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Out of "Dark Backrooms and Sheds"

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Abstract

Commitment to a single, inclusive education system has been the aspiration of reform in education in a democratic South Africa as articulated in *White Paper 6: Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system* (Department of Education, 2001, referred to hereafter as *White Paper 6*). Within a 'barriers to learning' approach to inclusive education, progress is being made with improved facilities and the implementation of AIDS awareness programmes. Managing the transition towards an inclusive education system has proved challenging in some areas, however, and the specific provision in policy documents directed towards children with disabilities is behind schedule. One component that is furthest behind in the proposed milestones is the implementation of the information and advocacy programme (Maher, 2007). This article discusses the need for the information and advocacy programme to be prioritised, and presents a model which weaves together an adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989, 1993) and the tenets of human agency theory (Bandura, 2001; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999; Carlson, 1997), which are central to decision-making, self-regulation and self-determination. This model provides a framework within which people can enact their democratic right in a wider sense than casting a political vote, potentially advancing their self-efficacy. The framework, furthermore, encourages people to begin to reposition themselves and to adjust their beliefs towards a more positive notion of the inclusion of children with special needs in regular education.

Out of "Dark backrooms and Sheds" and into a "Caring Society": A Model to Enhance the Self-efficacy of Learners with Special Needs in South Africa.

First, progress towards achieving inclusive education in South Africa within a 'barriers to learning' approach is discussed. Second, progress towards the achievement of the 20 year plan within *White Paper 6*, specifically addressing the needs of children with disabilities, is considered. Third, the

theoretical exposition of a model is provided for comment and feedback from those involved with the education of children with special needs in South Africa as we move towards fully inclusive education. The model is proposed as a means to enhance the self-efficacy of learners with special needs and their families, and as a platform for the implementation of the advocacy and information strategy proposed in *White Paper 6*. This would support the vision, which is “to convince the thousands of mothers and fathers of some 280,000 disabled children — who are younger than 18 years and are not in schools or colleges — that the place of these children is not one of isolation in dark backrooms and sheds. It is with their peers, in schools, on the playgrounds” (Department of Education, 2001, p. 4).

The model weaves together an adaptation of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989, 1993) and the tenets of human agency theory (Bandura, 2001; Bandura et al., 1996; Bandura et al., 1999; Carlson, 1997), which are central to decision-making, self-regulation and self-determination.

Inclusive education within a ‘barriers to learning’ framework

The Ministry of Education released *White Paper 6* in July 2001 entitled *Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system* (Department of Education, 2001). Inclusive education in this White Paper is defined as:

- Acknowledging that all children and youth can learn
- Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners
- Acknowledging and respecting difference in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV or other infectious diseases
- Broader than formal schooling, and acknowledges that learning occurs in the home, the community, and within formal and informal contexts
- Changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula, and environment to meet the needs of all learners
- Maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and curriculum of educational institutions, and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning. (Department of Education, 2001, pp. 6-7)

These six points reflect the major shift from parallel special education and regular education systems to a unitary system that responds to the needs of all students. As Francis and Muthukrishna (2004) explain, an “important proposal made in White Paper 6 relates to the need for changes in the general education system so that learners experiencing barriers to learning can be identified early and

appropriate support provided" (p. 110). This is reiterated in the first point of the long-term goal: "4.4.1 Our long-term goal is the development of an inclusive education and training system that will uncover and address barriers to learning, and recognise and accommodate the diverse range of learning needs" (Department of Education, 2001, p. 45).

Research on inclusive education subsequent to 2001 has mainly taken place within this 'barriers to learning' model of inclusive education. Analysis of these findings shows that in the quest to identify barriers to learning, to address and eradicate them, important resource issues such as toilet facilities and leaking roofs were identified and the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has been made explicit (Muthukrishna, 2000; Muthukrishna & Sader, 2004; Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2001). These are barriers to learning for large numbers of students and, in getting funding to improve school facilities, positive gains have been made. Addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic, with dissemination of information as the top priority, is another really vital issue. Indeed, a leader of a Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) funded project focussing on inclusive education in South Africa from 2002 to 2004 noted, "Well, at the end of two years the Swedish Government was extremely pleased. They said it was the most successful project they ever funded in Africa" (Maher, 2007, p. 165).

Specific provision for students with disabilities

White Paper 6 clearly states the intention of achieving inclusion rather than mainstreaming or integration. It notes at the same time, however, that belief in, and providing support for, a policy of inclusive education are insufficient to ensure that such a system will successfully be translated into practice. Consequently, a strategy to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the interim was articulated in *White Paper 6*. This included the strengthening of special schools which would be called Resource Schools and which would serve severely disabled students and also provide support for teachers who would be including students with less severe disabilities in Full-service schools. It is envisaged that Full-service schools will provide education for regular students as well as those with disabilities in an inclusive setting, with there being supports for those with disabilities within the regular classroom.

The 20-year time frame, for the implementation of the key interim steps, was initially as follows:

- 2001 – 2003 Implement advocacy programme; transform 30 special schools to resource schools and 30 primary schools to full-service schools; implement support teams
- 2004 – 2008 Expand the above in line with lessons learned from initial implementations

- 2009 – 2021 Expand provision to reach targets (Department of Education, 2001)

It became apparent, however, that translating theory into practice would take longer than that. A UNESCO funded project has been undertaken to trial the British *Index for Inclusion* in South Africa so that a model can be developed for assisting the achievement of inclusive schools in South Africa. Phases one and two of a five-phase study have been completed, using schools in the Western Cape province (Engelbrecht, Oswald, & Forlin, 2006). These authors report that the majority of teachers were unfamiliar with the content of *White Paper 6* or with the vision for inclusion in education in South Africa.

Between June and October 2005 several further documents were published to assist with the implementation of the inclusive education vision. These included making explicit the role of the district based support teams (Department of Education, 2005a); the practicalities of the establishment of full-service schools (Department of Education, 2005b); the adaptation of curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners (Department of Education, 2005d); a clear management plan for the first phase of implementing inclusive education (Department of Education, 2005e), the practicalities of transforming special schools to resource schools (Department of Education, 2005c); and guidelines for teachers at both regular and special schools for inclusive learning programmes (Department of Education, 2005f).

While some aspects of the implementation of the 20 year plan are behind schedule, steps are being taken to progress this initiative. Examples would be the appointment of additional qualified staff at Resource schools (Maher, 2007) and the documentation noted above. One aspect that is furthest behind in all its milestones, however, is the implementation of the information and advocacy programme. This is an important aspect as it addresses people's beliefs and assumptions, and its implementation could see an improvement in the efficacy of the disabled and their families.

Ecological model and human agency theory

The following model is therefore proposed as potential vehicle for the implementation of the advocacy and information strategy.

Ecological model introduced. Children with disabilities and special needs, at the centre of inclusive education, can be seen within an ecological model, described below. Elements within the various systems in this ecological model potentially influence the self-efficacy and educational outcomes of children with disabilities. Within the ecological model, *transactions* occur when there is an interplay between the child at the centre and the settings within which the child operates. Dynamic transactions occur as members of the systems interact with one another and the child, and as the child interacts in

these transactions. It is not simply a one- or two-way interaction that occurs. As one element or system influences another in any interaction, so the influenced one changes, indeed, but at the same time the one which initiated the interplay is also affected and transformed and nothing remains the same.

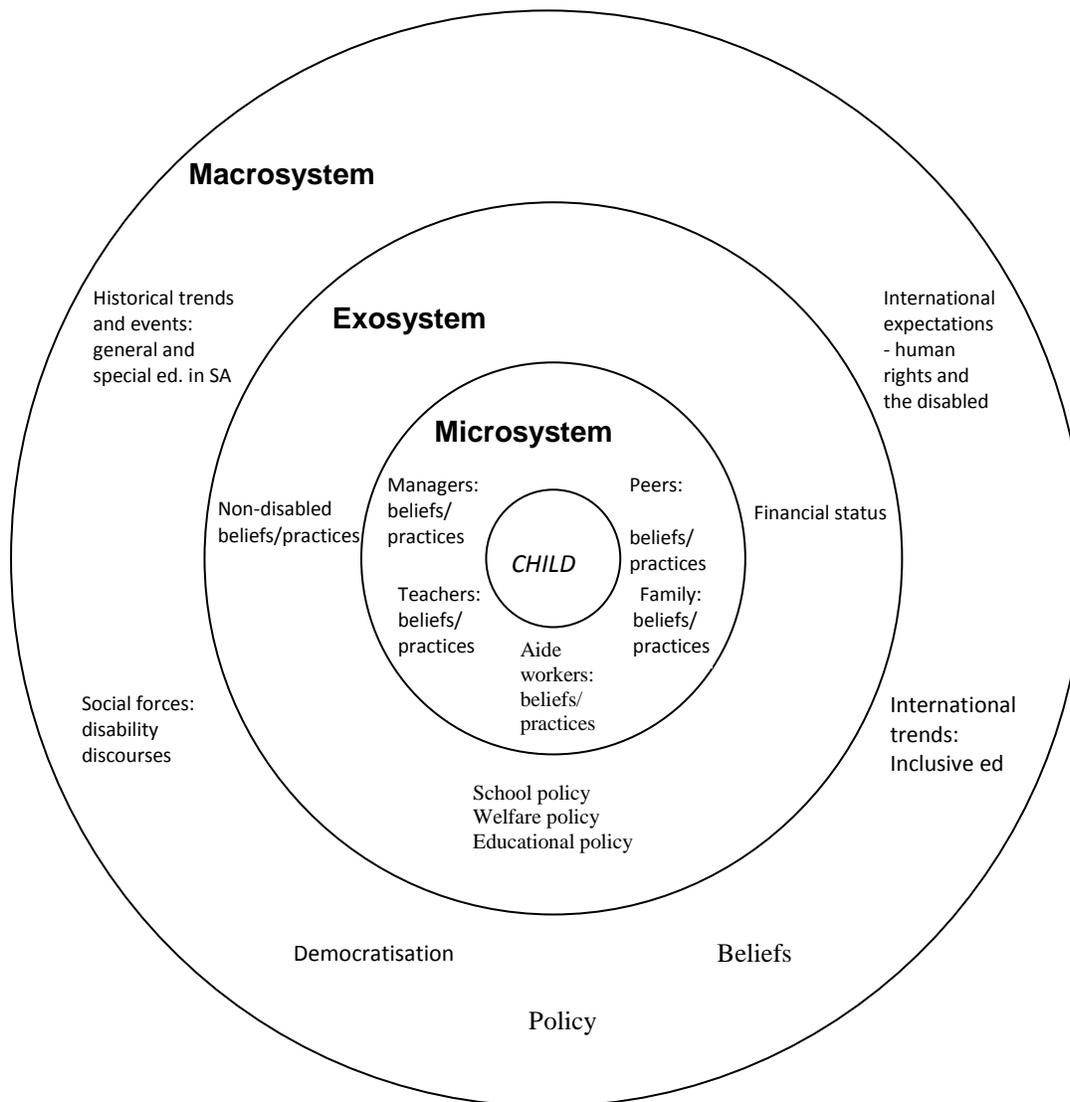


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Model includes but is not limited to noted elements in a disabled child's environment (Bronfenbrenner as cited in Berk, 2001)

In response to his concern that inadequate attention was paid to environmental influences on human development Bronfenbrenner (1979) wrote:

The understanding of human development demands more than the direct observation of behavior on the part of one or two persons in the same place; it requires examination of multiperson systems of interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject. (p. 21)

Although the emphasis on developmental environment is familiar to educators working with children with disabilities, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) call for examination of the "multiperson systems not limited to a single setting" and "aspects of the environment beyond the immediate setting" challenges those concerned with the education of children with disabilities to look beyond the tensions of inclusion versus exclusion, special curriculum versus adapted curriculum, parent aspirations versus bureaucratic goals, or special education versus regular education.

Explaining the transaction dynamic, and developing his original proposition, Bronfenbrenner (1989) wrote:

The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 188)

Using Bronfenbrenner's (1989) model and applying it to children with disabilities in the context of the ideal of inclusive education in South Africa, it is possible to represent the transactions likely to operate within such a child's ecosystem in figure 1. There are several notable points that emerge from this model which profoundly influence the way the effectiveness of educational policy to practice can be evaluated. First, the impact of interaction between the child and others is seen transactionally, not additively which links with human agency theory. Second, it is clearly explained that the settings within which the child develops are ever changing, affected by relations and transactions between the settings. Third, the unique nature and circumstances of each child's situation are reflected, honouring the notion that needs, abilities, and barriers to learning are likely to differ from child to child.

Human agency It is useful here to link the transactional effects of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989, 1993), as explained in figure 1, to the concept of human agency as described by Bandura (2001) who sees being an agent as exercising control over circumstances to bring about desired outcomes. He holds that the "core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times" (p. 1). He, like Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989, 1993), rejects the view

that human behaviour is controlled or automatically shaped by stimuli provided by the environment, and where people are depicted as "devoid of conscious agentic capabilities" (Bandura, 2001, p. 1).

Supporting the view of human agency, Carlson (1997) emphasises the pivotal role that consciousness plays in decision making and being an agent of action. Underlying this is the necessary motivation to act. "Unless people believe that they can produce desired outcomes by their actions, they have little incentive to act or persevere in the face of difficulties" (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001, p. 187). Indeed efficacy beliefs play an important part in people's ability to adapt to change and to human development in its entirety (Schwartz, 1992). According to Bandura (2001) there are several mechanisms of personal agency: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness, but "none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their level of functioning and environmental demands" (Bandura et al., 1996, p. 1206).

Ecological model and human agency theory interwoven Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecological model portrays "microsystems", "mesosystems", "exosystems", and "macrosystems" linked together in "a system of nested, interdependent, dynamic structures ranging from the proximal, consisting of immediate face-to-face settings, to the most distal, comprising broader social contexts such as classes and culture" (p. 4). Any transaction between the child at the centre and any one other is seen as being a microsystem transaction. When two or more interact, it is seen as being a mesosystem transaction e.g. when parents, teacher, and the child are involved. For a child with special needs in South Africa, the four systems describe the interwoven networks of transactions that create an individual's ecology (see Figure 1).

Contextual elements of microsystem and mesosystem as described by Bronfenbrenner (1993) are of particular relevance in investigating what determines the educational outcomes of children with disabilities. He described the microsystem as

patterns of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing persons in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment. (p. 15)

The emphasis here of the importance of the child's actions, reactions, and interactions with others in the microsystem, as determined by their beliefs and practices, is useful in understanding a

disabled child's development. The child's engagement with any one of these people in the attendant setting (for example: school, playground, home) would be considered a transaction within the microsystem.

The mesosystem is the web of involvement that comprises linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person. Special attention is focused on the synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting. (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 22)

In the case of children with disabilities, their self-efficacy and educational outcomes are in the first instance influenced by the family in the home setting as the beliefs and practices of these primary people in the child's life have a direct bearing on the child's development (Berk, 2001). Once the child goes to school, the linkages between home and school for the child, and the new transactions with teachers, peers, aide workers, and managers will have developmentally instigative or inhibitory effects on the child. The effects within and across systems may, depending on the beliefs and practices of the people in those systems, act against one another, or they may reinforce one another, highlighting discrepancies and possibly causing the child to confront contradictory messages between microsystems. As highlighted by Bandura et al. (1999), however, "individuals play a proactive role in their adaptation rather than simply undergo experiences through environmental stressors acting on their personal vulnerabilities" (p. 258). People in this model are seen as "producers as well as products of social systems" (Bandura, 2001, p. 1). Irrespective of potentially conflicting messages or tensions that may exist, positive outcomes are seen to be attainable for children with disabilities.

As there is an interplay between the systems within the model in figure 1, it is possible to identify links to the three models of agency identified by Bandura (2002), those of "personal agency exercised individually; proxy agency in which people secure desired outcomes by influencing others to act on their behalf; and collective agency in which people act in concert to shape their future" (p. 269). The proxy agency as described here would suggest that children actively motivate others to work on their behalf. In this model, it would probably be the parents who would do this. Elsewhere, Bandura (2001) describes proxy agency as agency "that relies on others to act on one's behalf to secure desired outcomes" (p. 1). In the case of young children, this would be the likelier definition. In summary then, children have efficacy in their transactions with parents and family, with peers, and with teachers, which exemplifies direct personal agency. Parents, teachers, paraprofessionals, aide workers, and managers can, and do, individually advocate on behalf of the children in a proxy agency role.

Exosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989, 1993) exist when there is a setting not containing the child, but which nevertheless exerts an influence on his or her development. As depicted in the model, the assumptions, beliefs and practices of the people who interact with the child in the micro- or mesosystem are influenced by factors noted in the exosystem. The non-disabled in the community frequently act as gate-keepers, for example, and their beliefs and practices are influenced by the disability discourse within which they function.

The South African government's educational and special education policy documents regarding inclusion are central to schools' policies and have a direct or indirect bearing on the child's development. The Provincial Education Departments' ability to translate National policy into practice has an impact on disabled children's schooling.

Parents' financial status has an influence as well, as the wealthier they are, the more options are open to them when making decisions about their child's education (Maher, 2007). This is, at times, influenced by welfare policies. It is interesting to note that in a study on what shapes children's aspirations and career trajectories, Bandura et al. (2001) found that "familial socioeconomic status influences parental perceived efficacy and academic aspirations, which, in turn, affect their children's perceived efficacy, academic aspirations and scholastic achievement" (p. 188), and they conclude, therefore, that "socioeconomic status had ... an indirect effect on children's perceived ... efficacy" (p. 198). They found, however, that children's judgements about their occupational efficacy are "entirely mediated through the effect on children's self-conceptions and efficacy" (p. 198). These findings support the transactional nature and interpretation of the interplay between the child at the centre of the ecological model and the people in that child's microsystem whose efficacy is inhibited or advanced by exosystem level factors.

The macrosystem

consists of the overarching pattern of micro- meso- and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in such overarching systems.

(Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 25)

Within the exo-, and macrosystems, agency can be interpreted within Bandura's (2001) model as collective agency "exercised through socially coordinative and interdependent effort" (p. 1). At times the call from the disabled for recognition can be fragmented. Within the philosophy of inclusion, however, there is a wider definition of need with greater numbers involved. With this increased critical

mass, there is likely to be stronger “perceived collective efficacy” and consequently higher “aspirations and motivational investment in their undertakings” and furthermore higher “morale and resilience to stressors” producing greater “performance accomplishments” (Bandura, 2001, p. 14). This collective agency is more likely to overcome the potential active opposition or circumvention that Burns and Dietz (2000) note are part of the rule structures of any social system. It is necessary to consider the possibility that while the disabled are advantaged because of numbers by the wide definition of need subsumed in a philosophy of inclusion thus strengthening their collective agency, their specific needs can become overshadowed or lost within the wider definition.

At the same time as transactions occur between different elements depicted in figure 1, it is important to note that some traverse all systems. If one considers the concept of *beliefs*, there are beliefs that operate in and across various systems: macro-, exo-, meso-, and microsystems. While they traverse all systems, the form they take and the way they are experienced, is likely to vary according to system kind. Trends in beliefs in society – the discourse espoused – described at a macrosystem level, will either have an enabling or inhibitory effect on people with disabilities. In the same way, though, beliefs of people who interact with the disabled at a meso- and microsystem level, work transactionally, influencing what disability discourse is accepted and adopted at a macrosystem level in society. These macrosystem level beliefs again support or challenge beliefs internalised by the people who interact with children with disabilities at a micro- and mesosystem level.

Even within systems there are transactions. Beliefs of policy makers, for example, will determine what education and welfare policies are promulgated at government level regarding children with disabilities. These policies then traverse to other levels of the model shown in figure 1, affecting school policy regarding inclusion, for example. As teachers have more contact with students with disabilities and their families because of policy dictating their interaction with these students, so their belief systems may transform, affecting their practice, thus continuing the transaction.

Bandura (2002) notes “cross-cultural commonality of agentic capacity” irrespective of whether people live in a mainly individualistic society such as some Western cultures, or one that is more collectively oriented such as some indigenous cultures. He explains that a well developed “sense of personal efficacy is just as important to group-directedness as to self-directedness”. As he points out, group pursuits “are no less demanding than individual pursuits” (p. 273). He emphasises the importance of personal efficacy if success is to be achieved, whether the goal is individually or collectively determined. Bandura (2002) therefore concludes that “there are collectivists in individualistic cultures and individualists in collectivistic cultures” (p. 274) since cultures are diverse and ever changing, not

invariant. All people live with others in a group, whether familial or social, even in individualistic societies; and in collectivist cultures people are not so completely immersed in the group that they lose their individuality.

It would therefore be a false dichotomy to consider self-efficacy as individualism and to contrast it with collectivism. Bandura (2002) highlights that this will not affect the personal agency of any particular sector of society since "human agency operates generatively and proactively on social systems not just reactively" (p. 278). Thus, if individuals experience successful inclusion, for example, whether child, parent, or teacher, this is likely to generate a positive attitude to future instances of inclusion for them and for others.

Conclusion

As the inclusive education policy through to practice paradigm in South Africa is considered, it is possible to interpret events within the nexus between transactional interactions and human agency theory: a multicausal model "which integrates sociostructural and personal determinants" (Bandura, 2002, p. 278).

If "special needs education is a sector where the ravages of apartheid remain most evident" (Department of Education, 2001, p. 9) then the enhancement of the self-efficacy of the disabled and their families needs to be prioritised. This was acknowledged in *White Paper 6* where the information and advocacy programme was prioritised in the planning stage. This aspect seems to have foundered, possibly because a model for enhancing people's efficacy was not available. To this end the model explained in this paper is put forward as a platform to let people see their potential to influence both the proximal in daily interactions, but also the distal by exercising collective agency. It is hoped that this model might support the Ministry where it "sees the establishment of an inclusive education and training system as a cornerstone of an integrated and caring society" (p. 10).

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