

The implementation of a curriculum for learners with severe disability: a success story?

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ABSTRACT:

This paper focuses on the experiences of teachers regarding the implementation of the *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* or CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability in schools for learners with special educational needs. The curriculum was developed to ensure that the needs of learners who have special educational needs will be met by reducing the depth and width of the national CAPS used in ordinary public schools. It was written at a more functional level by considering the cognitive abilities of these learners. A sequential explanatory mixed-method research design was applied. The quantitative phase consisted of a self-developed questionnaire sent to 21 pilot special schools in all nine provinces of South Africa. Collages and art-based focus group discussions were used to generate data for the qualitative part. Most of the participants agreed that it was good to have a structured curriculum that gave teachers guidelines and lesson plans. However, issues such as a high workload, assessment, time management, resources, and training were problematic in some schools. The findings of this research were used to develop a manual that can be used to train beginner teachers who have never worked with the CAPS for severely intellectually disabled learners.

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INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) states that every child must have access to basic quality education without any form of discrimination. The state must provide support systems so that learners with special educational needs have equal access to basic education. The government must ensure that all resources are made available for learners with special educational needs to develop to their full potential (Department of Basic Education, 2014a).

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006), ratified by the Parliament of South Africa in 2008 (Section 24), requires the government to ensure that learners with special educational needs are able to access an inclusive quality primary and compulsory education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live and that persons with barriers are not excluded from general education (Department of Basic Education, 2014a). Before 1994, schools in South Africa differentiated between learners on the basis of not only race but also intellectual ability (Engelbrecht, 2020). Accordingly, mostly white learners were placed in schools that specialised in teaching learners with severe intellectual barriers.

White Paper 6, a policy about transforming South Africa's school system to an inclusive school system, radically changed the placement of learners (Department of Education, 2001). The implementation of the inclusive education policy requires integrated planning at all levels that must work across multiple disciplines. Critical systemic considerations must be taken into account, and decisive action must take place to recognise inclusive education as one of the national priorities (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

McKenzie (2021) writes that in the initial stages of inclusive education in South Africa, the government and the Department of Education were committed to, like most other countries, having one curriculum for all, where teachers who teach in schools for learners with special educational needs try to differentiate the curriculum. The result was that there was a poor standard of curriculum delivery, with most learners concentrating on either a functional curriculum or a vocational or skills-orientated curriculum (Sprunger et al., 2018). The Department of Basic Education decided to develop two new curricula for learners with special educational needs in response to a court ruling in the Western Cape – the *Cape Forum for Intellectually Disabled versus Government of the Republic of South Africa* (2011). In this court case, the judge stated

that the Department of Basic Education, and in this case, specifically the Western Cape Education Department, had not succeeded in meeting the needs of learners with severe intellectual disability regarding learning materials. Recent research has, furthermore, indicated that learners with severe intellectual disability can and should be trained to develop important skills that are important for increased quality of life (Botha & Dreyer, 2022).

To address the above-mentioned issues, the Department of Basic Education developed a Draft General Educational and Training Certificate: Skills and Vocational, which is equal to a Level 1 qualification of the National Qualification Framework (Umalusi, 2013). This programme offers the potential for more opportunities for learners with severe intellectual disability to follow an apprenticeship or craft course when they leave the school system. The first of the two above-mentioned curricula was developed as a skills and vocational curriculum for learners with moderate disability, while the second one was a curriculum for learners with severe intellectual disability, which was developed on their level of understanding and ability. Both curricula were written in such a way that learners could more easily master the *National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)*, although perhaps at a lower cognitive level that is more functional and focuses on job creation and technical and vocational training.

This article focuses on the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability and the challenges that teachers experience with the implementation of the curriculum in South Africa. The Department of Basic Education has implemented the new CAPS for learners with severe disability that is in line with the NCS CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2014a) from 2018 in schools for learners with special educational needs and resource centres that serve as pilot schools.

The education of learners with severe intellectual disability in South Africa

To develop an understanding of the various challenges that are being experienced in the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability, it is important to briefly refer to the education of learners with severe intellectual disability, both internationally and in South Africa. Hofman and Kilimo (2014) discuss several problems that teachers experience in schools for learners with special educational needs, including those learners with intellectual disability in Tanzania. The same problems are also experienced in other countries, such as

Singapore, Australia, Hong Kong, and Canada (Lumadi, 2013; Muzata, 2017; Yeo et al., 2016) and include, for example, the difficulty of managing learners with different educational needs and the shortage of teaching and learning materials. They also discuss the lack of training for teachers who work with learners with severe intellectual disability and, in most cases, the poor working environment of these teachers (Hofman & Kilimo, 2014). In a study on the implementation of a new curriculum in Hong Kong, the high workload resulting from curriculum implementation was one of the problems that principals and teachers experienced (Cheung & Wong, 2012). Even though school principals employed more teaching assistants to ease teachers' workload, it was still a problem for teachers.

Lumadi (2013) and Yeo et al. (2016) also mention that policy interpretation and assessment, as well as positive feelings such as satisfaction and happiness that teachers experience, are aspects that can influence teachers who teach in schools for learners with special educational needs. The self-efficacy of teachers is strengthened by a positive attitude (Price, 2015), and through their teaching, the values of integrity, thought, and life are embedded in them.

Theoretical-methodological approach

According to Freire (2000), curriculum planning is a process where people are the starting point, as it involves people, their expectations, and their needs. Moreover, Freire (in Mahmoudi et al., 2014) states that curriculum planning is an ongoing process in which all stakeholders who are involved in the teaching and learning process should be involved and that it should not be a top-down process. These stakeholders include teachers, parents, and experts in the field of education. This approach was used in the development of the curriculum for learners with severe intellectual disability in South Africa, as it was first developed by a group of teachers in schools for learners with severe intellectual disability in collaboration with many other teachers in the same schools whose ideas and expectations were taken into consideration. Only after the curriculum was finalised was it approved by the subject specialists at the Department of Basic Education. According to Freire (2005), the ideal curriculum liberates groups in society. That is also true with this curriculum, as it is meant to strengthen respect for human rights and diversity. Moreover, it aims to provide learners across the spectrum with competencies and skills that ensure dignity and active participation in the school and the community.

METHODOLOGY

A sequential two-phased explanatory mixed-methods design was used in this research. The first quantitative phase, a self-developed questionnaire, was followed by a qualitative phase where an arts-based method combined with focus group interviews was used. The researchers tried to include realities by combining quantitative and qualitative data, as suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), with the purpose of building upon the initial quantitative results by explaining the initial results more descriptively. The overarching worldview or research paradigm is pragmatic.

In the quantitative phase, a self-developed questionnaire was sent to teachers at 29 of the 62 schools in which the new curriculum had been piloted. After the results of the quantitative research were analysed, the second phase consisted of the collection and analysis of qualitative data by using art-based research. The participants for both phases were part of the same sample. The qualitative part had a smaller sample, and the quantitative results determined which type of participants was selected for the qualitative phase, as proposed by Nel and Jordaan (2016).

Population and sampling

In this research, the study population was the 62 schools designated by the Department of Basic Education as schools in the pilot project for the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability. This was done according to Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) suggestion that the selected group of participants must be smaller than the total number of people who can participate but must be representative of the entire population, according to Hartell and Bosman (2016). In total, 217 participants responded to the survey.

In the quantitative part, non-probability sampling was used. Non-probability sampling makes use of the random identification of participants (Lombard, 2016). A self-developed questionnaire was provided to teachers in the selected pilot schools for learners with special educational needs. Although more pilot schools were initially identified, some principals did not want to participate due to the pressure placed on schools during the Covid-19 pandemic (table 1).

In the qualitative phase, four schools in different provinces were selected to be part of the research, as shown in table 2. Schools in both urban and rural areas, as well as under-resourced schools and schools that were well equipped in terms of resources, were included. These four schools were part of the 62 pilot schools that implemented the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual

Table 1. Number of participating schools in each province.

Province	Number of schools
Eastern Cape	2
Free State	2
Gauteng	4
KwaZulu-Natal	2
Limpopo	2
Mpumalanga	3
Northern Cape	2
North West	4
Western Cape	4

disability and participated in the study in the quantitative phase of the research. 51 participants took part in the qualitative phase.

The criteria used to select the four schools and the staff of the selected four schools were as follows (table 2):

- Participants had to be part of the staff of the selected pilot schools.
- Participants had to teach the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability.
- The CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability should have been implemented in January 2018 or earlier.

Data collection

By using a self-developed questionnaire as a data collection method, the researchers obtained as much information as

possible about the implementation of the curriculum in the first or quantitative phase of the research. The self-developed questionnaire, based on a literature review and using a Likert scale, was sent to 21 pilot schools (200-300 teachers across all provinces in South Africa). The questionnaire was used to obtain the teachers' opinions of the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability and the challenges they experienced during the implementation thereof. Before the questionnaire was distributed, it was pilot-tested by consulting the coordinator and two other curriculum writers. Three teachers in one of the pilot schools that were not involved in the research also completed the questionnaire to get more input.

After the information from the questionnaire was analysed by a statistical analyst, four of the pilot schools in three provinces were selected to be part of the qualitative

Table 2. Schools that were part of the qualitative phase.

Schools	Focus group discussions
School 1 North West	Focus group discussion 1: 5 participants Focus group discussion 2: 3 participants Focus group discussion 3: 2 participants Focus group discussion 4: 4 participants
School 2 North West	Focus group discussion 1: 6 participants Focus group discussion 2: 4 participants Focus group discussion 3: 5 participants
School 3 Gauteng	Focus group discussion 1: 5 participants Focus group discussion 2: 4 participants Focus group discussion 3: 5 participants
School 4 Western Cape	Focus group discussion 1: 4 participants Focus group discussion 2: 2 participants Focus group discussion 3: 2 participants

phase. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic caused a restriction on travelling among provinces; therefore, some focus group discussions were held via Zoom and schools in only three provinces were used.

In the qualitative phase, art-based research was used to enable the participants to develop an understanding of themselves while engaged in a critical inquiry (Weber, 2014). One of the strengths of the qualitative approach is the richness and depth of such an investigation and the descriptions it brings to the fore (Ivankova et al., 2019). Semi-structured focus group discussions were held with the participants from the respective schools. During these discussions, each participant had the opportunity to discuss his or her collage with the group and to explain why he or she had chosen the different pictures used. Time was allowed for questions and comments from the other participants in the group about the specific collage.

Data analysis

After the questionnaires were returned and checked, the data were processed by a statistical analyst. The analyst used the statistical package SAS 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., 2019) to perform the statistical analysis for the study. Averages and frequencies were used to describe the data, and exploratory factor analysis was performed to confirm construct validity. Cronbach's alpha values were calculated to confirm the reliability of the constructs. Data obtained from the Likert scale were divided into two nominal categories for positive and negative answers so that inferential tests could be done using the chi-square test. While variation among specific schools in the study population was not investigated, variation among provinces and years of experience was examined in particular questions. Because the study population was an available sample, the magnitude of differences in practice between independent and dependent groups was interpreted using Cohen's effect sizes (d-value) for independent and dependent groups (Cohen, 1988). In the case of groups with more than two categories, the results of ANOVAs were reported. These procedures (namely t-tests and ANOVAs) were done for the sake of completeness as if random sampling had taken place for the study.

For the qualitative data analysis, the focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. The researchers read the data to get a general overview thereof. Notes were made alongside the interview data. Then the researchers assigned codes to the data. Positive and negative comments were made for each theme. The data were divided into three categories and 11 themes. The themes were predetermined by the subjects assigned for making the collages. Under each theme, interrelated themes were

identified and coded. Connections with previous literature and theories were drawn and a personal assessment of the significance of the findings was given. The data were checked for accuracy and the reliability and transferability thereof were confirmed.

Thereafter, focus group discussions were held with the school management of each school to discuss the challenges and problems encountered from the transcripts and to obtain the school management's position and advice on them. These focus group discussions were also transcribed to help compile a manual that could be given to schools to use in the training of new teachers who need to use the curriculum for the first time. The data of each of the four schools were analysed separately, and afterwards, the analyses were put together to ensure cross-cutting themes.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for the research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University, which provided an ethics number for the study. The statistical analyst also had to provide ethical clearance.

Validity and reliability

Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) point out that validity and reliability differ in quantitative and qualitative research, but in both research methods, the purpose of checking validity and reliability is to ensure that the quality of the data, the results, and the researcher's interpretation of the data is reliable. Credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability as quality criteria were considered throughout the research. The researchers used triangulation in the research project. By comparing the quantitative and qualitative results with one another, the results were confirmed. The transcribed data were presented to the participants so that they could check whether the transcriptions were a true version of what they had said. Literature was also used to triangulate the data by compiling the self-developed questionnaire and checking whether the results of the questionnaire matched the literature consulted.

RESULTS

For the quantitative phase of the study, the following conclusions were drawn from the results:

Demographic information

Information such as the age of the participants, their highest teaching qualification, the age group that the

participants teach most hours per week, their years of experience in education, the province in which they teach, the size of the school, and other information about the participants and schools was obtained in this section of the questionnaire.

Information on the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability

In this section, information was shared about which curriculum the participants had used before the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability. Altogether 181 of the 217 teachers had used the National Curriculum Statement CAPS and adapted it for the learners in their class. The SANASE document, a document designed by the South African Association for Special Education specifically for the needs of learners with special educational needs, had also been used in some cases, but not as much as the NCS CAPS document. Moreover, 77 of the participants used a combination of the NCS CAPS and the SANASE document and developed their own document.

Factors and key challenges that have an impact on the implementation of the curriculum.

Training, language use in the curriculum, and workshops that are needed for the electives were identified as external and internal factors. It is interesting that time management was regarded as less important according to the participants. In the qualitative phase, the participants stressed the importance of time management.

According to the participants, classroom size, followed by resources and support material for teaching and learning, finances, and computer skills were the most important challenges.

Teachers' knowledge of and attitude about what the CAPS requires for learners with severe intellectual disability (planned and implemented curriculum)

Resources were identified as the aspect where the biggest difference between the planned and implemented curriculum occurred. Two other aspects were also discussed: first, the fact that a single curriculum can be used for different learners and, second, that the curriculum equips learners with knowledge, skills, and values that can facilitate their transition from school to the world of work.

Factors that contribute to the successful implementation of the curriculum

Creativity, technology, and originality were the factors that made the biggest contribution. Other factors that were also regarded as important were supportive leadership,

diversity, and assessment. It is interesting that workload, resources, and class composition were not regarded as important here, while in the qualitative part, workload and a lack of resources were considered to be very important.

Support for teachers during the implementation of the curriculum

Most (96%) of the participants indicated that they needed more practical training opportunities to master the content of the curriculum. They indicated that they believed that those training opportunities or training activities did not help their schools to be more prepared to implement the curriculum, but that the training or lack of training had an impact on their own classroom practices. Furthermore, they had a negative opinion of the public comment aspect during the process of writing the curriculum, as well as the lack of resources. Only 40% of the participants saw the need for curriculum adaptations in their schools for learners with special educational needs.

Content of the curriculum

Most of the participants (85%) agreed that formative assessment, as it was written in the curriculum, played an important part in the written and oral curriculum. They (81%) agreed that there were ample opportunities in the curriculum for learner-centred teaching and learning and that the learner-centred approach had a positive impact on their teaching and learning. They (67%) did not agree with the statement that the curriculum provided opportunities for learners to transfer easily to another school, and they (72%) felt that the world of work approach in the curriculum was not successful.

Implications of the curriculum implementation in practice on the workload of the teachers

According to 89.4% of the participants, the preparation of lesson plans and resources played the biggest role in the workload of teachers. Another factor was the making or lack of resources (88.5%). The participants regarded training opportunities as the aspect that had the least influence on their workload (82.5%).

Implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Creative Arts)

The aspect that the participants (94.5%) were most positive about in the Creative Arts curriculum was the fact that it taught the learners skills that they could use in their families and in the community to make articles or objects that they could sell to earn money. They (91.7%) were also positive that the curriculum had been written

and developed in such a way that learners were introduced to different art mediums and that their creativity was developed. An aspect with which the participants (49.8%) did not agree was that no extra preparation was required. This goes hand in hand with the time management of the curriculum (54.8%). The fact that so few participants (57.1%) knew that only practical assessment was prescribed for the Creative Arts curriculum is concerning.

Implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being)

The Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being curriculum is a very popular curriculum. Most of them (93.1%) indicated that it was important for them that the curriculum addressed issues related to nutrition, diseases (including HIV), safety, violence, abuse, and environmental health. However, the participants (59.9%) did not agree that the content was specifically written in such a way that learners with severe intellectual disability could learn coping mechanisms to maintain themselves in the community. The participants had knowledge of the prescribed assessment in this curriculum.

Implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Physical Education)

The participants had a good knowledge of the curriculum, and they (89.4%) were positive about the fact that

the curriculum focused on perceptual and locomotor development, rhythm, balance, and laterality. An aspect of great concern was the issue of assessment in the Physical Education curriculum and the Creative Arts curriculum, as only 46.1 to 58.1% of the participants knew that assessment in these two curricula was done only on practical work.

In the qualitative phase of the study, the findings were divided into three categories and 11 themes (table 3).

Category 1: The participants’ opinions of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability and the different sections of the Life Skills CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability.

Theme 1: The implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability

It was very clear that there were mixed feelings among the participants on whether the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability was successful. From the focus group discussions, it was clear that most of the participants were in favour of a functional Life Skills curriculum. The lesson plans included in the curriculum were regarded as a positive aspect, as the participants could use the lesson plans just as these had been written in the curriculum for their preparation. Another positive aspect was that there was a community of teachers from different schools who could work together. The participants indicated that they believed that

Table 3. Categories and themes.

Categories	Themes
Category 1: The participants’ opinions of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability and the different sections of the Life Skills CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability • The CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Creative Arts) • The CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being) • The CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Physical Education)
Category 2: Aspects that influence the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relevance of the world of work included in the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability • The availability of resources • Training for the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability • Assessment included in the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability • Degree of difficulty of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability
Category 3: The influence of the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability on the teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workload of the teachers • Time management of the teachers

the attitude of teachers, as well as their commitment to the curriculum, would determine the success of the curriculum implementation.

Theme 2: The CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Creative Arts)

It is clear from the responses to this question that most of the participants were positive about the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Creative Arts).

Theme 3: The CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being)

Although the participants did not like all the themes that were prescribed in the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Beginning Knowledge and Personal and Social Well-being), they were positive about the skills and values that were included. They also liked the layout of the curriculum that described in detail what needed to be taught during each term and year.

Theme 4: The CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Physical Education)

The participants reacted positively to the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Physical Education), but they indicated that they missed the prescribed lesson plans that were in the other two Life Skills curricula. Most of the participants felt that it was not necessary to have a specific Physical Education curriculum, as most of these schools included their sports activities during the school day.

Category 2: Aspects that influence the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability

Theme 1: The relevance of the world of work included in the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability

The participants had different views on the aspect of the world of work included in the curriculum. They all agreed that it was an important aspect and must be included in the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability, but their opinion was that it must only be included from the ages of 14 to 18 years. They indicated that learners who needed a high level of support usually did not understand the aspects discussed in the world of work, as they would probably not work independently after leaving school. Furthermore, the participants felt that the aspect of the world of work could be integrated during the presentation of the elective subjects.

Theme 2: Availability of resources

The participants from schools with many resources indicated that they were blessed with many resources, and if they planned, they could easily use recycled materials to participate in art projects. They felt that the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability (Physical Education) needed resources that were not always available at schools and that schools without the necessary resources would struggle to successfully implement the curriculum.

Theme 3: Training for the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability

Some of the participants came from a school where two of the curriculum writers were part of the teaching staff. They indicated that it was an advantage, as they could easily discuss their problems with the writers. Most of the participants were positive about the training they had received from the Department of Basic Education, but that also differed among the various provinces, as sometimes the presenters were not prepared and did not have enough training material. Most of the participants felt that the training would be much better if the curriculum writers of the different subjects could do the training throughout the country. Some participants suggested that well-equipped schools must act as mentors to schools that were struggling with the implementation of the curriculum and obtaining the necessary resources. Moreover, some participants felt that the in-service training they had received at their own school was better than the training by the Department and that they had wasted time attending all the training sessions.

Theme 4: Assessment included in the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability

The participants were positive about the fact that assessment was fully described and included in the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability. Some of them mentioned that there were too many assessments to be done, while others stated that the assessment showed them exactly how learners had progressed.

Most of the participants agreed that it was important to use rubrics in assessment. Other participants believed that they first had to successfully implement the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability before they started compiling rubrics, as they were already struggling with the assessment.

Theme 5: Degree of difficulty of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability

The opinions of the participants regarding this theme differed. More than half of the participants felt that the

CAPS was too difficult for learners with severe intellectual disability who needed low support structures. The participants indicated that the longer they implemented the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability, the more work they got done with the learners, as they had more experience in helping learners to master the difficulty level of the work. In addition, the participants reported that the more they managed to differentiate the content successfully, the easier the content became for both teachers and learners.

Category 3: The influence of the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability on the teachers

Theme 1: Workload of the teachers

The participants indicated that the diverse needs of learners had an impact on their workload and lesson planning, as they had to differentiate each step of the lesson plan. They also felt that if they worked hard during the first year of implementation, the workload decreased after the first year. They indicated that they had to work during weekends and holidays to stay on top of their daily planning. The lack of resources, Wi-Fi, and electricity in some rural schools had a great influence on the workload of the participants of those schools. Participants who had previously taught in public ordinary schools stated that they had more personal time after the implementation of the curriculum in schools for learners with severe intellectual disability. They felt that the pressure was lower than in public ordinary schools, where the emphasis was more on examinations.

Theme 2: Time management of the teachers

Some participants were positive about time management and attributed this to the way the curriculum was written and the fact that lesson plans and assessments were already included in the curriculum. Factors mentioned that influenced time management were, for example, the number of learners in the class, the help of class assistants, and whether the participants held a senior position at the school.

DISCUSSION

McKenzie (2021) writes that there was a shift in inclusive education for learners with severe intellectual disability from one low-cost, simple curriculum within the general education system to an elaborate system of different curricula. She feels that the battle for the curriculum is between the academic content of the general CAPS, on

the one hand, and a separate curriculum that consists of mostly functional skills for special schools that reflect debates that are also discussed in other countries (Shurr & Bouck, 2013). Moreover, McKenzie (2021) is not convinced that separate curricula will be effective in meeting the needs of learners with special educational needs. On the other hand, the teachers who were participants in the current research study were genuinely positive about the implementation of the curriculum, although they indicated that there were certainly still challenges that needed to be addressed.

Moreover, the participants felt positive about the fact that there was finally a structured curriculum that was used in all schools for learners with special educational needs and, therefore, was aligned in all the provinces in the country. It is also clear from the participants' discussions that they were in favour of a functional Life Skills curriculum.

Secondly, most of the participants felt that their workload had increased during the implementation of the curriculum. School management teams play a big role here, as it is they who decide on the amount of preparation and assessment that needs to be done. Each lesson must be carefully planned, as each lesson should only be 20% theoretical and 80% practical. Some schools insist that a complete lesson plan plus a memorandum should be worked out for each lesson, which makes the teacher workload very high, while other school management teams are satisfied with weekly planning. The implementation of new curricula in New Zealand, Australia, England, and the United States of America has led to an increase in the workload of teachers as a result of the implementation of a new curriculum (Ingvarson et al., 2006). According to Van Tonder and Fourie (2015), research indicates that 28% of teachers in New Zealand have considered leaving the teaching profession due to the high workload.

Thirdly, a lack of resources, especially in Creative Arts and Physical Education, is another issue that needs to be addressed, as it can limit the performance of even the best teachers and undermine learners' efforts to focus on teaching and learning. A lack of resources in a developing country such as South Africa is important, as the focus on resources places the responsibility for the successful implementation at the door of the Department of Basic Education (Furiwai & Singh-Pillay, 2020; Molapo & Pillay, 2018).

The participants felt particularly strongly about resources such as workbooks written specifically for the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability.

Some schools focus mainly on resources such as recycling materials for art products, while schools in urban areas spend a lot of money on making sure that the teachers have enough resources.

In the fourth place, time management regarding the Life Skills curriculum is another issue that needs attention. It is especially the administrative work and unexpected assignments that come from the Department of Basic Education and school management teams that impede time management. Van Tonder and Fourie (2015) state that teachers experience pressure from all stakeholders to do record-keeping very accurately. Teachers spend a lot of time on administrative duties, which leads to reduced teaching time and an increase in workload. Furthermore, diverse learners in classes have a great influence on the time management of teachers.

Fifthly, assessment is an issue that needs urgent attention. Here, attention should undoubtedly be given to specific training in assessment and differentiation, as these are the key to success. According to the *National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support* or SIAS document (Department of Basic Education, 2014b), teachers are expected to offer differentiated assessment, as learners with severe intellectual disability need diverse learning styles and support.

Furthermore, the degree of difficulty of the curriculum provoked a wide response among the participants. Learners who need high levels of support struggle to master the content of the curriculum. Here, differentiation, according to the school management teams, is the answer. Knowledge and skills must be presented at a more functional level, while several vocational subjects are also made available (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

In the last instance, the issue of the difference between the planned and implemented curriculum was investigated. Jančec et al. (2014) point out that every school has not only a planned, formal, recognised curriculum but also an unplanned, informal, hidden plan that must be considered. The planned, formal curriculum focuses on goals, objectives, content, and the organisation of teach-

ing, while the unplanned, informal curriculum focuses on the socio-psychological interaction between learners and teachers, specifically their feelings, attitudes, and behaviours (Ornstein & Hukins, 2014)

According to the results, the curriculum is applied in most respects as it is written, except for resources not being provided to all schools. The participants of the focus group discussions were informally asked whether they could use the planned curriculum in the same way and whether they should adapt it. Their responses were, mostly, that they were adapting the curriculum, and that meant that they had to differentiate.

CONCLUSION

At the start of this paper, the question was asked how successful the implementation of the CAPS for learners with severe intellectual disability in the pilot schools was. The authors conclude by stating that although there are still problems and challenges that the curriculum writers and the Department of Basic Education must address, most of the participants in this research were positive about the fixed guidelines and weekly planning included in the curriculum. There is room for creativity, innovation, and originality if the training of teachers continues and if the management of schools gives support to teachers. The written electives that have been implemented for learners aged 14 to 18 years contribute to the world of work and the opportunity to get work for learners with special educational needs. For the first time, learners can also get a certificate of competency, which contributes to the success of this curriculum.

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None

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