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THE NOTIONS OF 'SPECIAL' AND 'EXPERTS' AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO ISSUES OF QUALITY AND EQUITY FOR THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH SEN: AN EXPERIENCE FROM RURAL KENYA.

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Abstract

International and national policy documents support the provision of free public education for all children in regular schools, including children with disabilities. This paper is drawn from a study that investigated the perceptions of educators, parents and teachers in three rural districts in Kenya where national policy supports inclusive education consistent with the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. A qualitative research paradigm utilizing a multiple case study focused on how social experiences are created and given meaning by participants in rural Kenya schools. Interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data from three purposively selected case study schools. 42 participants were interviewed: 24 parents, 3 SEN teachers, 6 regular teachers, 3 head teachers, 3 district quality assurance and standards officers, as well as 3 focus group discussions, 3 observations and documentary analysis. The major findings of the study were that children with SEN are described in very derogatory terms and their education is seen as requiring 'experts' and 'special' resources usually unavailable in regular schooling. There was also a disconnec between SEN policy and practice, and between the various stakeholders. The conclusion drawn is that the notions of 'expert' and 'special' led to the exclusion of children with SEN from regular schooling and society which is against the principles of the *United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child* that Kenya ratified and has entrenched in its laws and policies. There is need to persuade parents and teachers that children with SEN are worthy of an education and that they can also benefit from regular schooling.

Key Words: Special, Experts, Inclusion, Rural Kenya.

Introduction

Access to education is recognized as a basic human right both in the *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (King & McGrath, 2002). In the developing world, this education must incorporate an attempt to identify those groups that have been unable to benefit from the current structures of education and factors that have led to that situation (Mansaray, 1991). This explains the global agenda of Education for All (EFA). The discussion over the education of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) has been problematic. A major development was the *Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education* held in Spain in June 1994 that brought together 92 governments and 25 international

organizations (UNESCO, 1994). The conference reaffirmed the need for EFA and produced a framework for action recommending the integration of SEN children in regular schools and within a child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting their needs (Arbiter & Hartley, 2002).

The education of children with SEN has developed from the periods of neglect characterized by abuse, condemnation and isolation (Winzer, 1993;Tennant, 1996; Hughes, 2002; Mcphail & Freeman, 2005; Hick & Thomas, 2009), the period of segregated education characterized by separate schools (Winzer, 1993; Gallager, 1979; Smith 1999) and the period of integration characterized by educating children with SEN in regular schools in what was referred to as normalization (Wolfensberger, 1972; Thomazet, 2009). These periods were criticized for succeeding only in isolating children with disabilities from the society, assuming that disability was permanent, failing to recognize diversity and violating the rights of these children (Tomlinson, 1982; Ainscow, 1999; McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Nilhom, 2006). This led to a reform movement in special education currently encompassed under the term 'inclusive education' (Winzer & Mazurek, 2005). The philosophy of inclusion shifts attention from the deficits of the children with SEN to the organization of schools and the society. The focus is to make schools accessible to children with SEN in terms of the curriculum, organization, environment and culture (Swain & Cook, 2001; Ainscow, 1995; Slee &Alan, 2001; Heung & Grossman, 2007).

Despite the global acceptance of inclusive education, the notions of 'special' and 'expert' persist in reference to the education of children with SEN. The education of children with SEN is seen as a preserve of 'experts' and 'special' facilities and a battle between different interest groups instead of being a response to children's difficulties (Kopetz & Ifimu, 2008; Osler & Osler, 2002; Powell, 2009; Wamae & Kan'gethe-Kamau, 2004; Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). It can be argued that these notions can lead to the exclusion of children with SEN from regular schooling and society and therefore to a violation of their rights.

The Place of Teachers and Parents in the Education of Children with Sen

Teachers and parents form an integral part of any policy implementation process therefore engaging with and understanding their perspective is important. It has been argued that consultation is important in order to discern policy mutation (Mendez-Morse, 2002; Chimombo, 2005) and ensure broader participation (Williams, 2008). Indeed, the government of Kenya concedes that one the problems with the implementation of the free primary education policy, was lack of consensus building prior to its introduction (World Bank, 2009). The understanding of interest groups can enable us explain the institutionalization of special education (Powell, 2009) and review the perception of special needs education as a non-structural battle between different groups instead of being a rational response to children's difficulties (Osler & Osler, 2002).

Although teachers alone cannot bring about the reforms required replacing special education with inclusive education, they can choose to think positively about the nature of the difficulties

that students encounter and how to respond to them (Florian, 2008). A compelling body of empirical research demonstrates that proportions of contemporary teachers hold negative views and feel inclusion should not be pursued (Swain & Cook, 2001; Wamae and Kan'gethe-Kamau, 2004; McGhie-Richmond, 2009). As opposed to teachers with positive attitudes, teachers who have negative attitudes towards disabilities and are opposed to inclusion show little concern for different needs in their classes (Kagan, 1992; Arbeiter& Hartley, 2002).

Denial by parents of children with disabilities and lack of government support can be setbacks in the quality of life for these children (Browder *et al,* 2007). Parents get frustrated when their children do not behave as per expected societal norms (Carpenter, 2005). These frustrations can directly impact on the education of children with SEN. Schools should be viewed within the broader context of the social and economic lives of the people around them. Lamada (2007) argues that parents make choices about the education of their children guided by reasons that may not be purely educational but social and economic as well. In instances where education is not seen as leading to benefits, parents will be reluctant to facilitate the education of their children. This is similar to situations where parents are ashamed of having a disabled child and perceive such a child's education as being unworthy and view their education as the responsibility of the schools or government (Heung & Grossman, 2007). Meyer, Bevan-Brown, Hyun-Sook and Savage (2010) contend that parental non-involvement in the education of their children may result from the perception that professionals are "experts" and therefore questioning them may be disrespectful.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Kenya

Many children with disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially those in rural areas, are excluded from the public education system or enrolled when they are over school-going age (UNESCO, 2004). Most African governments have demonstrated only a policy level interest in the education of children with SEN. Some of the factors that contribute to the general neglect that people with disabilities experience in Kenya include superstition that disability is a curse from the gods, or punishment for sins committed by parents, among others (Ndurumo, 1993; Mukuria and Korir, 2006). Factors such as lack of awareness and low priority given to education of children with disabilities in developing countries mean that a small percentage of them are enrolled in school (Kisanji, 1998) while special schools exist in cities where they are accessed by the minority city dwellers (Kalyanpur, 1996). It has also been pointed out that the poor economies of developing countries mean they spend less on education and therefore provide special education to a smaller population (Putman, 1979). In Kenya, special education has traditionally targeted children with physical handicaps (Putman, 1979). Provision for SEN is the responsibility of the government but because of its poor economy, Non-governmental Organisations participate in the providing this education. Following the introduction of free primary education in 2003, public primary schools with special/integrated units recorded a significant increase in enrolment (Wainaina, 2005).

ElimuYetu Foundation (2007), an organisation that advocates for the rights of disabled persons in Kenya, estimates that the population of people with disabilities in Kenya is 10% of the total population. About 25% of these are children of school-going age. Of 750,000, an

estimated 90,000 have been identified and assessed, but only 14,614 are enrolled in educational programmes for children with disabilities while an equivalent number are integrated in regular schools. This suggests that over 90% of handicapped children are either at home or in regular schools with little or no specialized assistance. The government administers 57 special primary schools for children with disabilities. There are 153 integrated units in regular primary schools, 3 high schools for persons with physical disabilities, 2 high schools for persons with hearing disabilities and 1 high school for persons with visual disabilities. Thus, children with SEN who cannot get a place in a public school must find a place in a private school, at a cost ranging from $192 to $641 per term; which is a considerable expense in a country where, according to the *United Nations Human Development Report* for 2003, about 23% of Kenyans live on less than $1 a day.

According to a report by the United Disabled Persons of Kenya (2003), an organization that fights for the rights of people with disabilities in Kenya, people with learning difficulties have been marginalized regarding the distribution of resources because they have been perceived as more of a liability than a group of contributors. They live in poverty; have limited opportunities for accessing education, health, and suitable housing and employment. One of the difficulties of addressing special needs education in Kenya is the lack of information and research evidence on the extent and nature of special education provision. There is relatively little evidence at school level of details of provision and educational aims (Muuya, 2002) while much of the literature available is written by authors from northern countries and therefore influenced by northern perspectives. The Ministry of Education in Kenya acknowledges that research in special needs education and disability is inadequate. The 2009 SEN policy indicates that Kenya has been slow in generating knowledge and taking advantage of new and emerging innovations in the field of disability. Constraints facing research and development include lack of effective coordination between various actors, lack of harmonization on research policies, and limited research funding. Other challenges are limited appreciation for the role of research and documentation, poor linkages between research and development programmes, inadequate mechanisms and systems for dissemination of and utilisation of research findings, and absence of an up-to-date research resource centre (MOE, 2009). The little research conducted in Kenya seems to concentrate in urban areas for reasons such as "practicality" and "accessibility" (Muuya, 2002) which would alienate many children in rural areas whose circumstances may be different. It has been observed that research needs to consider local contexts (Peters, 1993; Booth & Aiscow, 1998; Meyer, 2003).

Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and those from poor households in Kenya are not enrolled in early childhood development centres (ECDC). There is therefore need to develop and implement appropriate ECDC programmes for children with SEN, including vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, in order to enhance access. In Kenya, rural preschools tend to be poor compared to urban and suburban schools. In terms of staffing, communities often call on retired teachers, mothers, high school dropouts, and volunteers who provide their services for free or at a minimum salary (Mbugua, 2004). Given the importance attributed to early identification and intervention for children with SEN, this situation does not augur well . Currently, there are no pre-school units targeting children with SEN. Parents, most of them without skills, are the only educators and care-providers at this level (Mukuria & Korir, 2006).

Following a report of the taskforce on special needs education appraisal exercise commissioned by the Ministry of Education (Kenya) in November 2003, a draft *Special Needs Education Policy* was released in April 2008 and adapted into a policy document in 2009 with little changes. Some of the guiding principles of the policy are a guarantee for the rights of children with SEN including equal access to all educational institutions, non-discriminative enrolment and retention of learners with special needs in any institution of learning and barrier-free transition of SNE learners through the various educational levels in accordance with their abilities. Other rights include a learner-centred curriculum and responsive learning systems and materials, protection of the human dignity and rights of learners with disabilities and the active and proactive primary role of parents and families as caregivers and health providers of their children. These rights are backed by the *Kenya Constitution* 2010, various legal notices, and the *Children's Act* of 2001. The implication here is that it is the responsibility of the entire education and social system to attend to the educational and life concerns of all children, including those with special needs and disabilities.

Purpose of the study

This was part of a study to explore the perspectives of teachers and parents on the quality of education for children with SEN in the era of free primary education in rural Kenya. The assumption was that since the government had declared that primary education was free, all children would have access to education. This paper will examine the perceptions of the participants on the education offered to children with SEN. Particular emphasis is laid on whether the education of such children should be left to "experts" and requires "special" facilities.

Theoretical framework

This study was informed by the doctrine that children's rights are human rights that they are entitled to, equal to other human beings (Alanen, 2010). Children with disabilities have undeniably and consistently occupied the role of 'others' in schools (LaNear & Frattura, 2009). As a result, a critical theory approach that pays attention to the marginalized in the society informed this study. Critical theory seeks to empower individuals, confront injustice and critique certain aspects of the society that are oppressive (Kincheloe & Mclaren, 2008; Prasad, 2005). It is an attempt to address socioeconomic and cultural injustices (Fraser, 1995) which are prevalent among marginalized groups such as children with SEN. The ways to equity and quality in education for children with SEN should be seen in the wider context of social justice. But what does social justice mean for children with SEN? Is it socio-economic and grounded in exploitation, economic marginalization and deprivation, or is it cultural and grounded in society's patterns of representation, interpretation and communication, or is it both options? (Frazer, 1995).How can it be realized? Can it be addressed by some kind of redistribution where resources are distributed and basic economic structures transformed to serve all (Frazer, 1995) or by recognition, (Frazer, 1995; Gale, 2000; Young and Quibell, 2000) which would include some positive revaluation of disrespected identities and cultural outcomes of despised groups? Will recognition be construed to mean we are still identifying certain groups as "others"?

Can a combination of both redistribution and recognition address injustice for children with SEN? Frazer (1995) agrees and adds a concept of "transformative" which seeks to address disability injustice by restructuring the systems that give rise to disability and a deconstruction aimed at eliminating discrimination against disabled people. Proponents of the restricting principle (Chistensen & Dorn, 1997; Gale, 2000; Lanear & Frattura, 2009) argue that affording children with SEN an opportunity to be in class with their non-disabled peers does not necessarily guarantee them quality education if they are treated as "others". Does this then justify special education? Would it not be unjust to separate children with SEN from their non-disabled peers? Can we justify both inclusion and special education using the principles of equity and social justice? Christensen and Dorn (1997) capture this dilemma: How can some writers argue for the dismantling of special education based on grounds of equity and social justice, while others argue for the retention of extant structures on the same grounds? If special education has been at many times and in many places fundamentally unjust, why has it continued as part of public schooling for nearly a century in the United States? (p.182)

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) is seen as a typical attempt to achieve social justice for children with SEN. The CRC is viewed as providing nations with a clear and comprehensive legal tool dedicated to children's rights (Detrick, 1992). It offers a core point of debate on how modern societies should protect and empower children (Dillon, 2010). The CRC sets out the rights of all children to life, identity, security, family, housing, health and education, and to freedom from exploitation and protection of their dignity. According to the CRC, the right to education should be recognized on the basis of equality of opportunity where each child has an equal right to a school of their choice (Campbell, 2002). This sets the ground for inclusive education which is seen by many educationists as affording children with SEN equitable and quality education (UNESCO, 2000; Meyer, 2001; Campbell, 2002; Osler & Starkey, 2005Moor, Melchior & Davis, 2008). This study was pinned on the categorization of the CRC into the 3Ps: Protection, Provision and Participation, those of recognition (services, material benefits), protection and participation and was based on the recognition that children, especially those in poor and difficult conditions need special protection, and have needs that require specific provision (Osler & Starkey, 2005).

Modes of inquiry

This study was exploring people's perspectives in their natural setting and this was possible through a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research operates in a natural setting, places emphasis on those being studied, and stresses how social experiences are created and given meaning (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005; Silverman, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The study employed a case study approach within a qualitative methodological paradigm. It was preferred because it is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomena are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009; Cohen, Marion & Morrison, 2000). The approach ensures that we get closer and more detailed perspectives of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This research employed a constructivist model which encourages researchers to focus on how phenomena develop through close study of interaction in different

contexts. The interest is in documenting how human beings make sense of the experiences they are exposed to (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Silverman, 2006; Gray, 2009).

Data analysis procedures

This study employed a thematic data analysis procedure. It followed six steps as identified by Braun and Clarke (2006). The following table illustrates the phases.

Table 1: Procedures followed in thematic data analysis

Phase	Description of the process
Familiarizing with data.	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data; noting down initial ideas.
Generating initial codes.	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set; collating data relevant to each code.
Searching for themes.	Collating codes into potential themes; gathering data relevant to each potential theme.
Reviewing themes.	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set; generating a thematic "map" of the analysis.
Defining and naming themes.	On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
Producing the report.	The final opportunity for analysis: Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples; final analysis of selected extracts; relating back of the analysis to the research questions and literature; producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006 p. 87).

Data sources

In this study, interviews, focus group discussions and observations were used to collect data. This research involved case studies of three schools selected from three different districts (hereby named A, B and C) in what is referred to as a multiple-case study (Yin, 2009). In selecting the districts and schools, the study employed a literal replication process (Yin 2009) whereby findings from the schools were expected to be similar given that rural schools in Kenya tend to be similar in most characteristics. The selection of the cases and participants was purposive to ensure that the groups, settings and individuals and processes being studied were available (Denzin& Lincoln, 2008). The schools were selected because they had special

education units for children with SEN alongside regular classes in the schools. The district SEN coordinators were requested to identify the schools. The first to accept to participate in the research was selected. The region represented by these districts was the researcher's home area. Districts were selected in the order of one to the far south, one in the middle and one to the far north. Due to perceived low literacy levels on the part of parents, it was possible for the researcher to communicate in the local language.

A total of 42 people participated in this study. They included twenty four parents (P), three SEN teachers (ST), six regular teachers (T), three head teachers (HT), and three quality assurance and standards officers (QS). Three focus group discussions (TF) with regular teachers were facilitated; one in each school.

Findings

The government of Kenya in its SEN policy commits itself to inclusive education and articulates that all children including those with SEN should attend the school nearest to their home regardless of age or disability unless there are compelling reasons which may mean they attend special schools (Ministry of Education, 2009). However, a major finding of this study was that the notions of 'special' and 'experts' were very persistent. In fact, the SEN coordinators felt that by articulating inclusive education, the government was living in pretense.

We have had several challenges because education in Kenya is a bit hypocritical. There are sometimes when we assume to be at a certain level, when we are far off. In any case, the government is pretending when we are talking of inclusive education [CSC]

The government posts at least a SEN teacher to each school that has registered children with SEN. This was seen by the regular teachers as absolving them from the task of teaching children with SEN. Well because the government has trained the special needs teachers, if they are there, why are these children included in regular classes? That is my question [AT2]

The district SEN coordinators said that they were in a constant 'fight' with the 'other' government departments over the education of children with SEN. They felt that children with SEN were given the least priority in terms of resources such as funding and staffing;
When it comes to funding, they first fund secondary school education, then fund primary education and if there is any money left, they give to special education. Sometimes there is no money left so special education doesn't get anything [BSC]

The quality assurance and standards officers were responsible for ensuring that quality education was provided to all children including those with SEN. However, they stated that they did not have the 'special skills' to inspect the education of children with SEN;
I can say we don't have adequate skills. There are certain cases like mentally handicapped; it becomes a very big challenge to quality assurance officers because that one requires a very serious special needs person to be able to understand [BQS]

The SEN coordinators and the SEN teachers (experts) were emphatic that the quality assurance and standards officers did not have the skills to supervise the education of children with SEN. They suggested that these officers needed training in order to be of help in the education of children with SEN.

Actually these people (quality assurance and standards officers) are not aware of what is being done in SEN...It is their responsibility but they do not have the knowledge to assess what is going on in the SEN classes. They cannot advice the SEN teachers on their work because they do not know. [CSC]

In the schools, there was a bridge between the regular teachers (non-experts) and the SEN teachers (experts). The SEN teachers felt that the regular teachers had negative attitudes towards children with SEN and their education. The SEN teachers were also of the opinion that their training had made them better teachers of children with SEN and that the regular teachers needed training.

When they (regular teachers) see that we (SEN teachers) are not there, these learners are chased off, they are making noise, they are doing this and that, so the whole day they end up accusing us and saying that we have turned their school to be a mad school...so normally when we are not here, we tell these learners not to come to school especially those ones who are not inclusive [CST].

The regular teachers stated that they were not rained to teach children with SEN and therefore it was not their responsibility. They were emphatic that children with SEN should be taught in "special" schools by "experts". They stated that children with SEN performed poorly in class, had difficult behavior, they needed skills that they did not have and therefore should be separated from the 'other' children.

Most of these children don't know how to read they are not even interested. When you are teaching they are doing their own things. It disturbs us since we are not trained for the same, I feel please these children are supposed to be taken to their special school and taught by their special teachers or specialists. I think that they should have their own school and far away from others (all of them laughing) [ATF7].

Although many parents did not have sufficient knowledge about what their children were learning in school, they still felt that their children could learn better in a "special" school with "special" resources.

These children (with SEN) should have their own school with things like playgrounds adapted to their needs" (BP4).

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Despite policy advocacy for inclusion, there was evidence from this study that the major stakeholders were emphatic that children with SEN require separate educational provision. It appears that the notions "expert" and "special" contribute to the exclusion of children with SEN from regular schooling. In my discussion, I will review why the notions are persistent and whether it is in the best interest of children with SEN that they learn separately.

Why the notions are persistent

The government of Kenya recognises SEN as a distinct service. There is a specific department whose responsibility is special education. Kenya's policy on SEN aims to rehabilitate children with SEN, provide them with skills to adjust to the environment and provide specially trained teachers. Teachers are trained to identify children with SEN and teach them appropriately (Wainaina, 2005; Mukuria&Korir, 2006; MOE, 2009). The SEN coordinators in this study stated that one of their main responsibilities was to ensure that each school with a special education unit had a SEN teacher. The government of Kenya also articulates through policy that the learning needs of children with SEN and the 'others' are not entirely the same and therefore curriculum for the two should be different(MOE, 2001). The Kenya Institute of Education defines special education as education of children who have learning difficulties as a result of not coping with the "normal" school organisation and instruction methods (MOE, 2009). Most participants in this study echoed the government position that children with SEN could not cope with the regular curriculum because the curriculum was 'supposed to be taught to the normal children' and that curriculum for children with SEN should be 'different from the one we use in our normal learning institutions'. It is therefore hard to blame them for that.

Interestingly, the SEN policy in Kenya also provides that children with disabilities need to be included in regular schooling unless there are compelling circumstances that suggest otherwise. The SEN coordinators in this study appeared to be in what they called a 'battle' with regular education staff to have these children included in regular schooling and get other services.The SEN coordinators also said they had to engage in a 'serious war' with the district education office in order to secure enough supply of SEN teachers. This seemed to cultivate a notion that children with disabilities must use disability as a platform to access regular schooling and other services. Priestly (2000) argues that policy articulation presents children with SEN as a vulnerable group who then have to use this 'vulnerability' to access services.

The creation of special education alongside regular education in many policy articulations creates two conflicting positions. This, according to Osler and Osler (2002) makes special education appear like a non-structural battle between different groups instead of being a rational and equitable response to children's difficulties. It explains the "battles" evidenced in this study; between SEN coordinators and other government officials notably the district education officers and the quality assurance and standards officers, between the SEN coordinators and the schools, and between the SEN teachers (experts) and regular teachers.

This supports the argument that the historical construction of special education separated children into 'normal' and 'abnormal'. The result has been a focus on leaner deficits and the belief that only 'experts' can meet the educational needs of children with SEN (Ballard, 1990; Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2000; Heung & Grossman, 2007). The Ministry of Education in Kenya appears to present an ambiguous policy on inclusion that brings forth variations in expectations and practice.

Another factor to consider is that the existence of children with a label of SEN creates the need for special education as opposed to inclusion. It is like a relationship between a business and customers. You cannot close a business if you have the customers, you would rather expand the business. In this study, children with SEN (mental handicaps) whose needs were deemed to be severe attended special education units separate from their peers. The government position according to the government officers was to open more units where a number of children with SEN had been identified and post SEN teachers to these schools. It was like looking for the customers.

There has been an observation that the additional resources that come with a label can make special education attractive (Powell, 2009). There was no evidence that parents in this study considered additional resources as a factor in having their children receive special education. However, schools received additional funds for having a special education unit and more funding per pupil with SEN from the FPE kitty. There is a possibility that this additional funding could motivate head teachers to prefer labeling children. The SEN coordinators and teachers complained that the head teachers were using money meant for SEN for other purposes, purposes they (head teachers) felt were more important.

There was evidence in this study that children with SEN occupied the role of "others". This is consistent with various studies that have found that children with disabilities occupy the role of 'others' and are considered a distinct group whose needs are addressed when those of the more able ones have been addressed (Heung & Grossman, 2007; LaNear & Frattura, 2009). The problem would be how a distinction is made between one group of children and another. Osler and Starkey (2005) argue that there is an oversimplified understanding of what a 'normal learner' is. This ignores the fact that even within the group of 'normal' learners, there can be differences. The assertion by participants in this study that children with SEN were 'abnormal', 'insane', 'dunderheads', 'less intelligent', 'food-mongers', 'destructive', 'abusive' and 'disruptive' can therefore be problematic and lead to unfair treatment of children with SEN. Indeed, the SEN teachers complained that the regular teachers did not value the work of teaching children with SEN and sometimes 'threw' or 'chased' them out of the regular classes; accusing the SEN teachers of 'turning their school to be a mad school'. It should be noted that the participants based their labels on a comparison between children with SEN and their peers in terms of behaviour and response to the regular school curriculum. It is not obvious that these factors are sufficient to label a child 'abnormal'? It is also not obvious at what level of curriculum response and behaviour a child can be labelled 'abnormal'.

There is another school of thought suggesting that although it is not clear how teachers may acquire the 'special' skills to teach diverse students, they nevertheless need skills and

professional help in order to put in place responsive teaching strategies (Winzer&Mazurek, 2005; MacArthur et al, 2007; Florian, 2008) to avoid a situation where children will be taught in exclusion, inadequatelyin regular classes (Mutua&Dimitrov, 2001; Stough, 2003;) or what Slee and Allan (2001) refer to as exclusion of the included. This was the position that was taken by most participants in this study. The quality assurance and standards officers said that they needed special skills in order to supervise the education of children with SEN although they said it was their role to ensure 'quality teaching and learning' in schools, the regular teachers said that they needed special skills to teach children with SEN, the SEN coordinators and the SEN teachers (experts) concurred although the coordinators criticised the training available. The SEN teachers also stated that they were better placed to teach children with SEN because of their 'special training'. This may explain why the concept of inclusion faces significant resistance from the major stakeholders in the education sector. Research has shown that regular teachers do not demonstrate responsibility to disabled students (Winzer & Mazurek, 2005; O'Neill et al, 2009). This depicts a struggle by practitioners to find ways of including children with disabilities in what would be a reformed education system. It has been demonstrated (e.g. Fisher & Meyer, 2002) that the inclusion of children with SEN in regular schooling can lead to gains in terms of development and social competence.

Another issue of concern is what the place of 'special education' and 'experts' would be if schools were to become truly inclusive. It has been argued that special education is an attempt to address the individual needs of particular learners and therefore in its absence, schools may not be able to provide for everyone (Florian, 2008). Inclusive education may also deny children with SEN access to an IEP Plan which is a legal document in some countries (Wehmeyer, Lattin & Agran, 2001). The regular teachers in this study questioned why children with SEN were included in regular classes if there were SEN (specially trained) teachers. Some of the teachers criticised the idea of sending SEN teachers to schools as it made it look like they 'owned' the children with SEN. The head teachers did not even know what transition and progress meant for children with SEN. They asked questions such as 'which class do they belong to and where will they end? Some scholars (e.g. Winzer & Mazurek, 2005) have advocated for partial inclusion where students are placed in general settings where appropriate with a focus on selecting a setting where they succeed. Winzer and Mazurek (1998) argue that if the needs of a child with SEN are not met in regular classroom, it would be in the best interest of that child to be placed in a special classroom. It has also been argued that ignoring children's impairment-related differences and identity and make them conform to a majority culture may imply denying diversity among children and therefore not the best option (MacArthur et al, 2007). A report by UNESCO (2000) warns that the policy of inclusive education should be applied carefully lest some children and their needs disappear in a monolithic setting that would extend the disability status. The policy guidelines in Kenya use the term special education to refer to the education of children with SEN which is consistent with the use of the term in other countries such as New Zealand (O'Neill et al, 2009). Would you then fault regular teachers for taking a position as outsiders in the education of children with SEN or is special education prevailing, as Tomlinson (1982; 1985) argues, because its presence makes professionals in the field of SEN relevant and may be a diversionary tactic to depoliticise school failure?

The education system in Kenya emphasizes examinations and participants in this study echoed that notion. The quality assurance and standards officers and regular teachers felt that the presence of children with SEN in the schools was lowering the overall performance of the schools. The teachers argued that because their performance was judged on the performance of pupils in examinations, there was no reason why they would have children who performed poorly in their classes. This is similar to what Lister (2006) observed in a study about the UK education system which focuses on children for who they will be in the future and what they will contribute to the economy at the expense of the quality of children's lives, equality and rights. At individual level, regular teachers in this study voiced the idea that they would rather focus on the 'normal' children who they can contact in later life for help. They also accused the parents of having little interest in the education of their children because of the same reasons. This may be the reason why some parents withdrew their children from school to work and earn the family some money. Such a social investment model may not adequately address the needs of certain children who may be regarded as unworthy of investment.

Schools not just in Kenya but at a global level are under intense pressure for increased performance which may undermine a combined effort of all the stakeholders involved in the education of children with SEN (Neel et al, 2003). The emphasis on academic performance presents teachers and education systems with two conflicting philosophies; one of accommodating differences in class and the other a stress on academic achievement of students in a high-stakes examination-based education system. Given that children with SEN may find the general curriculum demanding, it would be difficult for teachers to illustrate that their teaching has produced learning where effective learning is viewed in terms of academic achievement (Arbeiter & Hartley, 2002; Benjamin, 2005; Winzer & Mazurek, 2005;Heung & Grossman, 2007). The quality assurance and standards officers in this study said that teachers were not willing to have children with SEN in their classes because they were lowering the mean grades of their performance. The SEN coordinators complained that head teachers were refusing to register children with SEN for the final primary school examinations because of the same concerns. My interpretation is that this is a result of the dilemma in which schools find themselves in and not necessarily their unwillingness to accommodate all children in their classes.

What is interesting, if not confusing in the Kenyan situation is that the district education officers were accountable to the Ministry of Education for the performance of schools in examinations. In turn, head teachers had to account to the district education office if their schools were not performing well in examinations. The head teachers passed on the pressure to the teachers. On the other hand, the government emphasises free inclusive primary education where schools cannot turn away any children regardless of their ability. This is the provision that the SEN coordinators used to press for the registration of children with SEN in national examinations. This situation created a serious dilemma for all regular staff. How were they to meet the demands of the national curriculum and accommodate children with SEN at the same time? If examinations were not the measure of the success of an education system, what would be the alternative?

Critiques of an examination-based system (e.g. Wolhuter, 2007) have argued that examinations tend to measure the ability of children to recall facts and not the ability to use the knowledge received in the service of the community. But how would students be rewarded for 'working hard' in schools in the absence of an examinations or testing system? At the end of each school term in Kenyan primary schools, there is a closing ceremony where children who perform well in tests are rewarded while teachers will take credit for the same performance. How would you reward children whose performance in the tests is wanting? This brings into play the argument that justice is about people receiving what they deserve in terms of input and output (Nozick, 1976). This has led to the characterisation of schools as places where children are rewarded according to academic success (Christensen & Dorn, 1997;Gale, 2000). The head teachers in this study did not know how to describe the success or transition of children with SEN because they did not sit for the regular exams and when they did, they performed poorly. The sceptics according to Kittay (2001) would question why public resources should be invested in a group of children who would not produce output instead of putting those resources in children who would reciprocate. Whatever the positions taken by different schools of thought, it is evident that the education of children with SEN is perceived as being outside "normal' school structures. The next section will examine if children with SEN should be educated separately.

Should children with SEN learn separately?

The position by many participants is this study that children with SEN should be separated from their peers contrasts with internationally recognised children rights and Kenya's commitment to free primary education for all children. The perception by regular teachers in this study that there were 'normal' and 'abnormal' children goes against the commitment to establish a world fit for all children. The teachers' argument that children with SEN should be separated from the 'other' children is a violation of the children's rights. The UN principles apply to all children in all countries. Teachers have a particular role to play in ending discrimination against certain groups of children. This is a big ask for teachers in circumstances like those in this study where the education system did not view children with SEN as a viable investment and where the regular teachers were unaware of legislation regarding children with SEN despite its existence. The issues raised by the teachers include: children with SEN being disruptive, dirty, moody among others are not sufficient to suggest these children could not learn together with their peers. Children with SEN may look and behave in different ways but that does not mean they are not rights-holding children like any other.

Children are entitled to human rights equal to other human beings (Campbell, 2002; Alanen, 2010). Placing children with SEN in special education violates their rights, assumes disability is a permanent condition and only serves to isolate the children without addressing their differences (Tomlinson, 1982, McLaughlin & Jordan, 2005; Nilhom, 2006). Children's rights that respect co-existence, equality and diversity is in line with the principles of the CRC which favour inclusive education (Osler & Starkey, 2005; Hodgkin & Newel, 2007). The children's act in Kenya (2001) commits to give effect to the principles of the CRC. The principles of the SNE policy in Kenya (2009) include a guarantee for the right of children with SEN such as equal access to all educational institutions. The Kenyan constitution (2010) provides that

children with disabilities have a right to benefit from a full and decent life. Policies for the education of children with SEN should be accompanied by information regarding how the education of children with SEN alongside their nondisabled peers will not only benefit the children themselves but also their communities in signalling to the wide society the value of diversity (Campbell (2002). Children with disabilities who are included have access to enhanced opportunities to learn skills needed for their communities from nondisabled peers who, in turn, can develop new capacities to adapt and grow in today's diverse world (Meyer, 2001). Ray (2010) argues that as children grow the significance of their peers and older children in directing their behavior and forming their values increases. Studies have shown that children with disabilities benefit from learning when they spend more time in regular classrooms and their presence can have a positive influence on the achievement of those without SEN and regular teachers (Blackorby et al 2005;Demeris, Childs and Jordan, 2007; MacArthur *et al,* 2007).

Schools are expected to be inclusive and act in the best interest of all children (Osler & Starkey, 2005) so that separating children with SEN is seen as locating the problem within individual children and not schools and their ways of teaching (Ainscow, 1999; Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2000; Dyson, 2001). Emphasis needs to be placed on eliminating barriers for both teachers and children by restructuring schools so that they can accommodate all children (Ainscow, 1999; Slee & Alan, 2001; Swain & Cook, 2005; Heung & Grossman, 2007; Thomazet, 2009; Powell, 2009). SEN are not caused solely by deficiencies within the child but interaction between the child and the environment (Warnock, 1978) and therefore differences in learners should be seen as an essential part of reality (Heung & Grossman, 2007). The role of education should be to support that diversity through transforming educational pedagogy in order to achieve what Swain and Cook (2001) refer to as evaluating and celebrating difference. But what does this mean for teachers who are guided by a contradicting education policy and cultural perception which regard children with SEN as a liability? What would it mean for schools to restructure? What seemed to be understood by teachers in this study was 'special education' (they referred to the SEN teacher as *'the teacher of special'*) and mainstream education and therefore inclusive education was something vague. In this study, teachers took little responsibility for the poor services available to children with SEN. Where they did not blame the inadequacy of resources, they blamed the children for being unable to fit in the regular education system, the parents for being disinterested or blamed each other.

Final thoughts

The findings of this study indicate that mainstream education stakeholders view the education of children with SEN as requiring something more than what is available in regular schooling. This is consistent with other research which has found out that mainstream staff view inclusive education as a policy doomed to fail (Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Swain & Cook, 2001; Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2000). Regular teachers find themselves operating between two conflicting philosophies; the philosophy of accommodating differences in class on one hand and the stress on academic achievement of students on the other (Heung & Grossman, 2007). Florian (2008) captures this dilemma by questioning; If inclusive education was to be a process of responding to individual differences within the structures and processes that are

available to all learners rather than something separate from them, what would be the role of specialist teachers and what should be the nature of their expertise? (p. 202).

This study hopes to inform policy in Kenya that it is needless to 'pretend' that inclusive education can be implemented when those in charge of its implementation do not understand its substance and do not see it as their responsibility. There is need to turn attention to the socio-cultural elements of disability and articulate the fact that disability is a social problem (Winzer, 1993; McDermott &Varrene, 1995; Phyllis, 2005; Oloo, 2006). Emphasis needs to be placed on persuading mainstream staff that large numbers of children will experience similar problems and that the solution is not isolating children with SEN but addressing the institutional and societal barriers that create the notions of 'special' and 'experts' (Dyson, 2001; Winzer & Mazurek, 2005; Powel, 2009; Thomazet, 2009). It is to prepare teachers to internalize the idea that knowledge or 'expertise' alone is not enough to ensure quality education for children with SEN. Rouse (2008) identifies 'doing' and 'believing' as complementing knowledge. As Florian (2008) observes, the important question is how teachers can be supported to develop the knowledge, believes and practices to support inclusion.

Policy designers are also drawn to the idea of dialogue and participation is formulating implementable inclusive practices for children with SEN. It is in the realization that knowledge that is imposed upon a people by experts and professionalization of all knowledge cannot have local relevance (Prasad, 2005; Habermas, 1972). Policies for the education of children with SEN should clarify that when disabled children learn together with their nondisabled peers, it signals to the wide society the value of diversity (Campbell, 2002) and gives disabled children the opportunity to learn skills such as socially appropriate behavior using their peers as models (Meyer, 2001).

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