

Inclusion and Sport: Analysis of Selected South African Township Schools

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Abstract. In 1994, South Africa adopted an inclusive system of education in line with the rest of the world. The doors of learning were opened to all learners regardless of their background or disability. However, in spite of the changes, the notion of inclusive school sport as enshrined and articulated in White Paper 6 on special needs' education published by the South African Department of Basic Education in 2001 has not been fully realized in terms of enabling a diverse inclusive sporting environment for all learners. The research on which this article is based therefore attempted to analyze the nature of school sport and suggest mechanisms for making school sport inclusive. The data of the qualitative study were extracted from interviews conducted with six principals, six sport organizers from three primary schools, and three physically disabled secondary-school learners from the Free State province of South Africa. To triangulate the data, interviews were conducted with three physically disabled secondary-school learners. A structuration theory lens and inductive analytical framework were used to analyze the data. The findings indicate that not enough provision has been made to accommodate the diverse sporting needs of learners, despite the implementation of inclusive education, and that teachers are not yet ready for inclusive school sport.

Key concepts: agency, education, inclusive education, inclusive sport, sport, structure

Introduction and background

In 2001 the South African government adopted White Paper 6, which is a policy framework for the implementation of inclusive education published by the Department of Education of Education (DoE, 2001). The aim was to realize the educational priority of opening the door of learning to all learners since the advent of the new educational dispensation in 1994. The policy on inclusion was derived from the principles enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 200 of 1993 which states in section 32 (a) that “every person shall have the right to basic education and equal access to educational institutions” (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996).

Despite this constitutional imperative, Phasha (cited in Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2010) indicates that, while this right to education is guaranteed, there are learners whose educational needs call for more resources beyond what mainstream schools can offer. Phasha further states that more provision should be made to accommodate all learners in schools as the Constitution and international declarations and treaties such as the Salamanca Statement referred to. Although the policy of inclusion has been adopted in South Africa, there appear to be problems with regard to its implementation at grassroots level (Makoelle, 2012). The lack of resources and inclusive pedagogic skills on the part of the teachers has made it a daunting task to create a fully sustainable inclusive education environment. Inclusion, according to the White Paper 6 policy framework, has to be realized in all schooling areas, from the foundation phase to university level. Phasha (cited in Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2010) identified various factors that continue to hamper the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa. These include the attitudes and ingrained beliefs of stakeholders, the variable capacity of schools to implement inclusion, and the tendency to borrow most practices from different contexts. These and many other factors have far-reaching implications for the realization of an inclusive schooling system.

While Phasha (2010), Makoelle (2013) and other education researchers have focused on practices within the classroom, few studies have actually explored other aspects of schooling such as school sport and its contribution towards

achieving inclusion. In South Africa, each school is expected to have some extramural activities involving sport. My observation is that, while schools have accommodated learners from different backgrounds in terms of the inclusion policy, few schools have actually given thought to how they can make school sport inclusive to accommodate the diverse kinds of learners they have enrolled. The study reported on in this article therefore analyzed the inclusive nature of school sport and how it could be used to develop sustainable inclusive education environments. The findings support my contention that sport has neither been made fully inclusive in schools nor has enough provision been made for the participation of learners in sport. I aver that sport is not yet perceived as an integral part of an inclusive pedagogy and it is therefore not sufficiently utilized to enhance sustainable inclusive learning environments.

The theoretical framework

In this article I have adopted the structuration theory of [Giddens \(1984; 2013\)](#) to assist me in understanding the dynamics of the reality of sport and inclusion. The significance of agent, agency and structure is located within the context of an inclusive schooling system. According to Giddens (1984), there is a dual relationship and a constant dynamic tension between the structure and agents of inclusive school sport. This implies that in this duality the structure has a constraining effect on the agent, while agents through their agency influence the structure in turn. Therefore agency is critical for the production and reproduction of the structure through what is referred to as a reflexive process. The following extract is the key to understanding the significance of agency in producing and reproducing the structure:

“... in and through their activities as agents, they reproduce the conditions that make activities possible” Structure is not to be equated with constraint, but is always both constraining and enabling” (Giddens, 1984, p. 25).

With regard to this quotation, Pantic (2013) sees teachers as agents of change within inclusive education. Therefore less emphasis is placed on the agency of learners within an inclusive education system. By contrast, this article emphasizes the agency of both the teacher and the learner in the school's inclusive sporting structure. Pantic describes agency as the "human power to make a difference within given structures and cultures and to transform or reproduce them" (cited in [Archer, 2000 & Giddens, 1984](#)). The attributes of agency are identified as:

- a sense of purpose
- competence
- scope of autonomy and
- reflexivity

These attributes are critical to the learner and the teacher who act as agents within the education structure. Therefore it is critical to place the situatedness of the learner and the teacher within the context of an evolving and transforming education environment while their role in the process of transformation is being analyzed. Given the duality of the structure and agency, the school becomes an emancipatory and a transformative space where activities within it have to empower rather than constrain. In this article, the role of both the teacher and the learner as agents within the school and the school sporting structure is analyzed in relation to how inclusive school sport is.

The role of sport in education

There is a general view that sport and education are closely related. However, there is also an indication that sport for learners who exhibit some form of disability has not been well grounded in schools. This is well articulated in the Millennium Development Goals (UNESCO, 2005). Musengi and Mudyahoto (2010) conducted a study in Masvingo Urban in Zimbabwe and found that a low expectation for sport was evident for learners with disabilities from both teachers and non-disabled learners in schools. It also revealed that provision had not been made for inclusive sport in schools. This study, one among many, shows that

practices of exclusion are still prevalent in many schools despite efforts to implement inclusion. Sport has been found to be beneficial for learning or educational outcomes. For instance, [Bailey \(2006\)](#) postulates that it is not only the participation in sport that fosters a spirit of success among learners but also the interaction that it promotes between the teachers and learners. According to [Bailey \(2006\)](#), sport yields positive experience, enjoyment, diversity and engagement, of all which result in potential benefits for participation. The indication is that sport is a necessary activity that could bring learners together, foster scholastic patriotism among the learners, and the benefit of mutual co-existence which is pivotal for inclusion.

Seymour, Reid and Bloom (2009) take a broader view of the importance of sport by arguing that sport enhances social interaction and the development of friendship between diverse learner populations, which is fundamental for inclusive interdependence among the diversity of individuals. The benefits of sport in education have been well documented by Penny (2008) who shows how sport contributes positively to lifelong learning, inclusivity and excellence. Azzarito and Solomon (2006), in turn, regard sport as empowering, if constructed as an educational space for the body to transform and express the self freely and positively.

Various authors have looked at inclusive sport from the point of view of different contexts. For instance, Sykes and McPhail (2008) have raised concerns about the exclusion of overweight and obese learners from sport and aver that this could have far-reaching negative effects such as instilling a sense of alienation and poor self-concept in the learners. Authors such as Lambe and Bones (2006) believe that inclusive sport should be rooted in a curriculum that is proactive and fosters collaboration, cooperation and external support. The notion of inclusive sport falls within the preserve of inclusive education; therefore, it is important to discuss and blend the notion of inclusion with the need for all-inclusive sporting opportunities for all learners. The next section discusses the philosophical development of inclusion globally and explains how this is conceptualized in South Africa in particular.

Inclusive Education: International and South African Perspective

Inclusive education is defined as a system of education where learners are taught in the mainstream schools with their peers ([Ainscow, 1999](#)). UNESCO (2005, p. 168) defines inclusive education as:

“... a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children”.

The various definitions of inclusive education all signal the need to have schools that do not discriminate against learners in any way whatsoever, which means that excluding learners from the playground also represents a serious violation of individual rights and access to full participation in sport. Therefore schools have to respond inclusively to the physical sporting needs of all learners. While several studies have been conducted in developing schools that are inclusive, the extensive literature on inclusion focuses mainly on, for example, aspects such as inclusive pedagogy ([Florian, 2009](#), [Makoelle, 2013](#)), inclusive discourses ([Dyson, 2001](#)), curriculum and inclusion ([Giangreco, 1992](#)), developing inclusive school-policy practice ([Ainscow, Farrell, & Tweddle, 2000](#)), and inclusive education research ([Nind, Benjamin, Sheehy, Collins & Hall, 2004](#)). While these studies give a comprehensive account of the developments in inclusive philosophy, research and practice, the focus on developing inclusive school sport has only been researched to a limited extent. It was, however, helpful to use the Ainscow and Booth (2002) Index of Inclusion to understand the significance of inclusive sport to a school that purports to be inclusive. The Index of Inclusion is a guideline document that schools could use to measure the extent of their inclusivity. The important dimensions within the index which specifically assist in evaluating how inclusive school sport is are the following:

- Establishing inclusive values (indicator ix): Is exclusion understood as a process that takes place on ... playgrounds ... and may end in separation from the school?
- Developing schools to become all-inclusive (indicator ii): Is the school concerned with the accessibility of all aspects of the school, including the playgrounds?
- Orchestrating learning and having all learners take part in activities outside the classroom (indicator xiv): Do sports days include activities in which everyone can take part, irrespective of their skills level or impairment?

The above dimensions indicate that the school playground should be inclusive, accessible and that all learners should be afforded the opportunity to participate in all sporting activities regardless of their conditions and circumstances.

In South Africa, White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) became the blueprint for implementing a process that could make schools inclusive. The overarching principles of inclusion within the White paper are the following:

- Acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and the youth need support;
- Accepting and respecting the fact that all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs which are equally valued and an ordinary part of our human experience;
- Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners;
- Acknowledging and respecting differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability or HIV status;
- Recognising that inclusive education is broader than formal schooling, and acknowledging that learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal modes and structures;

- Acknowledging that inclusive education is about changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula, and the environment to meet the needs of all learners.
- agreeing that inclusive education is about maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and the curricula of educational institutions, and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning;
- recognizing that inclusive education is about empowering learners by developing their individual strengths and enabling them to participate critically in the process of learning.

While the White Paper provides general guidelines for implementing inclusive education, it is much less specific about the other important aspects of education that need to become inclusive, for example school sport. The White Paper states that schooling systems are to be made inclusive and that all schools are to accommodate all learners, regardless of their background. While inclusive education in general has been studied extensively, the focus on inclusive school sport has been minimal.

Not only is there no policy framework for making sport at schools inclusive, but teachers have also not been given the training needed to implement such a policy of inclusion ([Hay, Smit & Paulsen, 2006](#)). The school environment, building and structures have not been sufficiently transformed to make it easy for inclusion to be realized.

Methodology

For the purposes of the research study, I adopted the interpretative approach and structuration theory as a lens to assist me in understanding the dynamics of the reality of sport and inclusion. The qualitative study involved conducting unstructured interviews with six principals, six sport organizers from three primary schools and three secondary schools in one education district in the Free State province of South Africa. The following questions were posed to the principals and sport organizers:

- Has provision been made to include diverse learners in sport at your school?
- How do you see the participation of learners with diverse abilities and needs in sport at your school?
- Does your school have the facilities needed to make sport inclusive for all?
- Are coaches prepared to coach learners with diverse abilities and needs?
- Is sport an integral part of your school curriculum?

To triangulate the data culled from the interviews with the principals and sport organizers, three secondary school learners in wheelchairs were interviewed and asked to answer the following questions (follow-up questions were based on the learner's response in each case):

- Do you feel included in sport at your school?
- How would you describe the attitude of other learners and teachers to you during sporting activities?
- In which sport or sporting game are you well-coached?
- Do teachers use games to teach you about some aspects related to your theoretical subjects?

Availability and willingness to participate in the study were used as selection criteria for both principals and sport organizers. The Interviews were voice recorded and transcribed for analysis. As part of the ethical procedure, the principals, sport organizers, and the parents of learners were required to complete and sign the relevant consent forms. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time should they wish to do so, and they were given the assurance that the information would be treated in the strictest confidence and used exclusively for this research. An inductive analytical framework was used to analyze and interpret the data. The process of analysis involved analyzing and interpreting the development data inductively according to the following steps (Laws, Harper & Marcus, 2003, p. 395).

Step 1: Reading and rereading all the data closely. This was done to ensure that I was fully conversant with the facts to make the process of analysis more manageable.

Step 2: Drawing up a preliminary list of themes arising from the data. The process involved categorising the data into themes (that is, “coding the data”), assigning labels or texts to all the data collected, and organising raw data into conceptual categories in order to make the data more manageable.

Step 3: Re-reading the data to confirm the themes. By reading the data several times, I was able to verify that the interpretations were correct.

Step 4: Linking the themes to quotations and notes. I then wrote themes alongside the quotations and notes as I went through the data to establish interrelationships.

Step 5: Perusing and interpreting the categories of themes. This was done to discover what the data were telling me in relation to the objectives of the study.

Step 6: Designing a tool to assist in discerning patterns in the data. In order to triangulate and determine the patterns during data analysis, a spreadsheet was used which gave a summary of the themes. For example, the spreadsheet recorded the title of the theme and quotations from different sets of data.

Step 7: Interpreting the data. During this stage, I re-read the quotations and deduced the meaning of each in relation to the others. This resulted in my interpretations, which I presented according to each theme. The themes derived were interpreted using a structuration theory framework to determine the relationship between agency and structure. Finally, the themes were discussed in relation to the duality between structure and agency. To maintain trustworthiness in this study, the data were triangulated.

Findings

The analysis of the data harvested in the course of the research study yielded the following themes:

Theme 1 Provision of inclusion in sport

The data indicated that, at the time of the time of the research study, little or no provision had been made for the inclusion of all learners in sport. The results showed that learners participated in sport only when they could do so. Learners with disabilities were not participating in sport and there was little if any effort to include them. This was borne out by the comments of one of the principals:

“While we have soccer, netball and tennis as sporting games, we allow learners who can play those [games] to participate; learners with special needs are not usually expected to take part.”

This was also revealed when learners were asked if they felt included in sport, in response to which one of the learners stated:

“Most of the time, we act as spectators or we look after the clothes of the participants during games so that they do not get stolen.”

Theme 2: Teachers’ and able-bodied learners’ and their expectations for disabled learners to participate in sport

The study showed that there was little expectation on the part of teachers for some learners to participate in sport, especially learners who exhibited some form of a disability. For instance, one of the sports organizers remarked:

“How can learners who are in a wheelchair play soccer? I think they can just be good by cheering others.”

What also emerged from the study was that learners with disabilities were over-protected by their by their parents; hence, one of the principal remarked:

“Even if we want all learners to participate, parents of learners with disabilities always discourage such a move as they believe that, if their children cannot perform to the level of others, that could result in them

being demotivated and could have implications for the children being alienated and developing a resentment for school.”

The study also revealed that, according to the teachers, learners with disabilities have less interest in participating in sport. For instance, one of the sport organizers remarked: “When you ask learners with disabilities whether they want to do sport, they say they are not interested because their parents do not want them to do sport.” However, the study also showed that the opinion held by some teachers that disabled learners do not want to participate in sport was false, as one of the learners remarked:

“I think other learners and teachers do not want us to play—they always say we are excused and will even say we can go if we want to, but me, I want to take part but there is no soccer for us using wheelchairs.”

It also became apparent that the attitude towards learners with disabilities on the part of other learners and teachers was that they were incapable of doing sport, as one of the learners remarked: “Our friends who are not in wheelchairs always tell us that we cannot play netball.”

The general belief of both teachers and able-bodied learners that learners with disabilities cannot do well in sport was confirmed.

Theme 3: Coaching skills for diverse learners

The study showed that teachers lacked the skills to coach sport to learners with disabilities. For example, one of the sports organizers said:

“While we might want to coach every child, the fact of the matter is that we have not been trained to coach learners with disability, they require specialized kind of coaching skills.”

When asked how they were being coached, one learner replied:

“I do not go when there are practice session for netball because the teacher will always say that she focuses on the team that is going for competitions and us we only wait outside and watch the teach practice.”

When asked if they were coached for any sport, one of the learners replied: “No, no, we are only requested to be there to watch others.” When asked if they wish to be coached, one of the learners responded: “Yes, that could be nice, but I don’t know of teachers will do that.” The data seemed to indicate that teachers either do not have coaching skills for learners with diverse abilities and needs, or that they seem to believe that learners with different disabilities cannot do sport. It is also clear that learners with disabilities want to take part in sport but not enough effort is being made to realize their needs.

Theme 4: Resources for inclusive school sport

The study indicated that most schools did not have adequate facilities to make sport inclusive. When asked to comment on the availability of facilities to make sport inclusive, most teachers and principals indicated that their schools had a shortage of facilities; for example, one principal posited: “At our school we only have a soccer and netball field—we need some indoor games like chess for our disabled learners because they can’t do both netball and soccer.” This view was also shared by the learners; for instance, when asked in which sporting games they were being coached, all the learners stated that there was no coaching for them, which is an indication of the few sporting facilities available at their school. One learner remarked: “At our school there is only soccer and netball, or athletics, but I want to play tennis of the disabled, like in Paralympic.”

Theme 5: Integrating sport into the curriculum

The study revealed that, while the teachers and principals indicated that sport was an integral part of their curriculum, the educational value of sport was not being fully explored or utilized. They agreed that sport was part of what they had to teach the learners. One of the principals stated: “Sport is part of our

curriculum plan, but because of financial constraints we are unable to reach all learners.” The study showed that learners with disabilities did not benefit academically, socially and emotionally as the result of their exclusion from most of the sporting games. One of the learners remarked: “Because of not being able to do what all other learners are doing, I feel not part of the teams or class.”

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that practices of exclusion from school sport are still prevalent, especially for learners with disabilities (Musengi & Mudyahoto, 2010). As Phasha (cited in cited in Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2010) points out, not enough provision has been made to make school sport inclusive. The need to reorganize schools resources and facilities to accommodate learners with different abilities and needs was evident in this study. Indications are that, while schools have accommodated learners from a diversity perspective, little has been done to ensure their participation in sporting facilities. While teachers have learners with diverse abilities, they have not been empowered to coach sport to all learners regardless of their background. Therefore the study has exposed the training needs for teachers in view of their inability to coach sport inclusively.

The findings further confirm the need for sport to be rooted in the curriculum, if it is to have positive educational effects ([Lambe & Bones, 2006](#)). While sport has educational value, such as enhancing social interaction and developing friendship between diverse learner populations, not enough is being done in schools to realize its educational potential. Indeed, the findings suggest that schools are currently constraining the learner’s opportunities to participate in sport ([Giddens, 2013](#)). While teachers and learners are constrained by an obvious lack of resources and little provision for inclusive sporting facilities, indications are that they have not yet challenged the situation that has led to the status quo.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Despite the introduction of inclusive education in South Africa, the study demonstrates that teachers have not changed their beliefs about sport and disability. Indeed, very little provision has been made for inclusive school sport,

therefore, an awareness campaign should be embarked upon to sensitize teachers to the need of all learners to participate in sport. It would be to the advantage of all learners if sufficient financial provision could be made to redesign school sporting facilities to respond to the sporting needs of all learners.

It would also be helpful if teachers were trained to coach sport inclusively to all learners, irrespective of their different medical conditions and circumstances. Similarly, it would be beneficial to integrate sport into the school curriculum to ensure that teachers incorporate sport in their facilitation of teaching and learning.

The study has confirmed the need to root sport in the curriculum if it is to have any positive educational outcomes ([Lambe & Bones, 2006](#)). However, the study has shown that, while sport has educational value such as enhancing social interaction and the development of friendship between diverse learner populations, not enough is being done in schools to realize such.

This article has highlighted the need to make school sport inclusive and has provided tentative solutions to the problems stakeholders are likely to face in this regard. The study has tapped into the significance of narrowing the gap between the physical, social, intellectual, and other forms of development needed to make schooling, including sport, inclusive in every respect. While it could be ambitious to claim that this paper has provided a blueprint for making school sport inclusive, it has laid a foundation for further debate and research into the inclusive or exclusive nature of school sport.

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