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Collaboration in full-service schools: Learning support teachers' roles and practices

In South Africa, one of the key strategies for the implementation of inclusive education was adding an additional category of school, known as full-service schools. These schools are mainstream schools that function in such a way that they are responsive to the full range of learning needs of all learners. The purpose of full-service schools is not only to provide access to learners who are deemed as having moderate or even high levels of support needs, but also to ensure that the school they have access to can provide them with the needed support, through collaboration with government and community services. Fullservice schools were afforded learning support teachers along with the expectation that they would participate in intersectoral networks and collaborations while brokering partnerships through which various role players would have the opportunity to co-construct knowledge.

The theoretical framework for the study was cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). In this study, the object in terms of this theory was access and quality education for all learners through responsive pedagogies. The interpretation of such an object can vary extensively depending on the subjects' interpretations, past and present relational power struggles within the particular system and the context. CHAT as an exploratory lens allows one to explore these relational struggles that underpin the goal-directed action. The learning support teacher as a member of the full-service school and the district can assume a crucial role as possible boundary broker, who can develop responsive practices to mediate between systems in order to negotiate new ways to ensure that objects reach education's outcome of inclusion and education for all. This is known as boundary-crossing competence. This study aimed to develop narratives of learning support teachers' trajectories of collaboration and relational agency and their role in developing inclusive pedagogies in fullservice schools.

An interpretive case study design was used to provide in-depth descriptions and analysis of a bounded system comprised of four learning support teachers employed by the Western Cape Education Department and stationed at full-service schools. Participants were selected through non-probability sampling and data were collected through four individual semi-structured interviews, document analysis and field notes from observations. The data revealed that if learning support teachers are to be agents of change, who broker policy based on the specific context of the school in which they are placed, they need to have the voice, skills and membership to do so. Their success depends on their ability to broker partnerships, though relational agency, within a particular context. An individual, however, whether afforded membership or not, cannot bring about the level of change needed to make full-service schools functional. For deep-seated institutional change, school management and their values and attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education need to be addressed.