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## **Cooperation between the Department of Education, South Africa and the Stockholm Institute of Education, Sweden, 2005-2007.**

### **RESEARCH POLICY**

#### **Introduction**

The South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) states that all citizens of South Africa have the rights to an education system based upon equality and human dignity. White Paper 6 is a policy guideline for achieving these goals. Education should specifically take in consideration learners who experience barriers to learning and learners not attending schools of one reason or another. The main objective of the policy is to achieve an education system, flexible and adaptive to the needs of the learners.

#### **Background**

In order to transform the education system- according to stated objectives- an Operational Plan on Human Resource Development (Tender Number RT1665 CP) has been worked out by the SISONKE Consortium. The Operational Plan could be regarded as a gigantic learning process distributed over at least 20 years. Certain priorities have been made in this learning process. According to the implementation plan, some schools have been selected to be pilot schools and model examples for the future transformation of schools in South Africa. A major focus in the process will be on “attitudinal changes”. Experiences from the first steps of the process have shown hesitation towards the transformation in some parts of the country, while in other parts of SA, acceptance of and motivation for the change have been more prominent. Research in other countries shows that changes of curricula in theory and practice is a complicated issue. (Englund, 1986).

## **RESEARCH FOR UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING CHANGES**

The content of this text is based on the previous documents (Bäckman-Helldin, 2003; 2004).

### **Importance of theories**

A relevant, well thought out and developed theoretical framework is of utmost importance according to our opinions for at least four reasons. Firstly, a theoretical framework is needed in order to develop training programmes in support of the ongoing, educational transformation process in South Africa. Secondly, the theoretical framework is needed for establishing a "strong and coherent basis of argumentation" applicable to the newly, introduced, educational policy. In other words, this framework is central for the attitudinal changes, very frequently discussed in the policy documents. To develop a theoretical framework means working with comprehensive changes. Thirdly, the theoretical framework must be part of curriculum development at all levels. Fourthly, a theoretical framework must also support the historical reconstruction of a traditional special education system. This is a reconstruction that takes place at the same time as introducing new professional roles.

### **Research principles**

Of course it is not possible here to go to the bottom of the conceivable theoretical frames. Development must occur in close cooperation with South African professionals and others engaged in the transformation. We have chosen to point out certain principles, and we will also come up with some short suggestions with reference to contents of our theoretical framework and with reference to the SISONKE proposal (19 September, 2005). Firstly, we will briefly discuss some principles.

If you would like to understand educational concepts, the understanding has to be based on *different theoretical interpretations*. These interpretations could supplement and stimulate each other. In such a way, a holistic view of the problems could be achieved, e.g. in an educational situation.

This might make it possible for staff participating in training (in accordance with SISONKE research opinions) to analyse and investigate different educational problems. This promotes a dynamic process among students and researchers, a comparative process that could be exemplified in practical fieldwork, group work, discussions, debates, and analyses etc. Such a multidisciplinary approach might facilitate "dynamic meetings" between old and new paradigms.

Participants in training will thus be given opportunities to evaluate advantages and disadvantages of different paradigms, among others in South Africa and Sweden. To draw conclusions from an educational model like this should be a guideline for future considerations referring to inclusion.

### **The historical perspective**

If you would like to change education, the historical perspective must always be in focus. Critical analyses of the (special) education history of the two countries must be undertaken in order to learn from the past and to better understand the future. Critical analyses might include continuous considerations of the past, dominating knowledge forms, methods used, and knowledge of human nature etc.

Considering the development of the Swedish school system, the main policy has been to support an "integrated" school, specifically when introducing a school common to all citizens. Key words for this development have been solidarity and responsibility for students with learning problems. To keep all students together in a school system has been motivated by the principle of sharing education also with more gifted students. This has been the guiding policy basis when striving for a Swedish democratic society. It might be said that the design of the school system has been looked upon as an important factor for the development of a democratic Swedish society in general.

To understand (special) educational traditions, we think that the following principles should be observed:

an understanding of the present situation and future possibilities always demands parallel analyses of the development and status of the general, compulsory education;

changes and status of (special education is to a great extent a result of the development of the regular school system and its educational ideology;

the solution of the problem of schools indicates the motivation of societies to adopt full democracy and equality in all aspects. A basic analysis of school problems affects the understanding of the democratic will of the society during different periods.

## **Comparative studies**

Comparative studies of the development of (special) education in other countries are valuable tools for the better understanding both of the past and of the future. Countries have faced similar problems as mentioned in the South African policy documents, and experiences from other countries are important to consider. We are thus in a favourable position. A critical analysis could include studies of different school systems and basic educational experiences with regard to segregation, exclusion and inclusion and background factors influencing transformation of school systems. What causes a school system to change and how to keep sustainability?

## **Education and Human rights**

The right to education is a fundamental element in all democracies. A comparative discussion of rights in training and research seminars could be a method to assimilate a critical view on "dominance" and understanding of own and other teachers' concept of rights. We propose this kind of reflection as a valuable tool to discuss a common moral dimension that focuses on the best educational support for school children. According to our opinions this should also be transformed in a broader learning context. Human rights and democracy are two separate but mutually reinforcing concepts. A basic condition for democratisation is the respect for human rights. A deliberative decision-making process reinforces the protection of human rights of which access to education is a corner stone.

## **Top-down or bottom-up perspectives**

Researchers and educators often look upon school problems from either a "top-down" or a "bottom-up" perspective. A "top-down" approach applied mostly by educators starts from a strategic level, decided by top decision-makers with less influence of "the treated". However, a "bottom-up" perspective guarantees empowerment of staff that also strongly considers influence from "grass root levels". Thus, it is important in a training situation to consider the democratic influence of the trainees in order to increase motivation, interest, and active participation. The SISONKE research document also emphasises this.

## Possibility of changes

The possibility of changes-in an extended perspective- is closely connected to the “life-worlds” of participants in the process. Habermas (1995) defines "life-world" as follows: *It is an **implicit** knowledge that cannot be represented in a finite number of propositions; it is **holistically structured** knowledge, the basic elements of which intrinsically define one another; and it is knowledge that **does not stand at our disposition**, inasmuch as we cannot make it conscious and place it in doubt as we please*" (p. 336, emphasis above made by the author). South Africa is a good example of a “mixture” of the traditional world and the modern life-worlds. From internal and external perspectives the traditional and the modern worlds are parallel.

Research in anthropology has shown that life-worlds "*... are constitutive not only for processes of reaching understanding but for the social integration and the socialization of individuals as well. They function in the formation and stabilization of identities, supplying individuals with a core of basic concepts and assumptions that cannot be revised without affecting the identity of individuals and social groups*" (Habermas, 1995, p. 64.). These two quotations indicate the complexity of changing attitudes in some way or another attached to peoples’ life-worlds. Life-world refers to the identity of the individual. This exerts great pressure upon the communication procedure in an educational situation. Important aspects in democratic communication situations are that members have a sensitive ear for each others’ basic normative opinions and practical experiences. According to Habermas, each learning situation is a kind of "value internalization" to be treated in a democratic way. Thus, it is important to researchers and teacher trainers to understand that the learning situation touches the core of each individual. Without this intra-personal understanding "education" might be at risk as understandable resistance towards changes could occur.

"Changing attitudes" is thus a very demanding concept with reference to education. Some teacher trainers underlined the difficulty to sustain attitudes, and that the process of changing attitudes must be "school driven".

The sustainability is dependent on support from province and district offices. Possible changes are also dependent on parallel changes at all levels of the society. A "top-down" approach is not possible in a democratic process of attitudinal changes. Teachers feel intuitively fears of “being changed” by decision-makers.

Finally, we would like to list some important areas and key concepts. They are not presented in any priority order. This is meant to be our contribution to training courses and prospective research in the Swedish-South African agreed cooperation with emphasis on teacher training:

*Political/Moral Philosophy*

(values in education, de/reconstruction, power, constructivism, deliberation, democracy etc.)

*Disability Theory*

(individualisation, variations, categorisation, specialised knowledge, "experts", equipment, adjustment, environment, school/classroom inclusion, counselling, special schools, special classes, resource centres etc.)

*Curriculum Theory*

(education for citizenship, educational policy, theory contra practice, education as a political problem, socialisation etc.)

*Sociology of Education*

(experts, professional knowledge, positivism/hermeneutics, normalisation, empowerment etc.)

*History of Special Education*

(separation, "keeping", rehabilitation, integration/segregation, inclusion, social approach, medical approach, paradigm shifts, grounding assumptions, human sciences etc.)

*Critical Theory*

(suppression, hegemony, dominance, discrimination, interpretation, redistribution, interest etc.)

*Multicultural Education*

(identity, ethnicity, culture, beliefs, religion, tradition, life experience, social conditions, family ties etc.)

## How to fit into the SISONKE Research policy

The main objective is to discuss basic concepts of inclusive education with emphasis on observed possibilities/problems. An important task for the Stockholm Institute of Education is to analyse prospective gaps between policy and practice and to assist in bridging problems and in searching possibilities. Training will be focused on networking, cooperation, intra-team communication, flexibility, problem-solving methods and development of local curricula.

- The training could be designed for shorter or longer periods depending on the extent of the Swedish-South African collaboration period. Swedish involvement in **training will be attached to research activities** that will "engage participants", such as introductory courses in research methods, gathering of data and compiling of small research projects. The SISONKE "baseline status" results will be the basis for discussions and development projects. Our intention is that produced research reports should be analysed in common SISONKE-Swedish research workshops. Some theoretical, epistemological and structural dilemmas have to be mentioned with reference to different documents, central for inclusive education. Research is valuable in supporting the practical implementation. One important dilemma is attached to old "segregation paradigms" that should be an important focus. Traditional special education thinking is difficult to change as underlined in the SISONKE document. Old patterns and structures have a tendency to penetrate also new methodological recommendations.

Part of the guidance of participants must in most cases be **distance-based**. Thus, it is important to utilise the comprehensive South African knowledge of distance education, for example the competency of UNISA. This will be a complement to SISONKE research activities and has to be discussed and compared on a regular basis. Another important aspect of the research cooperation is a prospective construction of a database. One facilitating tool could be a "discussion over internet platform", in order to exchange ideas, to update each other on actions taken at different universities/teacher training institutions, and to disseminate information of relevant research in the field. The platform must also be looked upon as a "scene of communicative action" for joining theory and practice. Our intentions are to involve education professionals in the field (staff exchange between South Africa and Sweden).

From our point of view, our proposal could be "condensed" into **three related questions focusing possibilities and problems of the transformation process**. These questions could be raised in different contexts. They could refer to contents, to methods applied in training situations, to theoretical frames introduced and their potentials for change, to relationships between researchers, trainers and trainees etc.

What is the sense for theoretical and practical alternatives of change in different social and cultural contexts?

What consider participants in training activities to be good reasons for changing their traditional norms of action?

How do knowledge and structural transformation look like that does not threaten personal and professional identities?

**For specified suggestions as basis of further discussions, reference to Appendix I**

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## Appendix I

### BASIS OF DISCUSSIONS

#### **Some specified suggestions for coming cooperation of research between Department of Education /DIE, Sisonke Consortium and SIE.**

To:

*... give lectures and seminars on introductory concepts of research, and elaborate on action research as a tool for changes, in connection with Swedish workshops/training sessions in South Africa.*

*... prepare parallel action research together with participants in workshops/training sessions conducted by SIE in South Africa. This research could preferably analyse workshop-participants' daily work, view their professional roles and their possibilities for changing traditional working situations based on empirical experiences.*

*... follow up action research activities conducted by the participants partly by IT-communication.*

*... discuss results of participants' different research activities in SA together with Sisonke-members in seminars parallel with workshops on content of inclusion for changes. These meetings should have a comparative function in the "long run" research process.*

... *run a smaller parallel research program* in a remote area in SA together with Swedish and/or South African doctoral students and/or teacher trainers, in cooperation with suitable SA universities. The area for research could be chosen by Sisonke as a complementary activity, mainly for comparative reasons. The research should use base-line data and instruments prepared by Sisonke. Comparative discussions of the research results could be based on the Swedish experiences of knowledge of possibilities for changes towards an inclusive school system.

... use the SIE experiences for the Sisonke research team on a *“critical friend” basis*. Research results produced by Sisonke could be read, analysed and commented on by Swedish researchers. This focus intends to include SIE research knowledge - both methodological and content-based – “into” Sisonke reports.

... *compare Swedish theoretical experiences* of different aspects and levels of inclusion as elaborated upon in Swedish cooperation reports. The realization of this focus could be advanced seminars on “cooperation of and suggestion for theoretical frames” of the long run transformation. These seminars could be held both by IT-based discussions, and in continuous seminars when Swedish partners are working in South Africa. They could also be realized through visits by SA researchers to Sweden in order to familiarize themselves with SIE-work on inclusion.