

**EXPLAINING “NON-REFORM” IN SPECIAL
NEEDS EDUCATION POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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Abstract

The purpose of my case study research is to explain the development trajectory of Special Needs Education policy in South Africa. I also intended to establish whether this policy reform trajectory could be explained as “non-reform” in Special Needs Education. The development path of policies has been widely researched and explained in relation to theories of change. Over the past decade there has, however, been a growing body of knowledge that has moved the theoretical basis for the development of policy from a traditional linear and causal model to a more complex, dynamic model of change. I was able to draw from both models to engage in my case study research on the development of the Special Needs Education policy. This policy eventually culminated in a Government White Paper on Special Needs Education. My primary research question is to understand *why the policy on Special Needs Education did not emerge in South Africa when it was widely expected.*

I examined “up close” the views, perspectives and understandings of policy makers to establish the reasons for the non-emergence of the Special Needs Policy in South Africa. On closer analysis, I found that not only was there a significant delay between the policy formulation and policy adoption, but that this had created a critical policy vacuum in the Special Needs Education system in South Africa, which warranted an explanation.

I found that the main reasons for the “policy-lag” were situated in the intended paradigm shift from a medical based model to an eco-systemic model, the intended restructuring of the special school system, logistical factors, and the availability of resources.

This study addresses a gap in the related literature by its focus on the policy-making process for Special Needs Education in a transitional context. Its significance lies in shifting explanations of policy reform from the domain of the causal-linear to a political account of the process. The research was guided by a conceptual framework that combined the linear and iterative models of the policy development processes with the conceptual devices of “theory of action” and “theory in use”. The role of specific paradoxes and the ensuing tensions was formulated using qualitative content analysis.

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The study produced several new findings with regard to the factors that affect education policy-making in South Africa. Principal amongst these findings was the observation that the politics of participation was the main factor constraining the speed and direction of policy development in Special Needs Education. The findings of this research warrant several conclusions regarding the implementation and the dynamic nature of policy-making. The study concludes with suggestions for future research in policy-making related to Special Needs Education in South Africa.

Key words

Special needs education

Disability

Inclusive education

Policy development process

Barriers to learning

Education for all

Non-reform

Political symbolism

Policy-making

Education White Paper 6

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my late dad, Mr Ninian (Mac) Exton McCarthy.

Your patience and love was never understood.

You could not write, you could not spell, and you could not read.

You were our own special needs child.

You could skin a tender,

Spot a blue bar in flight from kilometres away.

Your hands were rough but your heart was kind.

You did not miss a day of work.

Your guts and tenacity of spirit it took you to get through each day has left
an indelible mark on me as a reminder of what it takes to succeed.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is a testament to the passion I have for all the children and the youth of this country. It has been a long path but it is not the end. It marks the beginning of the academic path that I wish to pursue in the field of Special Needs Education.

I wish to pay tribute to Professor Jonathan Jansen of the University of Pretoria for being the fascinating person that he is. His gifts of speech and acumen in research are some of his greatest talents. I also appreciate his deep understanding of the story that goes behind this study. May he always be the guiding spirit and mentor that so many of us seek in this world.

I wish to pay tribute also to my study companions, Anusha Lucen and Sandra Sooklal, for their support and affection and for the discussions we had on both academic and personal levels. Their commitment to our peer reviews goes beyond words. It is an honour to know people who are academically gifted, yet unpretentious and willing to share.

I am grateful to the participants in this research and the many people in the disability sector that I have come to know and love for their dedication to the “special ones” in our society. Eva Mahlangu and Henocho Schoeman deserve particular mention. It was through their gentle approach that I was wooed into the special needs field.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Sandy Lazarus. Her untiring and unrelenting spirit and her drive to get the job done did not go unheeded. Her dedication to serving the underprivileged of this country is magnanimous and she will forever be my role model.

A special thanks to a long-time friend who supported and assisted me by correcting and editing my writing. Denise Barry’s assistance went beyond my expectations of what friends are for. Her sincerity and determination to help me succeed are worthy of note.

I am also deeply indebted to my brother Peter, for believing in me and securing my education so that I could fulfil many of my dreams.

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To my children Charmaine, Natalie, Deon and Marchant, goes a special gratitude for simply accepting and understanding what this study means to me. I thank them for their love and support.

To my grandchildren Sabrina, Gabriella, Amber and Cyan go my thanks for providing me with the love of young people.

Finally and most importantly, I wish to thank my ever-present husband Bernardus Petrus Maria Laauwen. He has lived this experience with, through, by and for me.

Hermanean May Laauwen
South Africa, April 2004

Declaration of Originality

I, Hermanean Laauwen, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work, and has not been submitted previously for any degree at any University.

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Hermanean Laauwen

The Artist's Way

I was inspired to use this metaphor after reading an article¹ on narrative accounts in research. The author referred to the research plot as a Polaroid film. One takes a shot of a particular object and then waits for the slow and gradual development to a full picture. I elaborated on this idea by using the analogy, not of a photograph but of a painting, because I am more familiar with this form of art. Not only the study itself but also the way in which the policy for Special Needs in Education developed in this country, reminded me of the way a picture unfolds under the hands of the artist. I wish to portray this in the outline of this metaphor: The Artist's Way.

Chapter One: The outline - the introduction.



Chapter One deals with the development of an image that I am emotionally involved with and want to explore further, i.e., learners with special needs. This chapter introduces the purpose of the study and provides an overview of the analytic framework, research methods and organisation. See page 1.

Chapter Two: The background - the literature review and explication of the conceptual framework.



Chapter Two represents the first broad outline on the canvas, providing an idea of what must still be filled in. It is the beginning of the composition. Matters of proportion need to be considered and discussed. This chapter includes a review of the literature that anchors this research and describes the conceptual framework. See page 19.

¹ Muller, J. v Deventer W & L Human. 2003. Fiction writing as a metaphor for research: A narrative approach. <http://www.julianmuller.co.za/narrative%20research.htm>. Accessed on 2003/10/22.

Chapter Three: The technique - the methodology and methods deployed.



Chapter Three encompasses the decision concerning which technique to use. It deals with the various approaches that one can undertake to complete a study and the need to select the tools that are most appropriate. This chapter describes the methodology and methods deployed in this case study of the Special Needs Education (SNE) policy in South Africa. See page 52.

Chapter Four: The composition - the SNE policy trajectory.



Chapter Four reflects the need to decide on the composition i.e., what should go into the painting. This stage is characterised by the application of the first shade of colour to the foreground and the background of the painting. The components in this instance are flowers and rocks. This chapter describes the path of the SNE policy-making process in South Africa. See page 68.

Chapter Five: Adding variety - the role players in this study.



Chapter Five portrays my need to “make up” this picture with a variety of flowers. The flowers represent the variety of discourses associated with the various stakeholders and the hard rocks represent the objects that would not budge. This chapter reports on the views and perspectives of the SNE stakeholders with regard to the policy development process. See page 94.

Chapter Six: Adding colours – exploring the trajectory.



Chapter Six is concerned with the need, as in any painting, to avoid mud and blurred colouring. This chapter provides an analysis of the various roles of the key stakeholders in the

stages of the policy development process. See page 117.

Chapter Seven: Adding depth – the delay



Chapter Seven, the artist adds more colours to the foreground and the flowers. This chapter explains the reasons why the policy did not emerge when it was expected. See page 153.

Chapters Eight: Adding detail – theory in use.



Chapter Eight: to give perspective to the painting, the artist darkens the shadows and emphasises the light. In this chapter the provincial budgets have been analysed for SNE activities with a view to establish the government's commitment to this policy. What did the budgets reveal? Did the policy in practice reveal elements of darkness and light? See pages 187.

Chapter Nine: The finishing touches – a dialogue between theory and data.



In Chapter Nine I complete the finishing touches to the study, which can now be considered a work of art. It is a harmonious blend of colour (findings) with distinct areas of focus (data), placed within a background (theory). The work is ready to be framed and hung on the wall in between other great collections. This chapter summarises the study and presents the new knowledge arising from this study. It suggests a productive line of enquiry that could follow this research. See page 202.

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List of acronyms

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
CADLA	Curriculum and Assessment Development and Learner Achievement
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DICAG	Disabled Children's Action Group
DDG	Deputy-Director General
DoE	Department of Education
DPO	Disabled Peoples' Organisation
DSSA	Down Syndrome South Africa
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education for All
ELSEN	Education of Learners with Special Needs
ESS	Education Support Services
FET	Further Education and Training
FSS	Full Service Schools
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HEDCOM	Heads of Education Committee
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HODs	Head of Departments
IBST	Institutional-Based Support Team
LSEN	Learners with Special Education Needs
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
NACOCO for ELSEN	National Co-ordinating Committee for Education of Learners with Special Education Needs
NCCRD	National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development
NCESS	National Committee for Education Support Services
NCSNET	National Commission for Special Needs in Education and Training
NCCIE	National Coordinating Committee for Inclusive Education

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nDoE	National Department of Education
NEPI	National Education Policy Initiative
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statements
SAFCD	South African Federal Council on Disability
SANCB	South African National Council for the Blind
SASA	South African Schools' Act
SATU	South African Teacher's Union
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SCOPE	South African-Finnish Co-operation Programme in the Education Sector
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Or- ganisation
WCED	Western Cape Education Department