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Could Practicum Placements in Contrasting Contexts Support the Preparation of Pre-Service Teachers for an Envisaged Inclusive Education System? A South African study

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ABSTRACT

In contexts where inclusive education is nascent, teacher educators face the challenge of preparing pre-service teachers for a system that does not yet exist. While this might be possible through university-based coursework, difficulties arise when so few sites that model inclusive pedagogies are available for practicum placements. This article investigates whether practicum placements in contrasting contexts may prepare pre-service teachers for teaching in an envisaged inclusive education system. We analyse the reflections of South African pre-service teachers who have conducted practicum sessions in two contrasting contexts, neither of which offered ideal models of inclusion. We explore the extent to which moving between contexts enabled pre-service teachers to develop orientations towards teaching and learning that Black-Hawkins and Florian identify as essential for promoting and sustaining inclusive pedagogic practices. With reservations, we conclude that practicum placements over contrasting contexts potentially support the preparation of pre-service teachers for inclusive education.

KEYWORDS

Barriers to learning; diversity; inclusive education; practicum; pre-service teacher; rural schools; South Africa education; special schools; teacher education

Introduction

As classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse and inclusive of students who are deemed to need additional support to meet curriculum objectives, there is growing recognition that developing pedagogic responsiveness to student diversities can no longer be an optional component of pre-service teacher education programmes (Florian, 2012). As in many other developing countries, teacher educators in South Africa face the challenge of preparing new teachers for an inclusive education system that is envisaged in policy, but not yet fully realised in practice. Given that very few students with mild to moderate physical and/or cognitive disabilities attend regular public schools in South Africa, we investigated whether placing pre-service teachers in contrasting contexts for teaching practicum sessions could support the preparation of pre-service teachers for an envisaged inclusive education system. We show that in these contrasting contexts, pre-service teachers needed to be pedagogically responsive to the different aspects of student diversities. This paper analyses the reflections

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of a group of South African pre-service teachers who each undertook teaching practicum sessions in two contrasting contexts (in urban regular schools, and either rural schools or special schools). We analyse the extent to which these contexts (and their cumulative effect on professional learning) enabled or constrained the development of orientations in their teaching practices that are considered important for teaching inclusively.

Inclusive Education

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) proclaims every child's right to basic education and maintains that all children, including those with disabilities, should learn together, while their different learning needs are accommodated through the provision of appropriate support. The practice of separating students with mild to moderate physical and/or cognitive disabilities into 'special' classes has been strongly critiqued on moral grounds for at least 50 years. Dunn's (1968) influential criticism stemmed from his observation that children from socially and economically disadvantaged communities were over-represented in 'special' classes, and that despite a heavy investment in resources, there was no evidence to suggest that children in 'special' classes achieve any better than similar students in regular classes. Proponents of inclusive education urge teachers to take responsibility for enabling all students in their classes to learn, particularly those vulnerable to marginalisation or exclusion. Although the vulnerability of students is often associated with disability or 'special need', Messiou (2006, p. 306) reminds us that 'inclusion is concerned with any kind of marginalisation that might be experienced by any child', irrespective of 'notions of special educational needs'. Thus, in addition to disability, students may also be vulnerable to marginalisation as a result of refugee or migrant status, sexual orientation, gender, language, race, socio-economic status or another identity marker. Although inclusive education originated out of concern for where students with disability should be educated, it has extended its focus to be concerned about the socially just education of all students who experience any form of marginalisation (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Slee, 2011). While there is a strong focus on disability and special educational need in the South African policy on inclusive education, there could be a number of reasons why students experience difficulty with learning. These may include a mismatch between students' home language and the language of learning and teaching (LOLT),[1] poor infrastructure, lack of resources, family difficulties, poverty or a combination of these factors (Republic of South Africa, 2001). The preferred South African terminology is 'barriers to learning', to signal that disability may not be the only indicator of a need for learning support.

South Africa has committed itself (through White Paper 6: Special Needs Education) to the international trend of building the capacity of regular schools to meet the support needs of diverse students, including those with disabilities (Republic of South Africa, 2001). During the Apartheid regime, public schools were segregated on the basis of race and dis/ability. While public schools opened to students of all races with the collapse of Apartheid, the majority of schools located in rural and township areas (in formerly black African residential zones) still enrol predominantly black African students. Under Apartheid, special schools (some of them privately funded, well resourced, with teacher assistants and small classes) were established in urban areas to cater for white (and to a lesser extent, Indian and coloured) students with cognitive and/or physical disabilities. Teachers in urban schools were

encouraged to identify students requiring additional learning support and refer them to a nearby special school: a practice that continues to be prevalent. Very few special schools were established in South Africa's rural areas. Parents of students with disabilities who live in rural areas have had little option but to seek enrolment for their children in local regular schools. Some still keep them out of the formal school system for reasons including inaccessibility, cultural taboos and poverty (Gardiner, 2008). Teachers in rural schools are not easily able to refer students with additional support needs to special schools, as their urban counterparts do. It is currently estimated that approximately 360 000 children are still not in the schooling system at all, with disabled students in rural areas making up a significant proportion of these (Fleisch, Shindler, & Perry, 2012; Walton, 2014). Although inclusive 'regular' schools that cater for all aspects of diversity in society are promulgated as a cost-effective way of both combating discrimination and achieving basic education for all (UNESCO, 1994, pp. 11–12), in the South African context, relatively few schools have already been converted into 'full-service schools' (i.e. inclusive schools). These full-service schools are expected to enrol students with physical and/or mild cognitive disabilities and other low to moderate support needs, and ultimately to serve as a resource centre for supporting inclusive education in other schools in the district (Republic of South Africa, 2001).

In some contexts, like the United States of America, an arrangement of co-teaching between general teachers and those with some expertise in special needs education has advanced the implementation of inclusive education. In co-teaching arrangements, general and special teachers work together, sharing responsibility for the planning, delivery and assessment of lessons (Shin, Lee, & McKenna, 2016). Actual lesson delivery is shared through various arrangements, such as the general teacher leading a lesson, while the special education teacher works to provide small group support, organising station teaching with a teacher based at each station, dividing the class for parallel teaching and so on (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & Mcculley, 2012). Through these co-teaching arrangements, students with additional learning support needs remain in regular classrooms, gain access to mainstream teaching, while having their individual learning needs expertly supported for academic success. This model, however, is not (yet) possible in a developing context such as South Africa, where budgetary and infrastructure constraints require that general classroom teachers provide access to the intended learning to all students in the class, without the support of special education specialists or even teaching assistants.

Preparing Teachers for Inclusive Education

A considerable amount of research has been conducted around what is required to prepare novice teachers for inclusive teaching, and various important elements have been highlighted in the literature. These include positive attitudes and dispositions towards inclusive education and students with disabilities (Ahsan, Deppeler, & Sharma, 2013; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014), the development of a sense of self efficacy (Lancaster & Bain, 2007; Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Malinen, 2012), university coursework (Hornby, 2010; Scorgie, 2010) and practicum placements (Lambe & Bones, 2008; Lancaster & Bain, 2007; Walton & Rusznyak, 2014). There are, at present, too few full-service schools to offer practicum placements in inclusive education settings to the thousands of pre-service teachers registered.

For the purposes of grounding the empirical study presented in this article, we focus on three aspects relevant to the preparation of teachers for inclusive education. These are

inclusive pedagogy, the developmental trajectory of novice teachers and the role of the practicum.

Inclusive Pedagogy

An inclusive pedagogy has become a central concern as inclusive education is realised in classrooms. Its aim, we argue, is to ensure that while inclusivity is about all students feeling that they belong, it is also about enabling learning and achievement of all. Various scholars have sought to conceptualise what an inclusive pedagogy might entail. Greenstein (2016), for example, offers a 'radical inclusive pedagogy' (p. 79). She characterises this as a constructivist epistemology that values 'the multiplicity of knowledge and ways of knowing that are embedded in experience and relationships' (p. 79). Writing in the South African context, Makoelle (2014) asserts that inclusive pedagogy 'refers to the totality of teaching methods, approaches, forms and principles that enhance learner participation' (p. 1260). More useful for our purposes is the conception of inclusive pedagogy as developed in reports on research by Florian and Linklater (2010), Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) and Spratt and Florian (2015). Much of this research is derived from a study in Scotland of the craft knowledge of teachers who have demonstrated both a sustained commitment to inclusive teaching and use inclusive pedagogical practices with diverse students, resulting in high levels of achievement. This work on inclusive pedagogy is both theorised and empirically tested, offering valuable insights into classroom practices that support the inclusion project. The research reveals that inclusive pedagogy requires three major shifts in the way that teachers think about their teaching and their students. First, teachers should shift away from being concerned about 'individuals with additional needs', towards thinking about supporting 'learning to all'. Secondly, teachers need to shift away from deficit thinking about student ability towards a belief that all children have the ability to learn and make progress. Thirdly, teachers need to perceive difficulties in learning as a professional challenge rather than a problem located within particular students, and develop new ways of working with others to address these challenges. Before discussing inclusive pedagogy in relation to teacher development, we wish briefly to expand on the three shifts or components of inclusive pedagogy mentioned here.

A Shift Away from a Concern about 'Individuals with Additional Needs' Towards Thinking about Supporting 'Learning to All'

In classrooms with diverse students, an inclusive pedagogy is concerned with learning opportunities being made available to everyone to ensure participation of all (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Essentially, this means a move away from teaching 'most' students and making different pedagogical arrangements for 'some' students. In effect, this erases the distinction that Lewis and Norwich (2005) make in approaches to working inclusively with students between 'individual difference' and 'general differences'. In the former, it is assumed that all children, regardless of their differences, have many common educational needs, and some unique ones that need individual responses. The latter position assumes that subgroups of students in a class (irrespective of their individual differences) may benefit from the same form of pedagogic support. In extending this argument, Croft (2013) suggests that catering for each child's individual difference is difficult to attain, even in well-resourced schools within affluent communities. She argues that the difficulties in an 'individual

difference' approach are further compounded in contexts where there is limited resources and funding. Croft suggests that a more pragmatic response is to improve the overall quality of teaching with some specifically targeted interventions to support the learning of groups of students. Inclusive pedagogy, by contrast, avoids labelling some students as different, and 'does not require the identification of special educational need *within* individual learners' (Florian, 2015, p.11, emphasis in the original).

A Shift Away from Deficit Thinking about Student Ability Towards a Belief that All Children have the Ability to Learn and Make Progress

Inclusive pedagogy requires teachers to abandon the idea that ability is predetermined and static, and that the capacity to learn is fixed and finite. In turn, this means that students cannot be categorised according to perceptions of their ability (Spratt & Florian, 2015). Like race and gender, disability is a socially constructed notion (Baglieri et al., 2011). Inclusive pedagogy then means that teachers need to focus on what students can do, making a range of learning opportunities available to all (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). This does not mean that specialists or specialist knowledge is not valued by an inclusive pedagogy. Florian (2015, p.11) stresses that it is '… *how* [teachers]… utilise specialist knowledge that differentiates inclusive practice from other pedagogical approaches' (emphasis in the original). The role of specialists is highlighted in the third shift.

A Shift that Perceives Difficulties in Learning as a Professional Challenge for Teachers rather than as a Problem Located within Particular Students

When teachers see difficulties in learning as professional challenges for themselves, they will try to find new and different ways of teaching to enable all students to learn (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). It has been found that there are some teaching practices that are inherently more inclusive of student diversity than others (Ferguson, 2008). Using questions posed by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) in the 'framework for participation in classrooms', Akabor (2015) lists nine practices and strategies from the literature that promote collaboration, access to the curriculum and recognition and acceptance of learners. These are co-operative learning, peer-tutoring, co-teaching, differentiated instruction, whole class instruction, direct teaching, reflective teaching, teaching social skills and student selected work (p. 24). These practices and strategies are, however, not inclusive in and of themselves. Instead, professional judgement needs to be used in choosing and implementing these strategies to promote learning and inclusion (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Spratt & Florian, 2015). An ongoing commitment to professional development will be required to develop these inclusive practices (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Finally, inclusive pedagogy will also require different ways of working with other adults, including specialists, in 'ways that respect the dignity of learners as full members of the community of the classroom' (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 819).

While we accept the suggestion of Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) that the practices of expert teachers can inform how pre-service teachers are prepared for teaching in inclusive education systems, it is crucial to recognise that novices have developmental needs and concerns that are significantly different from those of experts (Berliner, 1994; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Maynard & Furlong, 1995). Referring to 'shifts' in the way that teachers think about teaching and learning implies that they previously held a (problematic) position that has changed over time. The idea of shifts in the thinking over time cannot be directly transferred

to pre-service teachers whose perspectives on teaching and learning are still in the process of developing. To consider the developing perspectives of pre-service teachers, we will therefore not refer to 'shifts' in this study, but rather we will use the term 'orientations' towards teaching and learning that set up conditions of possibility for inclusive teaching practices.

The Development of Teaching Competence in Pre-Service Teachers

It is necessary briefly to consider the developmental process of learning to teach and how this might intersect with practicum experiences that intend to prepare pre-service teachers for inclusive teaching. Several developmental models have attempted to describe the typical stages that pre-service teachers experience as they learn to teach. One early but influential model was proposed by Fuller (1969) who describes three shifts in the concerns of pre-service teachers that occur as they develop an ability to teach. First is a stage of *non-concern* with the specifics of teaching, in which pre-service teachers identify with the students, and are 'often unsympathetic, even hostile, critics of the classroom teacher whom they are observing' (p. 38). After attempting to teach, their concerns shift to their ability to manage a class and to convey an appearance of competence. As their professional practice matures, pre-service teachers shift their concern from their own performance to the impact their teaching has on students' learning (Fuller & Brown, 1975). There have been some revisions of this model (e.g. Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Kagan, 1992; Maynard & Furlong, 1993), which have redefined, refined and elaborated on developmental stages. Although linear stage models have been critiqued on the basis that they ignore the role that formalised knowledge plays in prompting shifts from one stage to the next, recent research has confirmed that until pre-service teachers have access to the inner logic of the cognitive demands of the practice, they tend to focus on their own performance in classroom environments, mimicking the outer routines they see other teachers perform (Hammerness et al., 2005; Loughran, Berry, & Mulhall, 2006). Fuller's model and this more recent research imply that until pre-service teachers are concerned about the impact of their teaching on learning, it may be developmentally premature for them to make the conceptual shifts that Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) deem necessary for inclusive teaching.

The Role of the Practicum

According to international literature, practicum placements for pre-service teachers should ideally be in well-functioning schools under the supervision of knowledgeable teachers whose classroom practices are consistent with the conception of good teaching promoted in university-based coursework (Banks et al., 2005; Beck & Kosnick, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2006; LaBoskey & Richert, 2002). It follows that practicum placements that would best prepare pre-service teachers for inclusive education would be in classrooms where they can learn from teachers who are committed to principles of inclusion, and who model inclusive pedagogies with diverse students. To this end, Waitoller and Kozleski (2010) report on the advantages of inclusive professional learning schools that support the 'development of robust, collaborative, and inclusive teacher identities' (p. 70). Also, relevant to the development of inclusive practice is the research interest in practicum placements in contexts that are relatively unfamiliar to pre-service teachers. This research has focused largely on the experiences and pedagogical learning of pre-service teachers in schools with students of

different ethnic or cultural backgrounds (for example, Sleeter (2001) and Pence and Macgillivray (2008)), in urban schools (Cornbleth, 2008; Hampton, Peng, & Ann, 2008; Mason, 1997), rural schools (Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013; White, 2006) and special schools (Lambe & Bones, 2008; Walton & Rusznyak, 2013). Findings from these studies suggest that practicum sessions in diverse contexts offer pre-service teachers opportunities to examine their own pre- and misconceptions about different students and their contexts, and develop more culturally responsive and contextually relevant pedagogy.

In contexts where there are human resources available to support inclusive education, some of the literature focuses on the conditions required for pre-service teachers to develop confidence in co-teaching through working collaboratively with general and special education teachers (e.g. McKenna, Shin, & Ciullo, 2015). Literature also alludes to ways in which university-based faculties of education can work directly with schools to support the induction of pre-service teachers into inclusive ways of teaching (Shin, Lee, & McKenna, 2016; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2010). While there are some South African studies about universities acting as partners in teacher development initiatives for inclusive education (Walton, 2016; Walton, Nel, Muller, & Lebeloane, 2014), these are localised, small-scale interventions mostly focused on in-service teachers.

While working collaboratively with teachers at full-service schools represents an ideal setting in which pre-service teachers may be prepared for inclusive education, in the current context teacher educators are forced to consider alternative ways of effecting this preparation, within the constraints and possibilities of existing classroom conditions. The gap in research that we wish to address is the extent to which practicum experiences in *contrasting* placements might develop the orientations to pedagogical thinking and action required for sustained inclusive pedagogic practices.

Research Context and Methodology

South Africa's teacher education policy requires that pre-service teachers should be exposed to 'varied and contrasting contexts of schooling' so that they learn to 'teach in a manner that includes all learners' (Republic of South Africa, 2015, pp. 15, 56). An assumption embedded in this policy directive is that the experience of teaching in diverse school contexts should enable prospective teachers to develop their capacity to teach inclusively. It is this assumption that our study seeks to investigate.

Institutional Context

The institutional context of the study is an urban university in South Africa that offers a four-year Bachelor of Education degree as a pre-service teacher education qualification. Approximately 20% of the pre-service teachers come from rural (farm or village) schools and 80% attended schools in urban areas (of these, 35% attended schools in formerly black African residential 'townships' and 45% attended formerly white suburban schools). For many, their own schooling has taken place in segregated spaces. In their third year of study, pre-service teachers in this institution complete a compulsory course on understanding the social constructions of race, gender and disability, the structures in schools and society that engender and perpetuate educational marginalisation and exclusion, and which also includes an orientation to inclusive education, and inclusive pedagogy (see Walton & Rusznyak, 2016).

Also, in their third year, pre-service teachers are encouraged to undertake a practicum in a context that contrasts with their previous placement. As with other urban-based universities in South Africa, this institution is able to offer pre-service teachers three main options for practicum placements: in regular schools (where it is improbable that pre-service teachers will encounter students with disabilities in their classes), remote placements in schools a considerable distance from the university (where pre-service teachers cannot easily be observed or assessed by university staff) or in special schools that cater exclusively for students with mild to severe physical and/or cognitive disabilities. While none of these contexts provide inclusive education, each potentially offers pre-service teachers exposure to the diversities that characterise broader society.

Methodology

This study forms part of a broader project that, with ethical clearance and institutional consent, researches the experiences and pedagogical learning of a group of South African pre-service teachers undertaking a third-year practicum placement in a context very different from their previous placements in urban, regular schools. The 29 third-year pre-service teachers who attended a practicum in a special school in 2012 were invited to participate in this study, as were the 54 pre-service teachers who undertook a practicum in a rural school. Fourteen of those who attended a special school and 25 of those who attended a rural school gave their informed consent to participate.

The table that follows lists the participants using pseudonyms and shows the context of their practicum placements (Table 1).

The first qualitative data-set comes from three sets of focus group discussions conducted before and immediately after participants attended a practicum in a special or rural school, and one year thereafter. The first set of focus group discussions explored what participants had learnt from teaching in urban regular schools and what they expected to learn while teaching in a contrasting context. Upon their return, focus groups were reconvened and participants shared their experiences, discussed the extent to which they felt prepared for teaching within that context and the ways they had adapted their teaching to the demands of that context. A year later, we asked them about the longer term impacts of that practicum learning as they returned for their final placements in urban, regular schools. During the focus group discussions, we noticed that there were a few points made by participants which were not clear. In these cases, we asked for clarification and illustrative examples. We then deliberately verbally summarised that point, for participants to confirm that we had correctly understood the points made. Each focus group interview was audio-taped and transcribed to ensure the accuracy of participants' contributions.

We are aware that in a focus group situation, participants may feel pressurised to contribute socially acceptable responses (Fisher, 1993; Nederhof, 1985). For that reason, we sought another source of qualitative data, both to complement and elaborate on participants' focus group contributions. The second set of data comes from the reflective journal entries that participants wrote preceding, during and subsequent to their placement in a special/rural school. In their journal entries, pre-service teachers document their observations, reflect on the lessons they teach and express their thoughts and concerns. Entries are largely open-ended, although participants were encouraged to respond to questions including:

Table 1. Participants (pseudonyms) and their contrasting practicum placements.

Participant	Urban regular school practicum	Special school practicum	Rural school practicum
Alice	x	x	
Anna	x		x
Bheki	x		x
Caryn	x	x	
Chantelle	x	x	
Eve	x		x
Dawn	x	x	
Grace	x		x
Gertrude	x		x
Hope	x		x
Helen	x		x
Iris	x		x
Indile	x		x
Jenni	x	x	
Karl	x	x	
Kholiswa	x		
Kiara	x	x	
Kim	x	x	
Lerato	x		x
Mary	x		x
Nadine	x	x	
Nkosi	x		x
Nthando	x		x
Ntombi	x		x
Quincy	x		x
Sadie	x	x	
Sandy	x		x
Sandile	x		x
Samuel	x		x
Sipho	x		x
Sue	x	x	
Surita	x	x	
Talia	x	x	
Tasfiyah	x	x	
Thabo	x		x
Thulani	x		x
Thomas	x		x
Wattson	x		x
Yvonne	x		x
Zodwa	x		x
TOTAL	39	14	25

- What specifically worked or didn't work in the lessons you observed/taught? If you needed to adjust your lesson while it was in progress, what were the reasons?
- What surprised/interested/challenged you during the day?
- How have you responded to student diversities within this school context?

We sorted data according to the three different practicum contexts under consideration: urban regular schools, special schools (also in urban contexts) and schools based in rural areas. We then looked again at the data for evidence that revealed the extent to which each context enabled pre-service teachers to think about teaching inclusively. To develop codes, we turned to the work of Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) and Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) that identifies three shifts that experienced teachers must make in order to teach inclusively. It has already been argued that the word 'shifts' is inappropriate when considering the developing practices of pre-service teachers, and we have justified our use of the term 'orientations'. These following three orientations towards teaching, learning and learners

informed coding of our data: (i) planning approaches that seek to support the learning needs of all students, (ii) beliefs about the capacity of students to learn and (iii) the acceptance of the difficulties that students experience with learning as a professional challenge. Once the coding was complete, we categorised the data by combining codes, across school context and across orientation. Our interest lies not only in the pre-service teachers' experience of teaching in very different contexts, but also in how pre-service teacher reflections on the contrasts between urban regular and urban special schools, or urban regular and rural regular schools provided insights into what students were learning in different contexts that might support or hinder their capacity to teach inclusively. Our presentation of the findings organises the data in terms of the three orientations obtained from the literature, and we compare and contrast student reports of their interpretation of their observations and experiences across the contexts in which they undertook practicum sessions.

Deductive analysis imposes conceptually defined criteria on empirical data and assesses the extent to which the data meet the criteria imposed. A deductive analysis is suitable for this study for a number of reasons. These analytical categories have been derived by empirical research in other contexts, and their use in South Africa identifies their potential applicability in this context. Like Spratt and Florian (2015), we are interested in '… how these conceptual ideas manifest in practice' (p. 90). By observing this manifestation, we may address Makoelle's (2012) concern that there is little understanding of inclusive pedagogy in South Africa. The pre-existing categories also work as organising principles that help make sense of a large data-set. Finally, given that inclusive education is not yet fully realised in South Africa, we cannot yet assess the extent to which pre-service teachers are able to teach inclusively. As a proxy, we can only seek to identify those conditions that previous research has delineated as conducive to the development of inclusive teaching.

In the coding process, both authors of this paper read the full data-sets and worked together to establish codes that took the conceptual framework of the study and the nature of the data-sets into account. At first, the researchers worked together to code the data-set, and verified that the chosen codes were working effectively with the datasets. Where they did not work, they were adjusted. The joint coding continued until consistency with allocating codes was obtained between researchers. Thereafter, each researcher coded the data separately, and conducted inter-rater reliability checks. In the few cases where different codes were allocated, we discussed these until consensus was reached, and both researchers were confident that all data had been consistently and accurately coded.

We acknowledge the limitations inherent in our data-sets and in our research design. As this is a small-scale case study, we can only draw 'fuzzy generalisations' from our findings (Bassey, 2001). We acknowledge, for example, that the pre-service teachers in our study came from one institution with a social justice orientation towards inclusive education, and that they may have been predisposed to particular kinds of contextual learning. We are insistent that implications from our study cannot be separated from the pedagogic choices made in the design of the curriculum (see Walton & Rusznyak, 2016). We are also acutely aware of the challenges and responsibilities when representing the voice of Others. As teacher educators, we occupy a position of relative power, and so (inadvertently) may influence what could or should be said by participants. Furthermore, as we lift the participants' accounts from their original form and recraft them as evidence for our research findings, we do inevitable damage to the integrity of each individual's reflection. While remaining cognisant of this, we attempt to portray their positions accurately by extensive use of

participants' own words when we present the findings. To ensure that we were working with ideas that were not individual anomalies, but shared amongst participants, we considered data to be significant when the same code was used independently for at least three participants, either from the focus group transcriptions or from reflective journal entries. In such cases, when we use a quote, the participant whose name appears first is the one who generated the exact wording quoted.

Findings

In presenting an analysis of our data, we return to the three conditions that Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) and Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) identify as necessary for the development of an inclusive approach to teaching diverse students. For each condition, we analyse how participants interpreted teaching and learning within and between the contexts in which they had taught.

Orientations between Focusing on 'Individual Students with Additional Needs' and 'Learning For All'

As expected, none of the participants in this study had previously encountered students with disabilities in practicum placements in urban regular schools, although some had encountered students who experienced difficulties with learning. During and after their practicum at a special school, participants describe in great detail the learning difficulties experienced by individual students, often in terms of a medical diagnosis. Surita, for example, describes 'a Foetal Alcohol Syndrome child' who 'can't concentrate because the medication hasn't kicked in yet'. In this, and other similar examples, the pre-service teachers are satisfied to credit a diagnosis with explanatory power for the way in which a student behaves in class. In contrast to this individualised approach, numerous participants noticed that in many urban regular schools, the acceptance of students with additional support needs is conditional upon their ability to keep up with the pace at which content is covered (Indile; Anna; Nadine; Thulani; Sadie; Zodwa). As Indile observes, 'In urban schools, there's only one kind of student they teach: those who finish [their work] just before the period ends'. Students who lagged behind in their work are expected to catch up without additional support, and this practice is justified by supervising teachers as a means of forcing students to 'take responsibility' for their learning. The close proximity of special schools in urban areas in turn legitimates the view that students who can't 'keep up with the rest of the class' should be transferred out of regular schools. Our study shows this position replicated in how some pre-service teachers reflect on how best to support students with learning difficulties. One year after her practicum in a special school, Surita writes journal observations about a particular student in an urban regular school who 'struggles to concentrate' and whose 'work is perpetually incomplete'. She expresses concern that 'the only time [the teachers] converse with him is when they shout at him'. Her focus on individuals with additional learning needs continues beyond her time at a special school and is transferred to how she interprets her observations in a regular school. She believes 'teachers should give him some one-on-one attention, even if it is during breaks or after school'. Like Grace, Jenni and Sue, she continues to think of the provision of support to individual students as an additional responsibility that teachers should undertake outside of scheduled teaching time. Surita goes on to

wonder, 'Maybe [teachers] can make a decision if he belongs in a "normal" school'. Although the practicum at a special school increased her awareness of the learning difficulties experienced by individual students, it also reinforced in her mind a distinction between those who 'belong' in regular schools and those who don't.

During a special school practicum, Sadie had worked with individual learning support plans for students with disabilities in very small classes. She tried to continue this level of individualised support within regular urban classrooms. She reflects

> I had in my class very weak and very strong students .… I often thought back to how we managed to get the children at the special school to stay on task. I thought: I need to slow down the lesson pace; I need to repeat what I said; I need to give them an extra worksheet, but the stronger children had already done both extra worksheets, and the weaker children were still doing the [basic] class work … What I've found so disheartening was how helpless I felt … I couldn't give them what I knew they needed.

Her reflections show that her endeavour to replicate an individualised approach within a regular urban class leaves her feeling pedagogically paralysed by the enormity of devising additional support to cater for learners with individualised support needs.

Participants encountered much more homogeneity amongst students in rural schools than they had previously encountered within urban regular schools, albeit with different sets of challenges (Anna; Helen; Bheki; Thomas; Thabo; Samuel). Most students speak the same home language, come from similar socio-economic backgrounds and have similar cultural customs and religious beliefs. Many students enrolled in rural schools stay with elderly guardians and are generally expected to do agricultural and domestic chores before and after school (Mary; Anna; Thabo; Quincy; Yvonne). Few have access to computer facilities, the internet or libraries. Participants found they could make many more inferences about students' backgrounds, life routines and prior experiences (Gertrude; Nkosi) and this enabled them to generalise common learning support needs in a whole class approach. Despite the sociocultural homogeneity, only Grace encountered a student with a disability in a rural school. Others (including Gertrude, Indile and Hope) were required to teach students of different grades/ability levels who had been grouped into one class. Numerous participants (including Hope; Zodwa; Lerato; Gertrude) grapple with how to plan 'learning for all' with large classes (of 60–80 students). Hope, for example, found it a 'challenge' to 'accommodate them all' by setting activities that 'weren't too easy to make those who understood to fall asleep; and not too hard to make those who are completely lost feel excluded'. The challenge of managing exceptionally large classes was further compounded in contexts where there was insufficient seating in the classrooms, lessons were allocated just 30 min, and where there was 'no space to move around the class and monitor what students are doing' (Zodwa; Anna; Lerato; Indile; Hope). They ask similar questions in their journals: 'How do I plan to make sure that all students understand?' and 'How do I find out who doesn't understand in this class?' These questions, we believe, are crucial ones. While we do not believe that these pre-service teachers have developed a sophisticated repertoire of inclusive pedagogies yet, grappling with these questions about teaching that supports learning for all is essential for working productively in a fully inclusive education system.

Unlike Surita and Sadie, whose combination of urban regular and special schools served to undermine their preparation for an envisaged inclusive education system, other participants who completed a practicum session at a special school (like Karl; Tasfiyah; Alice; Talia) felt more committed to teaching all students within in regular schools. Karl was adamant

that one shouldn't 'just push that one child aside and send them to a special school because they might have a slight problem. [This is] something we can address in the regular school'. During a planning meeting with a peer, Alice thought back to her experiences in a special school, and ensured that adequate levels of support were built into the overall design of their lessons. Similarly, Quincy recalls how after his experiences of teaching in a rural school, he became more conscious of the importance of introducing terminology and formulating assessment tasks in accessible language. In these examples, and others like them, working with different aspects of student diversity across contexts had value in prompting some participants to think about supporting the learning of all students in more deliberate ways.

Orientations between Deficit Thinking about Learner Ability and a Belief that All Children have the Ability to Learn and Make Progress

Participants who completed their practicum at rural schools noted that some supervising teachers openly deflected responsibility for students' low performance levels. Despite this, we see evidence of pre-service teachers (Thomas, Mary, Bheki, Thulani, Nthando and Zodwa) actively interrogating their supervising teachers' beliefs about student ability, and coming to different conclusions. When Zodwa asked a supervising teacher about what can be done better to support students in rural schools, she 'did not expect to be told that these students are "stupid, lazy and don't want to learn"'. Like Zodwa, most participants in this study explicitly rejected the beliefs of some of their supervising teachers that students in that context could not learn.

Pre-service teachers described how the students they encountered in rural schools generally 'struggled to read' (Zodwa; Gertrude), 'struggled to understand English' (Grace; Helen; Bheki) and 'found it difficult to express their thoughts in writing' (Sipho; Indile; Anna). They locate the 'problem' as residing within the students, not with the systemic marginalisation that students experience as a result of learning in a language that is not their home language. Several participants (Grace; Ntombi; Sipho; Quincy) drew on South African policy to describe the students' proficiency in the LOLT as a 'barrier' to their learning. We notice how participants use their awareness of these barriers to learning to inform how they approach the lessons they plan. Some participants (Helen, Lerato, Indile) avoided English and instructed students in their home language to help them 'understand better'. Others (Grace; Anna; Samuel; Nkosi; Zodwa) reasoned that it wouldn't help students in the longer term if they remained unable to express their understanding in the LOLT. They attempted to ensure that students acquired the concept, and also developed the associated English vocabulary and language structures. Aware of safeguarding the dignity of students and enabling their access to the knowledge to be learnt, Anna consciously pre-empted students' difficulty with subject-specific terminology and 'made sure to explain terminology carefully without making the students feel embarrassed [if they didn't know] certain terms'. In this way, she considers the nature of the learning support required for students upfront and incorporates this support into her lesson planning. Similar approaches were taken by pre-service teachers who noticed that students in their classes experienced difficulty in the reading of texts. Whereas, Zodwa and Gertrude chose to confront the difficulty by planning a series of structured reading lessons to develop students' reading competence, Indile actively avoided incorporating reading tasks in the lessons he taught. In the interviews and reflective journal, we noticed that Indile seemed highly concerned about projecting an image of himself as a competent teacher, whereas

Zodwa and Gertrude were mostly concerned by whether the students in their classes were learning. In choosing to address the learning challenges that students experience, some participants demonstrate their belief in the capacity of all students to learn and overcome the barriers to learning that they currently face. Planning lessons that strategically avoid assigning tasks to students that they are like to find challenging (e.g. articulating an understanding in English or reading) may be interpreted as a belief that some students can't learn. However, it could also be interpreted as a developmental sign of a professionally immature pre-service teacher who is still primarily concerned with portraying an image of competence and avoiding strategies or activities with which students may struggle (Fuller, 1969).

Orientations between Regarding Difficulties in Learning as a Problem Located within Particular Students and Regarding these Difficulties as a Professional Challenge

We noticed that all but three participants accepted student difficulties with learning as a professional challenge, despite several of them having received contrary briefs from supervising teachers. In a rural school, Grace accepted the teacher's instruction that the student with disabilities 'should not take up too much attention'. Yvonne, who returned to the school that she attended as a student, observed marginalisation but felt she 'had to follow what the teachers do because I [am] in their territory'. In a focus group discussion, Thulani insists, 'The teacher said it's not my problem [that the students aren't learning], but it has to be my problem! If that student does not understand what I'm saying then I didn't teach him anything'. Zodwa similarly writes in her journal, 'If my students don't understand what I'm saying, then the purpose of the lesson is not achieved, and it wouldn't matter if I went to class or not'. Seeing enabling students' learning as a professional challenge is reflected in how these participants evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.

Through their previous experiences teaching in urban regular schools, the participants had formulated a notion that curriculum coverage took priority over student understanding. Practicum sessions in rural and special schools prompted some participants to realise that curriculum coverage and pacing are pedagogic variables in tension that can be adjusted according to the learning needs of students (Kennedy, 2004). Jenni (in a special school) writes in her journal, 'My teacher [is] not rushed to get through the content; she told me to make sure students gain the knowledge and skills'. Others slowed the pacing of lessons so that 'all learning tasks could be finished during class' to accommodate the domestic duties expected of rural students after school (Mary; Gertrude; Lerato; Bheki; Eve; Nkosi; Sandile; Wattson; Sipho; Zodwa). They noticed how the slower pace of teaching provided 'more time for those students that are battling to [understand] the content' (Indile; Lerato; Sandy). Several participants expressed surprise that pacing could be used intentionally as a pedagogic variable to support the learning of all students.

Discussion

This study shows various ways in which practicum placements in contrasting contexts potentially support the preparation of pre-service teachers for inclusive education. A contrasting context prompted participants in this study to consider the pedagogical implications of different aspects of student diversity. The impact of different aspects of student diversity on

teaching and learning became more visible to the pre-service teachers as they moved between contrasting contexts. In special schools, participants became convinced of the ability of students with disabilities to learn and make progress, however, they invariably received an apprenticeship into an 'individual differences' approach to teaching students with disabilities. When some attempted to transfer an individualised pedagogic approach that was possible in a small special school in large, diverse mainstream classes, they experienced a sense of pedagogic paralysis. In contrast, those who adopted to a 'general difference' approach upon returning to regular schools were more convinced of the feasibility of inclusive education by building support into their overall planning of lessons. In considering how to enable learning within the constraints and possibilities of contrasting contexts, some participants discovered that aspects of teaching (such as pacing, homework allocation, teaching strategies, curriculum coverage) are variables that can be adjusted to suit the students in their classes. In this way, their teaching practices became more flexible and responsive.

Conducting a practicum in a contrasting context exposed some pre-service teachers to different teacher attitudes and teaching practices regarding inclusive education. In both urban regular schools and rural schools, some pre-service teachers in our study encountered marginalising practices and deficiency views of students. For some of the pre-service teachers, an exposure to marginalising practices ironically seemed to strengthen their resolve to teach inclusively. With other participants, however, the development of their inclusive practices was constrained, even undermined, as they deferred to prevailing practices. Although most participants in this study had already developed a sufficiently robust notion of teaching as a practice of enabling learning, and the grounding to reject these views and practices, we were concerned that a few of them had not. It should not be assumed therefore that exposure to a range of teacher attitudes and practices are necessarily beneficial. Participants who focused on the extent to which students were learning (and were less concerned about projecting an image of competence to peers, students and supervising teachers) were better able to both resist prevailing marginalising pressures and regard the difficulties with learning experienced by students as a professional challenge. We thus argue that an understanding of teaching as the practice of enabling learning for all students is essential in enabling pre-service teachers to resist deficit views of student ability, and to accept student difficulties with learning as a professional challenge.

The preparation of pre-service teacher education for inclusive education is crucial for the transformation of the education system. However, the transformation of the education system into a more inclusive one cannot be developed and sustained entirely by the hope that newly qualified teachers will reform system. While they might leave pre-service teacher education committed to the ideals of inclusive education, research has suggested that newly qualified teachers are often marginalised and disempowered in staffrooms, and their concerns and ideas are not always taken seriously by senior teachers (Gravett, Henning, & Eiselen, 2011; Whitelaw, de Beer, & Henning, 2008). For teacher education for inclusion to be an effective intervention, it needs to be coupled with the dismantling of structures that serve to exclude and marginalise (Slee, 2011). Schools themselves need to become inclusive spaces, with practising teachers becoming convinced of the benefits of inclusive education and confident in the use of inclusive pedagogies within their particular context (McKenna et al., 2015; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Until then, there is like to continue to be 'discontinuity between practicing teachers experience and principles of inclusive pedagogy' that

pre-service teachers should be learning during their school-based practicum sessions (McIntyre, 2009, p. 607). Sustainable transformation therefore requires that ongoing professional development of practicing teachers for inclusive education takes place. Up until now, the provision of continuing teacher development has been organised largely through once-off workshops, however, research has shown that this approach has a limited long-term impact on teachers' classroom practices (Walton et al., 2014). Preliminary research (Walton, 2016) suggests that contextually embedded teacher development through professional learning communities (PLCs) might lead to a more sustainable transformation to inclusive education. Once inclusive education becomes the norm in regular schools, the placement of pre-service teachers in regular schools should provide them with opportunities to co-teach with experienced teachers in inclusive settings. Until that time, however, teacher educators will need to continue to find alternative ways of preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education. Practicum placements over contrasting contexts, while not unproblematic, offer some potential for supporting their development of inclusive teaching practices.

Areas for Future Research

We identify two areas that our findings suggest would be worthy of further research. First, given our finding that not all participants in our study were able to resist marginalising practices they observed in particular school contexts, we agree with Florian and Linklater (2010) that a promising avenue of research will be to identify the strategies that pre-service teachers use when they work with supervising teachers who do not teach inclusively. Secondly, a generative avenue for further research would be to understand the disjuncture experienced by newly qualified teachers as they transition from university (where there is a policy and moral imperative that they are prepared theoretically for teaching in inclusive education settings) to the realities of practice-based contexts where, for the most part, inclusive education is not yet prevalent. Our study found evidence that in the short duration of a practicum period, most participants in our study were able to reject deficit views of students held by supervising teachers, and strive (albeit with occasional difficulty) for enabling quality learning for all. This research is required to establish whether this position could be sustained by novice teachers over longer periods of time.

Conclusion and Implications for Initial Teacher Education

In contexts where inclusive education is nascent, teacher educators have the responsibility of ensuring that pre-service teachers are able to teach inclusively. University-based coursework may offer pre-service teachers various theoretical perspectives that support their understanding and commitment towards inclusive teaching. It may even provide pre-service teachers access to pedagogic practices associated with inclusive education. However, when there are too few sites for them to observe and work collaboratively with teachers who model inclusive education, their practicum experiences can potentially undermine the imperative for them to learn to teach inclusively. This study shows that although none of three identified practicum contexts provided pre-service teachers with ideal models of inclusive teaching, practicum experiences in a *combination* of contrasting placement contexts offered an imperfect proxy. Practicum placements in contrasting contexts provided opportunities for pre-service teachers to consider their teaching in relation to different aspects of student diversity.

It increased the likelihood that pre-service teachers were exposed to a context where learning for all is privileged above the individualised support of those with additional learning needs, where teachers have a belief in the capacity of their students to learn and progress and where student difficulties with learning is regarded as a professional challenge for teachers. However, there are risks inherent in this approach. In a small number of cases, the cumulative effects of the emphasis of practicum placements in contrasting contexts served to undermine the goals of inclusive education, as three of the pre-service teachers deferred to the prevalent practices in the school and, in one case, avoided pedagogic responsiveness to the learning needs of students in favour of projecting an image of competence. The pre-service teachers in this study who best demonstrated the orientations for inclusive practices identified by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) were those who could draw on their content and pedagogic knowledge to respond to the different aspects of student diversity they encountered. For this reason, we would recommend that the use of contrasting placements to prepare pre-service teachers for inclusive education is used cautiously and once pre-service teachers have completed a significant percentage of the courses that develop their content and pedagogic knowledge. Coupled with strong university-based coursework on inclusive education, practicum placements across contrasting contexts offer pre-service teachers conditions of possibility to support the development of inclusive teaching practices.

Note

1. Mother-tongue instruction is provided for the first three years of schooling, after which English becomes the official LOLT in 80% of South African schools.

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