

Esmé-Mari Hunsinger

Supervisor: Prof. E. Swart

Patterns of collaboration and support in full-service schools

The background against which this study was completed is that of an inclusive education context at a full-service school in the Western Cape Province with its own unique challenges and contextual factors that influence teachers' experiences of teaching and collaboration within teaching on a daily basis. Inclusive education is defined as an international movement that challenges exclusionary policies and practices and is a very sensitive but important topic in South Africa. According to many researchers, there is a need to understand teachers' specific attitudes, sense of self-efficacy, experience in their own classrooms and the role that cultural-historical factors play, because teachers are the key to the possibility of change.

The aim of this study is to gain insight into collaborative practices in inclusive education, how teachers in a specific full-service school experience collaborative practices and to what extent these collaborative practices currently add value to inclusive education.

This investigation involves a qualitative case study of limited scope. Through interviews and non-participatory observation involving a total of six participants, the study found twofold results: support and collegial relationships that arise among teachers as a result of collaborative practices can be very valuable for inclusion as it strengthens teacher resilience for teachers to be able to act as change agents for inclusion. On the other hand, findings suggest that many collaborative practices that are stipulated in education policy and are embedded in the system are aimed at establishing inclusive education but are in reality still based on exclusion. This reduces the value of collaboration for the promotion of inclusive education. Another area of tension that the study reveal is the important role that context plays in the implementation of inclusive education and the conflicting dilemmas that develop due to 'n idealistic inclusive-education policy that cannot provide the necessary resources for the ever-increasing diversity of needs.

These findings first suggest that support structures through collaboration in full-service schools should be encouraged to continue to build teacher resilience. Without resilience, teachers will not be able to show the necessary agency to bring about change. Second, it appears that true inclusion may not have occurred yet. What is needed is the rethinking of a full-fledged inclusive pedagogy.