant in infusing change in the education system: '...schools are expected to engage in continuous renewal, and change expectations are constantly swirling around them. On the other hand, the way teachers are trained, the way schools are organised, the way the educational hierarchy operates, and the way political decision makers treat educators results in a system that is more likely to retain the status quo' (Fullan 1993: 3). It is essential that a teacher training curriculum should include IE pedagogy and methodologies to equip pre-service teachers with skills to implement policy during their in-service years.

Another study by Moberg & Savolainen (2003) found that the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education varies based on training and specialisation. Specialist teachers were more positive towards inclusive education than ordinary mainstream teachers; this is attributed to their training. Similarly, Rose et al. (2010) in their review of literature on inclusive and special education in Ireland suggest that teachers' professional training and skills (differentiated learning) and access to resources (e.g. special needs assistance) are essential to inclusive education. The studies above show that the whole education system (mainstream and special school) is key to the success of IE.

An intervention study by Engelbrecht, Oswald & Forlin (2006a, 2006b) helped three Western Cape schools to develop a South African model of inclusive education using British Inclusion Index materials. The British Inclusion Index is a 'detailed set of indicators and questions that requires each school to engage in a really challenging exploration of their present position, informing the move towards greater inclusion' (Engelbrecht et al. 2006a: 122). The study concluded that IE can be achieved with the recommended inclusive model materials, which focus on teachers' knowledge and awareness of inclusive education, democratic leadership style of governance by the school principal, providing resources, collaboration (school, parents and community), and knowledge and training on how to work with diverse learners within the school system (Engelbrecht et al. 2006a).

The above literature confirms that teacher training is essential to the successful implementation of IE, as are resourcing schools and clear implementation strategies for the IE policy. It is clear that pre-service teacher training geared for mainstream education does not equip teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills to teach children with mild to severe learning disabilities (especially children with severe intellectual and behaviour problems). Special schools teachers have specialised training and qualifications to teach learners with intellectual and behavioural disabilities. The education system needs to acknowledge that IE is not a binary opposition of inclusive mainstream and special school systems. The one objective of IE



education policy is to strengthen special schools (DoE 2001); the role special schools and specialist teachers play within the inclusive education system should be given the significance it deserves. This article suggests that special schools should be accessible to all learners who need specialised educational services. Especially in South Africa, where special schools were segregated and elitist, the call should currently be about equal access to these schools for all learners with severe learning and behavioural disabilities.

### **Inclusive and quality education for all**

Most developing countries struggle with the provision of education for all owing to socio-economic factors and learning disabilities. Children are not able to access schools (mainstream or special schools). Current education statistics in South Africa show that 97% of the 11,2 million school-age children attend school and 280 000 do not (Hall 2015: 119). This is a significant increase in access to education for all in South Africa. However, more work is required to achieve the goal of education for all, especially for the 280 000 learners out of school.

Sifuna (2007) looked at access to quality primary education for all in Kenya and Tanzania since the 1970s. The results show that, despite disparities in access to education, a small amount of progress has been made in widening access to primary education. However, the three indicators of quality education (input, e.g. learning resources; output, e.g. proxies of achievement, including students' performance; and process, e.g. organisation of lessons, including teacher qualifications and teaching pedagogy) are hampered by systemic problems. Similarly, Michaelowa (2001) did a comparative study on the quality of primary education in five sub-Saharan francophone countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar and Senegal) and found that contextual factors such as rural and urban ecologies, poverty and provision of nutrition in schools play an important role in the quality of primary education. The studies above show that access to education in poor countries hinges on access to resources, with poor socio-economic factors hindering progress towards education for all by governments in these countries.

### **Binary oppositions and polarisation on continuum of support**

Overall, literature reviews on special education and inclusive mainstream school systems show polarisation. Slee (2008: 100) succinctly put it that 'arguments between mainstream and special schools lead to ossification of both sides [...] continual justification and refinement of positions postpone interventions that challenge the proscribed possibilities of either of the protagonists'. Similarly, Fuchs & Fuchs (1994) report that a popular argument in pro-inclusive education literature blames and radicalises special education for promoting the exclusion of learners with learning disabilities from mainstream classrooms. This, however, is not the focus of IE policies

in South Africa, which see IE on a continuum of support provided in mainstream schools or a continuum of support with placement in special schools. IE is neither an inclusive mainstream nor a special school education system; both systems are part of the IE system.

A snap survey of education statistics on country distribution of special schools and learner enrolment from 2001 to 2013 shows poor implementation and strengthening of special schools (DBE 2015). The survey shows a slow countrywide progress in special schools and learner enrolment, and confirms Table 3, which shows a national decline in special teachers training and employment since 2001. Table 1 shows special schools education in South Africa is the lowest compared with all education systems (0,9%). The increase in access to public school education (93%) is impressive, indicating great strides towards education for all, while access to independent schools (4%) indicates an increase in private school education and an improvement in access to early childhood education (1,8%). The low statistics on the number of learners accessing support through a continuum of placement could presumably indicate that inclusive mainstream education is on the increase and parents choose to send their children to mainstream schools, especially full-service schools that are designed to provide a continuum of support to learners in mainstream inclusive schools. One of the objectives of IE policy is to convert 500 primary schools, beginning with 30 districts, into full-service schools (DoE 2001: 8). 'Full-service schools are schools and colleges that will be equipped and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs among all our learners' (DoE 2001: 22). However, education statistics do not indicate full-service schools among public schools. As a result, caution is encouraged, for in the absence of functional full-service schools, the quality of education offered to learners with severe learning disabilities is questionable, considering most public schools, especially in township and rural areas, have limited access to specialist support compared with the expected and recommended continuum of support in mainstream inclusive schools.

**Table 1: A snap survey of 2013 national education statistics in South Africa** (DBE 2015: 3, 21)

Institution	Learner enrolment	Teachers	Number of schools
Public schools 93%	11 975 844	391 829	24 136
Independent schools 4%	513 804	33 194	1 584
Early childhood education institutions 1,8%	277 736	11 874	3 859
Special education needs schools/special schools 0,9%	116 504	10 252	448



A snap survey of special education in South Africa (2001 and 2013) is presented in Table 2 (DoE 2003; DBE 2015). The table gives a clear indication of the progress with the implementation of IE and with support for learners with severe disabilities through a continuum of placement. Table 3 uses descriptive statistics and percentage formulae to describe the progress of IE objectives (strengthening special schools).

**Table 2: Education statistics on special schools, learners and teachers since the implementation of IE in South Africa (DoE 2003; DBE 2013)**

Province	Year	No. of schools	No. of learners	No. of teachers
<b>Eastern Cape</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>8 884</b>	<b>1 295</b>
	2012	42	9 117	854
	2013	42	9 165	876
<b>Free State</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4 023</b>	<b>692</b>
	2012	21	5 801	625
	2013	21	6 038	624
<b>Gauteng</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>26 800</b>	<b>4 009</b>
	2012	131	41 184	3 398
	2013	133	42 958	3 513
<b>Kwa-Zulu Natal</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>11 200</b>	<b>1 941</b>
	2012	72	16 264	1 393
	2013	73	16 785	1 547
<b>Limpopo</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>4 548</b>	<b>792</b>
	2012	34	8 524	684
	2013	34	8 598	696
<b>Mpumalanga</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2 489</b>	<b>474</b>
	2012	20	3 549	355
	2013	20	3 818	368
<b>Northern Cape</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6 254</b>	<b>305</b>
	2012	10	1 646	165
	2013	10	1 691	172
<b>North West</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>4 688</b>	<b>742</b>
	2012	32	5 437	465
	2013	32	6 764	605
<b>Western Cape</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>10 697</b>	<b>2 259</b>
	2012	82	20 076	1 802
	2013	83	20 689	1 851
<b>Total</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>79 589</b>	<b>12 482</b>
	2012	444	111 598	9 739
	2013	448	116 504	10 252

Table 3 gives descriptive statistics calculated using a percentage formula to indicate the implementation progress in percentages. The percentages were calculated using the following formulae:

$$\left( \frac{\text{No of schools}_{2013} - \text{No of schools}_{2001}}{\text{No of schools}_{2001}} \right) * 100$$

$$\left( \frac{\text{No of learners}_{2013} - \text{No of learners}_{2001}}{\text{No of learners}_{2001}} \right) * 100$$

$$\left( \frac{\text{No of teachers}_{2013} - \text{No of teachers}_{2001}}{\text{No of teachers}_{2001}} \right) * 100$$

Table 3 shows the 12-year trajectory (2001-2013) of IE implementation through the continuum of support and placement in special education and special schools. Overall, the view of national statistics indicates an 18% increase in the number of special schools built, a 24% increase in the number of learners (access to special schools) and a 21% drop in the number of teachers employed (training of specialised teachers has declined – this could mean a high teacher/learner ratio in some special schools). Table 3 further shows that the provinces with the highest drop in the number of special schools are North West (18%) and the Eastern Cape (5%), while all other provinces show an increase in the number of special schools, with Limpopo the highest (62%) followed by Gauteng (46%). All provinces show an increase in support through the continuum of placement except the Northern Cape, with a high drop of 73%. The following provinces indicate a substantial increase (+50%) in the support through the continuum of placement: Western Cape (93%), Limpopo (89%), Gauteng (60%) and Mpumalanga (53%). Regarding the number of teachers in special schools (specialised training presumed), national statistics show a decline in all provinces, with the Northern Cape (44%) being the highest but correlating with the drop in the number of learners in special schools (73%). Conservative estimation shows that Table 3 indicates some progress in strengthening special schools in some provinces in South Africa; however, the worrying drop in national statistics on the number of specialised teachers in special schools is a cause for concern. More resources need to be invested in the training of special education teachers to ensure that learners with severe learning disabilities receive quality education support in the continuum of placement.

The issue of IE and access to education through the continuum of support and the continuum of placement continues to threaten quality education for all in South Africa, especially in public schools. A study on the educational needs of learners with disabilities by Saloojee, Phohole, Saloojee & IJsselmuiden (2007) found that children (7-15 years) with severe intellectual and physical disabilities were not attending schools (excluded) as a result of multiple factors, e.g. a lack of access to special schools, to specialised support services in mainstream schools, to assistive services, etc. This study is corroborated by the statistics shown in Tables 1 and 3, indicating that access

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics using percentage formulae to compare implementation of IE through support in continuum of placement**

Province	Year	No. of schools	No. of learners	No. of teachers
<b>Eastern Cape</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>8 884</b>	<b>1 295</b>
	2012	-5%	3%	-34%
	2013	-5%	3%	-32%
<b>Free State</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4 023</b>	<b>692</b>
	2012	11	44%	-10%
	2013	11	50%	-10%
<b>Gauteng</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>26 800</b>	<b>4 009</b>
	2012	44%	54%	-15%
	2013	46%	60%	-12%
<b>Kwa-Zulu Natal</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>11 200</b>	<b>1 941</b>
	2012	18%	45%	-28%
	2013	20%	50%	-20%
<b>Limpopo</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>4 548</b>	<b>792</b>
	2012	62%	87%	-14%
	2013	62%	89%	-12%
<b>Mpumalanga</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2 489</b>	<b>474</b>
	2012	11%	43%	-25%
	2013	11%	53%	-22%
<b>Northern Cape</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6 254</b>	<b>305</b>
	2012	11%	-74%	-46%
	2013	11%	-73%	-44%
<b>North West</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>4 688</b>	<b>742</b>
	2012	-18%	16%	-37%
	2013	-18%	44%	-18%
<b>Western Cape</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>10 697</b>	<b>2 259</b>
	2012	21%	88%	-20%
	2013	22%	93%	-18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>79 589</b>	<b>12 482</b>
	2012	20%	40%	-22%
	2013	21%	46%	-18%

of learners with severe learning disabilities is not accelerated in special schools and such learners are denied quality education owing to insufficient investment in resources (training of teachers – national drop in trained teachers and building of schools to accommodate learners).

Hay (2003) asserts that the successful implementation of IE will depend greatly on the quality and transformation of the education system and realising the significant role of educational support staff in schools. Hay (2003) speaks of schools employing specialists (education support staff, e.g. psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, speech therapists, etc.) to support teachers and learners. This model is used in private (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller 2009) and well-resourced public schools in South Africa. A study on IE in private schools by Walton et al. (2009) found that private schools in South Africa have implemented inclusive education through a continuum of support within the mainstream system. The most common support strategy used by such schools is a 'pull out' strategy by specialists and support personnel employed by the school, e.g. psychologist, occupational, speech and physiotherapists, social workers and remedial teachers. The study by Walton et al. (2009) shows that specialist services and education resources available in private schools easily enable implementation of IE through the continuum of support in IE mainstream schools. Table 1 shows that private schools accommodate only 4% of learners, while public schools house 93% of the school-age population.

Specialist professionals and not teachers provide the continuum of support given to learners with learning and behavioural disabilities in those private schools, as the 'pull-out' pedagogy of learning is used. However, the public education system (especially in poorly resourced township and rural schools) does not employ the services of specialist personnel and does not practise the continuum of support. Instead, the support is provided through the continuum of placement (placement of learners in well-resourced special schools, which employ specialist personnel at the government's expense). Similarly, a case study of a learner transiting from a mainstream school to a special school found that the lack of resources in mainstream schools makes a continuum of support and inclusion difficult in public South African schools (Pillay & Di Terlizzi 2009). Jackson, Ryndak & Billingsley (2000) corroborate this, as they emphasise that the continuum of support is important for inclusive mainstream education to succeed, especially for children with severe intellectual and behaviour disabilities. These authors emphasise that inclusive mainstream education has social benefits, but trained support personnel are fundamental for this model to work. Accordingly, the authors conclude that for inclusive education to work in mainstream schools the training of teachers must be accelerated, support personnel must be hired, collaboration between teachers and specialist personnel and other service-providers needs to occur, full parental (caregiver) involvement is essential and an inclusive teaching philosophy is fundamental (Jackson et al. 2000).

### **Special education system as a resilient response to the laws of the time**

The trajectory of the special education system is traced from Wallin, a clinical psychologist known as the advocate of special education (Yoshii 2016), who instituted the training and specialisation of teachers in special education (Wallin 1931; Ferguson

2014). As a clinical psychologist, it is not surprising that he decided on the institutionalisation of the medical model as a criteria for educational placement and therefore segregation of students based on their intellectual abilities and degree of support. In fairness, the special education system was instituted as a direct response to the implementation of compulsory education laws in the 1900s (Goodin 2011). Identification of a learning disability and providing support are essential to promote and foster effective learning and resilience in children (Dyson 2001). These laws could be equated to an EFA policy because they mandated that all students should be in school (Yoshii 2016; Ferguson 2014). This could be viewed as equity by the marginalised and excluded child with severe learning disability. The implementation of EFA laws led to the placement of diverse learners into schools. IE education policy was not instituted with the EFA policy.

The challenge that Wallin and other educationists faced during the promulgation of education laws was finding educational methodologies and pedagogy to ensure access to quality education for all children within the education system. Special education schools and specialisation of teaching staff emerged as a resilient and the most functional solution to ensuring education for all. To ensure that learners with severe learning and behavioural disabilities gain access to specialised education, the use of psychometric media (standardised Binet Intelligence test) to assess the intellectual ability of the child was central. Even though Wallin (1916) contended that the test was flawed and inaccurate, it remained the main determinant in the placement of children based on their intellectual abilities. As a result, the continuum model of support emerged from this era and these processes (Yoshii 2016; Ferguson 2014) with the aim of providing access to EFA. Thus, the special education system is recognised as part of the education system by education governments and ministries (DoE 2001; UNESCO, 1994). This is echoed by the Irish study by Watson (2009), which found that most mainstream teachers do not have sufficient training to support students with learning disabilities and are reluctant to teach such students. In Finnish study, Naukkarinen (2010) confirms that teacher training institutions have education programmes at a national level to develop the quality of special education to support schools and inclusion. As a result of this form of teacher specialisation, the ‘number of school children transferred to special education has increased steadily between 1995 and 2008 from 3% to over 8%’ (Naukkarinen 2010: 188). The link between special schools and specialised training essential for quality education to all learners with severe disabilities attests to the resiliency of the special education system and the provision of educational support through the continuum of placement.

### **Binary oppositions in IE and the continuum model of support**

The binary oppositions of context (mainstream versus special school system) and intellectual ability (degree of disability – which determined the continuum of support) were instituted by Wallin in the American education system. Wallin’s primary model

of support for students with intellectual disabilities emphasised a continuum of placement into educational institutions arranged in a linear progression with 'separateness and specialisation of the physical setting where the support is provided ... a linear progression from the most segregated and restrictive to the most integrated and least restrictive' (Ferguson 2014: 2). The educational placement model, known as the continuum of services in intellectual disability programmes (Ferguson 2014), is designed to match the intensity of support provided by the separateness of the setting. In essence, the model of special needs education stresses that educational instruction should be suitable to a child's individual needs and mental ability, promoting segregation through educational placement. The establishment of educational placement of children into schools and differentiation of instruction based on their mental ability was viewed as a sustainable form of addressing the individual needs of a child (Yoshii 2016; Ferguson 2014), but this has been a bone of contention within the IE discourse.

Currently, the disadvantages of the psycho-medical and medical approach to support of learners with severe learning disabilities (special schools) dominates the inclusive education system (Slee 1998). The hegemony of the special education system is viewed as an elitist social exclusion, sustained as specialist (Slee 1998) and essential education for children with disabilities (Ainscow 1991). This, according to Fuchs & Fuchs (1994: 22), has remained a contentious issue in inclusive education literature, especially by an 'uncompromising full-inclusionist'. Proponents of full-inclusion (inclusionists), according to MacMillan, Gresham & Forness (1996: 150), hold that a 'least restrictive environment (LRE) is synonymous with regular school and regular class placement of all children with disabilities' and thus support complete eradication of special schools (support in continuum of placement). This, however, is not the position of the education department and the South African government.

The literature abounds with tension and arguments between advocates for social inclusion in mainstream schools who are against the social exclusion as seen in segregated schools (Ainscow 1991, 2005) and IE combined with specialised support of special schools (Fuchs & Fuchs 1994, 1998; MacMillan, Gresham & Forness 1996; Slee 1998, 2008). Accordingly, Ainscow (1991) stipulates that the exclusionary and inaccessible design and philosophy of the special school system have no space in the discourse of inclusive education. This argument I do not agree with, especially in countries where, owing to socio-economic factors, public schools cannot afford specialist services to assist with the continuum of support; in such instances, special schools with the continuum of placement are the best option for learners with severe learning and behaviour disabilities. Government is able to resource such schools for public education. Based on this, it is evident that even with global contestation of the special education system, its resilient education pedagogy and its theoretical foundations of developmental psychology and cognitive theories are unquestionable. According to Fuchs & Fuchs (1994: 28), the full-inclusionist mantra is 'eliminate



special schools', even against opposition by parents of learners with special needs who support the continuum of placement support.

Based on the argument above, it appears that institutionalisation of the medical model has resulted in two issues that still affect the education system. The medicalisation of the education system in the 1900s promoted and validated the segregated education systems based on a continuum approach to education placement and the use of psychometric tests to assess and diagnose intelligence and school placement. Psychometric media remain a concern and a contentious issue in South Africa and in most developing countries because of cultural and contextual differences between the norms of standardisation. In South Africa, most intelligence tests used are standardised for a population group that is different from the African child and thus support a different context and culture.

According to Florian (2008), many articles exist that propose the elimination of the special education system in institutionalising inclusive education. This stance is a counter-discourse to the hegemony of institutionalised special education. The arguments for and against special education and mainstream inclusive education are extensive and not the focus of this article. However, considering the existence of such literature and guided by the trajectory of IE presented, I would like to quote Florian (2008: 202): 'It is what teachers do, rather than what they are called, that gives meaning to the concept of inclusive education'.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

South Africa is doing well in providing access to education for all learners in public schools. Recent statistics indicate an increase in the attendance of primary compulsory education by children between 7 and 13 years (3,4% increase) from an already high level of 96,7% in 2002 to 99,3% in 2013 (DBE 2015: 15). Furthermore, there is a decrease of close to 50% in the number of school-age children (7 to 18-year-olds) who are out of school, from 7% (860 035) in 2002 to 4,5% (316 495) in 2013 (DBE, 2015: 16). Since the implementation of IE policy in 2001, it is encouraging to find that there is an 18% increase in the number of special schools built and a 24% increase in the number of learners who are able to access special schools. It is sad, though, that there is a huge drop of 21% in the number of teachers employed (training of specialised teachers has also declined). The figures above indicate slow, poor implementation of IE. It is not surprising, since the literature review indicated a lack of training of teachers in inclusive education.

The aim of any policy, including the inclusive education policy, is to shape practice at the intended level of classroom (Johnstone & Chapman 2009). Most policies provide strategies for policy implementation (DoE 2001; Johnstone & Chapman 2009), including implementation guidelines and – importantly – guidelines on staff training. White Paper 6 (DoE 2001) on inclusive education has clearly outlined the implemen-

tation strategies for IE in South African schools. However, with the implementation of IE, various factors present barriers to successful implementation such as inadequate and a lack of specialised teacher training (Johnstone & Chapman 2009; Naukkarinen 2010; Rose, Shevlin, Winter & O'Raw 2010). IE will be achieved when all education systems are made accessible to all diverse learners (including those with severe intellectual and behavioural disabilities) and when the education curriculum prepares pre-service teachers with pedagogy and methodology to teach diverse learners in all school systems.

The binary oppositional relationship between inclusive mainstream school and special school education is international. Comparative international studies, especially between the developing (South) and developed (North) countries, present contrasting contextual issues as barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. Moberg & Savolainen's (2003) study on Finnish and Zambian educators' perceptions of inclusive education found that Finnish specialist teachers were more optimistic about inclusive education while ordinary mainstream teachers were less positive. This could be associated with their level of training and specialisation. Moberg & Savolainen (2003) affirm this by confirming that the severity of the disability has a direct influence on teachers' views on education placement and inclusive education; teachers prefer special school education placement for children with behavioural disorders and severe intellectual and learning disabilities. The binary oppositional relationship is enforced within the education system, using the continuum of support as a motivation for placement of the child.

The above-mentioned research indicates that in a developed country like Finland, where special education is established as a discrete profession within the school system, social justice is not used as an argument for instituting binary oppositional relationships within the inclusive education system. Instead, Finnish teachers see special education as a specialisation and an essential service where 'children are taught in special education instead of normal neighbourhood schools' (Moberg & Savolainen 2003: 30). Similarly, the Norwegian education system sees inclusive education as an adapted education that accommodates 'the learning content and conditions of all pupils' abilities, skills and needs' (Fasting 2013: 267). The study by Fasting (2013) shows an increase in the enrolment of students in segregated special education, special classes and special schools within the Norwegian school system. Special schools are seen to provide an essential service that is not provided in mainstream schools. This view is not different from the current position that South Africa and most developing countries find themselves in. This paper has shown that pre-service teachers and mainstream schools are not equipped with the necessary resources and training to teach students with severe learning disabilities. The significance of specialised teachers and special schools within the education system cannot be undermined if quality education for all and inclusive education is to be realised.

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