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## **IMPROVEMENT OF AN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNER SUPPORT IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

*Petrusa du Toit*

Internationally much emphasis is placed on learner support for learners with special educational needs (LSEN). In the South African education dispensation before 1994, Educational Psychology performed a major role in the support services of LSEN. However, since the change in education policy in 1994, there occurred a devaluation of support services for LSEN, as the role of Educational Psychologists in the auxiliary services shifted to other tasks like e.g. educator training. Subsequently LSEN have since been receiving less attention in school and in the remaining auxiliary centres, and consequently performing poorer, to the extent that these learners are at present creating a service delivery dilemma in inclusive classrooms, due to these learners not coping in inclusive education.

Ironically enough, in exactly the same year that the South African education policy change took place, the international Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education was proclaimed, in Spain (Salamanca, June 1994), providing the driving force internationally for the support of LSEN within Inclusive Education. Three hundred delegates representing 92 countries and 25 international organisations endorsed this Salamanca statement. While these mostly developed countries by now have developed effective support services for LSEN, developing countries like South Africa face a different situation, as they usually have insufficient funds to create an infrastructure for LSEN.

The South African Education Policy on LSEN however does acknowledge the fact that a well-established education support service is an imperative for inclusive education in South Africa to be successfully implemented. However, this South African policy does not describe the role of Educational Psychology nor of the Educational Psychologist within these support services. Research was therefore undertaken to determine the process and outcomes of tracing and designing a new Educational Psychological model for learner support according to the Inclusive Education Policy in South Africa.

Interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of Educational Psychologists concerning their professional services towards LSEN in the present and past education dispensation, in the provinces that (did and still do) provide LSEN support by Educational Psychologists in educational auxiliary centres. Analyses of these interviews indicate that whereas in the previous dispensation Educational Psychologists were in the position to provide sufficient and professional support for LSEN, the present functioning and administration of the remaining auxiliary services are not focused on LSEN, but rather on continuing regular teacher training.

These results point towards the necessity of improvement of a model for Educational Psychology in the effective support of LSEN. Within such a model, the outcomes from this research indicate that four basic cornerstones need to be in place to ensure proper LSEN support: firstly *professional autonomy* (Psychologists empowered to perform their professional services towards LSEN

without permission or interference by their superiors), secondly *professional qualifications on postgraduate level* (a prerequisite for professional licensing and registration at the Health Professions Council of South Africa), thirdly a *professional approach towards learner assessment and support* (including adherence to the HPCSA ethical norms and integrity), and fourthly an *expansion of the role of the Educational Psychologist* (to encompass a consultative systemic approach towards the provision of support services for LSEN, and not only focusing on learners or on teachers only).

These results indicate that without such a new model for learner support by Educational Psychologists, inclusive education in South Africa is doomed to failure, leading to an increase in LSEN and another "lost generation" in the South African education system, instead of giving execution to the 1994 international Salamanca agreement.