Social and Psychological Effects of Inclusive Classrooms: Insights from Teachers of Inclusive Classes in Selected Primary Schools in Zimbabwe

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Abstract
This study analysed the insights of four (4) criterion-sampled teachers of inclusive classrooms in four criterion-sampled primary schools in Zimbabwe. The purpose of the study was, therefore, to elicit insights of the four afore-mentioned participants on how classroom inclusion affects learners with disabilities and those learners without disabilities socially and psychologically. The findings of this study indicate that: (a) classroom inclusion can generate positive as well as negative social and psychological effects on both groups of learners (b) the social and psychological effects of classroom inclusion on both sets of learners tend to depend, largely, on the social environment within and outside the classroom; (c) the placement of learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms seems to enhance their social and psychological development; (d) the placement of learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms does not seem to interfere with the social and psychological development of learners without disabilities and (e) responses to classroom inclusion by learners without disabilities seem to be shaped by multiple variables and change over a period of time. The significance of these findings find expression in the conclusion that general education is capable of providing effective individual instruction to both learners with disabilities and those without disabilities given a conducive learning environment. Policy makers and educators are likely to benefit from this confirmatory finding. Consequently, among others, this study recommends that prior to the establishment of an inclusive classroom, a concerted effort ought to be made to address the attitudes of all persons involved in the establishment and management of the any inclusive classroom. More specifically, the study recommends that administrators, educators, parents and learners need to transform their attitudes towards inclusion in general and classroom inclusion in particular.

Keywords: qualitative research, criterion sample, social effects, psychological effects, classroom inclusion, inclusive classroom, inclusive class and inclusionary programme.

INTRODUCTION
A great deal of research on inclusive education has focused on establishing the trustworthiness of the argument that classroom inclusion is beneficial to learners with disabilities. In this regard, several studies, including those by Brady and Taylor (1989), Snyder (1999) and Kavale (2002), have demonstrated that learners with disabilities benefit from classroom socially and psychologically with minimal negative effects. For many educators, however, as Davis (1989) aptly points out, classroom inclusion remains a leopard with several spots. While there seems to be sufficient beneficial social and psychological effects of classroom inclusion on learners with disabilities, little research focuses on such effects on learners without disabilities. In consequence, this study sought the insights of four teachers of inclusive classes on the social and psychological impacts of classroom inclusion on learners with disabilities and their peers without disabilities.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
By definition, classroom inclusion is about the child’s right to participate and classroom’s duty to accept that child. Generally, it is regarded to be “politically incorrect” to question this rather sensitive position. This, arguably, is where the Pandora’s box lies, hence the paucity of data responding to the risky questions relating to the possible negative social and psychological effects of classroom inclusion on either set of learners. Be that as it may, this study sought the perceptions of primary school teachers in charge of inclusive classes in response to the following questions:

- Why is the practice of classroom inclusion necessary in Zimbabwe?
- How does classroom inclusion affect learners with disabilities socially and psychologically?
- How does classroom inclusion affect learners without disabilities socially and psychologically?

DEMACRATION OF THE STUDY
In its broad usage, the concept of classroom inclusion denotes placement in “ordinary classrooms” of learners who have characteristics, live or learn in an environment or have experiences that make them more likely than others to be negatively affected in school (Friend and Bursuck, 1999). Among such learners are those with disabilities. This study, by design, confined itself to learners with disabilities. In
consequence, classroom inclusion in this study is restricted to the placement of learners with disabilities in “ordinary” classrooms.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
 Whilst the methodology used in this study examined social processes at work in the inclusive classroom in considerable depth, the analysis of the insights was time-consuming and therefore rather expensive. In addition, the study involved a relatively small number of participants; this can mean that it is less likely to be taken seriously by other academic researchers and policy makers.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
 Salend (2001) defines classroom inclusion as a philosophy that brings learners, families, educators and community members together to create classrooms, in the context of this study, based on acceptance, belonging and community. As already alluded to, classroom inclusion is not, in its general application, necessarily just focused on learners with disabilities as is the case in this study. The purpose of this review of related literature is, therefore, to examine the potential social and psychological effects of classroom inclusion on learners with disabilities and their peers without disabilities.

Lipsky and Gartner (1997) assert that the broad benefit of classroom inclusion resides in the strategy of designing supports which are built around innovative approaches to learning, differentiated instruction and curricular adaptations for every learner in the classroom. In this sense, classroom inclusion is also a philosophy which allows all learners to be valued and supported to participate in whatever they do.

Advocates for classroom inclusion have, over the years, argued that classroom inclusion can be beneficial to all learners in a class, not just those with special needs. Mowat (2010), for instance, maintains that the long-term positive effects of classroom inclusion on learners without special needs manifest themselves in heightened sensitivity to the challenges that others face, increased empathy and improved leadership skills. However, critics of classroom inclusion argue that while the concept is philosophically attractive, it is impractical.

According to Lamport (2012), the social and psychological effects of inclusive classrooms on learners with disabilities and those without disabilities continue to produce positive results. Commenting on the same theme, Mowat (2010) asserts that classroom inclusion can be a powerful tool to unify the learners with disabilities and those without disabilities. For Ntshangase et al (2008), social interaction in inclusive classrooms is important for the long-term general well-being and personal development of both learners with disabilities and their peers without disabilities. A study by Calabraro et al (2008) found that inclusive classrooms were beneficial in increasing social interactions between learners with disabilities and their peers without disabilities.

Banerji and Dailely (1995) carried out a study on classroom inclusion which compared integrated and segregated pre-school learners. Their study clearly showed that learners in the inclusionary classrooms progressed in social skills development while learners in exclusionary classrooms actually regressed. The same study by Banerji and Dailely (1995) concluded that learners with specific learning disabilities also showed some improvement in self-esteem.

Classroom inclusion has its opponents. The most frequent criticism of classroom inclusion deals with the issue of “labelling effects” on the learners with disabilities. For instance, Will (1986) suggests that classroom inclusion has a potential to lower expectations of the public and self-esteem of the learners with disabilities. Moreover, Lipsky and Gartner (1997) assert that the impact of such stigmas, lowered expectations and poor self-esteem is significant for the learners with disabilities and their counterparts without disabilities.

METHODOLOGY
 The methodology used in this study conforms to the broad qualitative research tradition in education. According to Bell (1993: 6), qualitative research is “…..more concerned to understand individuals’ perceptions of the world”, and therefore seeks quality and meaning”. It was, therefore, in the context of this paradigm that the researcher sought an in-depth understanding of how classroom inclusion affects both learners with and those without disabilities socially and psychologically from the perspectives of teachers of inclusive classes. Data were generated through face-to-face semi structured interviews which sought to elicit the inclusive classroom teachers’ experiences and perspectives on the social and psychological effects of classroom inclusion on learners with disabilities and those without disabilities.

PARTICIPANTS
 The participants in this study comprised four criterion-sampled teachers of inclusive classes in primary school settings in Harare, Zimbabwe. The researcher employed the criterion sampling technique to select, initially, one educational province out of the ten educational provinces in Zimbabwe after which he once again criterion-sampled four primary schools with inclusive classrooms. From each of the four schools, the classroom with the highest number of learners with disabilities was then selected. The
teacher of each of these classrooms was then used as unit of analysis.

The choice of the units of analysis was guided by Miles and Huberman’s (1994) insight that when choosing participants, a researcher is not only choosing participants for the study, but he or she is also selecting the settings, events, and processes. Franklin (2012) describes the selection of participants in a qualitative study, as purposeful selection. This is a strategy that deliberately selects the settings, people, and activities in order to provide data that cannot be easily found elsewhere.

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE
In line with Kavale’s (2002) advice, the researcher used an interview guide comprising three parts: the facesheet which was used to record details such as date and demographic information, the interview questions and the post-interview comment sheet. To put each participant at ease, the researcher prefaced each session with introductions before explaining the purpose of the study. The permission of each participant was sought prior to recording the session. This flexible structure of this interview guide allowed the researcher to explore, probe and ask pertinent follow-up questions.

DATA GENERATION AND ANALYSIS
Data were generated through interviews which were recorded on audiotape and then transcribed into a written form. Analysis of data involved re-reading interview transcripts to identify themes emerging from the participants’ answers. Each interview session lasted about 45 minutes. For data analysis, the researcher employed the inductive approach, using the thematic content analysis. To establish trustworthiness, the researcher returned to each participant and asked him or her to carefully read his or her interview transcript which resulted in some adjustments being effected in certain instances.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The analytical approach adopted in this study was informed by the process of recursive abstraction. From the data analysis, the participants provided various insights in response to the following sub-research questions extracted from the three main questions cited previously:

1. Why is classroom inclusion practised in Zimbabwe?
2. How does classroom inclusion positively affect learners with disabilities socially and psychologically?
3. How does classroom inclusion negatively affect learners with disabilities socially and psychologically?
4. How does classroom inclusion positively affect learners without disabilities socially and psychologically?
5. How does classroom inclusion negatively affect learners without disabilities socially and psychologically?

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS
Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants by sex (n=4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>Participant 3</th>
<th>Participant 4</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of participants by sex. As can be seen, the participants comprised one (1) male and three (3) females. Given the fact that the sample was extracted from an urban setting, the sex imbalance was not unexpected as most urban primary schools in Zimbabwe tend to have more women than men.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics by level and scope of education (n=4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Level and scope of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>O-Level plus a pre-service teaching qualification plus a Special Needs Education teaching qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Degree plus a pre-service teaching qualification minus a Special Needs Education teaching qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>O-Level plus a pre-service teaching qualification minus a Special Needs Education teaching qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A Level plus a pre-service teaching qualification plus a Special Needs Education teaching qualification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 indicates the distribution of participants by level and scope of education. It is hardly surprising that all the four participants had an educational level of higher than O-Level because in Zimbabwe the minimum qualification for anyone to train as a teacher is O-Level. It emerged during the interview that Participant 2 who had a Special Needs Education degree acquired it through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) seven years after initially qualifying as a general classroom practitioner. Table 3 also shows that Participant 2 did not have any qualification in Special Needs Education.

It is significant to note that participants 1, 2 and 4 had both pre-service and Special Needs Education qualifications. This is not unusual in Zimbabwe. Participant 3 had a pre-service qualification, but did not possess any qualification in Special Needs Education.
Participants’ Arguments for Practising Classroom Inclusion in Zimbabwe’s Primary Schools

Table 3: Arguments for practising classroom inclusion in Zimbabwe’s primary schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Emerging sub-themes</th>
<th>Substantiating statements by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Increased access to education as a human right | • Every child has a right to participate  
• The school has a duty to accept every child | “The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child talks against discrimination and exclusion” (Participant 3). “Every child has a right to education. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is very clear on this issue” (Participant 4). |
| Enhanced human dignity | • Respect for every child’s social status  
• Mutually beneficial | “Non-inclusion takes away the dignity of the child with a disability” (Participant 2). “I have noticed that in my class, every child seems to benefit from inclusion.” (Participant 1). |
| Enhanced co-operation | • Reduced chances of elitism  
• Mutual respect | “When children learn together and do other things together, they learn the meaning of co-operation and respect.” (Participant 2). |

As Table 3 indicates, the four participants generated three broad themes in support of inclusive classrooms in Zimbabwe. Firstly, there was general consensus among all the four (4) participants that classroom inclusion is a basic human right for every child as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) which calls on all States Parties to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels. Secondly, three of the participants were in agreement that inclusive classrooms enhance the social importance and visibility of learners with disabilities. Thirdly, all the four (4) participants made the point that in inclusive classrooms, learners practise living with diversity in preparation for life outside school. In amplification, two (2) of the participants contended that, in inclusive classrooms, learners learn to work with diversity; they learn to live with other people.

The immediately preceding views by the participants in this study seem to affirm the opinion by Stainback and Stainback (1995) who posit that the placement of learners with disabilities in general classrooms is a civil right issue. In amplification, these advocates argue that schools ought to be restructured so that full inclusion can be provided for all learners with disabilities.

From the above views, the key argument in favour of classroom inclusion seems to be that exclusion is morally unacceptable. As Stainback and Stainback (1995) aptly point out, exclusion results in the lessening of the importance of learners with disabilities in social terms. From the participants’ perceptions in this study, both sets of learners, that is, those with disabilities and those without benefit from classroom inclusion. It is important to note, in this regard, that this approach to classroom inclusion is essentially moralistic in character.

Table 4: Arguments against practising classroom inclusion in Zimbabwe’s primary schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Emerging sub-themes</th>
<th>Substantiating statements by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Impractical for some learners | • Not every child can be successfully included  
• Reduced individualised instruction | “Some learners with behavioural problems can be a physical danger to other learners.” (Participant 4) “…for example, learners with severe attention difficulties tend to distract other learners.” (Participant 1) “It is very difficult to give sufficient individual attention to all learners in an inclusive classroom.” (Participant 4). “It is virtually impractical to successfully include learners with severe and profound intellectual disabilities” (Participant 2). |
| Limited resources | • No supports such as training and other supports | “sometimes I do not have appropriate resources to use in the teaching of learners with disabilities.” (Participant 1). |
| Increased disruption | • Learners with behavioural problems tend to be disruptive | “Many learners with behavioural difficulties disturb the learning atmosphere. …other learners fail to concentrate because of them.” (Participant 1). “…some of these learners hardly respond to behaviour modification strategies.” (Participant 4). |
| Excessive emphasis on socialisation | • Tendency to lean towards normalisation  
• Academic intensity may be minimal | Learners with disabilities are sometimes compelled to adopt the behaviours of learners without disabilities (Participant 1). “Some learners with disabilities in inclusive classrooms may exhibit fear and frustration” (Participant 2). |

Table 4 clearly indicates that not every participant was completely excited about inclusive classrooms. Three of the participants expressed reservations about the inclusion of learners with severe and profound disabilities, for example, arguing that it would be difficult to give such learners attention that is appropriate for their levels in an inclusive classroom. In this regard, the three participants also cited the fact that learners with severe disabilities found it difficult to cope with several activities in their classrooms.
All the four (4) participants cited shortage of resources to motivate their arguments against classroom inclusion. In particular, the participants cited the fact that it is difficult for one teacher to give adequate support to learners with disabilities in an inclusive classroom. In amplification, the Participant 3 explained that learners with disabilities would receive more support in self-contained classrooms. In this regard, Participant 1 added that, “Each inclusive classroom requires at least two teachers for effective teaching to take place.”

Three of the four participants expressed concerns about the general tendency of learners with disabilities to cause distractions to other learners. In amplification, two of the three participants expressed the view that classroom inclusion tends to add frustration to the learners with disabilities because they might feel that they are expected to compete with their peers without disabilities. Participant 2 added that, “This frustration may easily trigger disruptive beviour in the learner with a disability.”

Two of the participants felt that in inclusive classrooms, more often than not, the socialisation part of the learners’ education tends to take precedence over the academic component. Moreover, these participants pointed out the fact that in many inclusive classrooms, several important skills fail to be taught effectively because of the limited ability of learners with disabilities to participate meaningfully.

Participants’ Views on the Positive Social and Psychological Effects of Classroom Inclusion on Learners with Disabilities

Table 5: Positive social and psychological effects of classroom inclusion on learners with Disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Emerging sub-themes</th>
<th>Substantiating statements by participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved communication skills</td>
<td>▪ Learners with disabilities improve their communication skills</td>
<td>“Interaction between learners with and those without disabilities helps learners with disabilities to improve their communication skills” (Participant 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Learners without disabilities learn to communicate with learners with disabilities</td>
<td>“One little boy who joined my class about two years ago with very little speech can now communicate satisfactorily. You can now easily follow what he is saying.” (Participant 4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Growth in their moral understanding of the needs of learners with disabilities</td>
<td>“It is always a great pleasure to see the relationship between learners with and those without disabilities grow in leaps and bounds” (Participant 1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Learners with disabilities have developed friendships with learners without disabilities” (Participant 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced social skills</td>
<td>▪ Learners with disabilities grow in their interaction with other people</td>
<td>“When learners with disabilities first come to an inclusive classroom, they generally lack confidence and self-esteem. However, with time they warm to their new environment” (Participant 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Growth in their moral understanding of the needs of learners with disabilities</td>
<td>“The longer learners with disabilities stay in an inclusive classroom, the greater their participation in class activities” (Participant 4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced self-esteem</td>
<td>▪ Growth in social cognition and self-concept</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved motivation</td>
<td>▪ Increase in desire to participate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the four participants seemed to agree that classroom inclusion, in general terms, has beneficial social and psychological effects on the learners with disabilities. The participants, in varying degrees of emphasis, cited social outcomes such as improved communication skills, enhanced social skills, enhanced self-esteem and improved motivation, among others. Participant 1 strongly felt that classroom inclusion of learners with disabilities helps such learners to maintain their social visibility. In amplification, the participant added that the social visibility would assist in enhancing the human dignity and social skills of learners with disabilities.

The participants’ insights on the beneficial social and psychological effects of classroom inclusion on learners with disabilities seem to be in tandem with Albert Bandura’s social learning theory which posits that behavioural learning takes place through the observation of, modelling by and imitation of others (Miller, 2011). On the same issue, Miller (2011) asserts that social learning theory combined with Freudian learning principles are capable of teaching children real-life social skills. In this sense, learners without disabilities act as role models for the learners with disabilities. Moreover, learners without disabilities provide examples for appropriate social behaviour for the learners with disabilities.

There was clear unanimity among the four participants that inclusive classrooms facilitate rapid language growth in learners with disabilities, in general terms. Of course, this growth tends to depend on a number of other things such as onset of disability, past experience, level and type of disability. Participant 2 seemed particularly convinced that communication skills of learners with disabilities improve as a result of working with their peers without communication disabilities. This view seems to find support from both the Observational Theory and the Guided Learning Theory both of which seem to affirm the view that learners with
Participants’ Views on the Negative Social and Psychological Effects of Classroom Inclusion on Learners with Disabilities

As Table 6 indicates, some participants felt that classroom inclusion does not benefit the learners with either severe or profound disabilities socially and psychologically. Participant 1 was particularly emotional in respect of this particular issue, arguing that many learners with either severe or profound disabilities sit in inclusive classrooms and look normal whether they are participating in the sessions or not. In amplification, the participant explained that many important social skills fail to be taught because of the intensity of the disabilities.

Participants’ Views on the Positive Social and Psychological Effects of Classroom Inclusion on Learners without Disabilities

All the four (4) participants opined that learners without disabilities in an inclusive classroom often become more aware of the needs of others. In amplification, Participant 3 contended that: “As the learners without disabilities become skilled at dealing with learners with disabilities, they acquire an enhanced appreciation of the fact that each person is gifted differently. These perceptions by the participants in this study seem to lend credence to the views of Salend’s (2001) view that in an inclusive classroom learners without disabilities grow in their commitment to their own moral principles and learn to become advocates for their peers with disabilities. As Salend (2001) further perceptive observes, the development of principles of social justice is likely to benefit the learners without disabilities throughout their lives. Three of the participants reported enhanced kindness, empathy and compassion in their classrooms for others on the part of learners without disabilities. In this sense, the consensus among the four participants was that learners without disabilities tended to gain a number of important social and psychological benefits from their interaction with their peers with disabilities. For instance, Participant 3 highlighted the fact that effective classroom inclusion is a group effort as it involves collaboration among learners. In this sense, as Salend (2001) aptly notes, in an inclusive classroom learners work co-operatively and reflectively, sharing resources, responsibilities, skills and decisions.
Participants’ Views on the Negative Effects of Classroom Inclusion on Learners without Disabilities

Table 8: Negative social and psychological effects of classroom inclusion on learners without disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging themes</th>
<th>Emerging sub-themes</th>
<th>Substantiating statements by participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduced interactions</td>
<td>Disruptive anti-social behaviour</td>
<td>“Some learners with anti-social tendencies find it difficult to attract friends from the learners without disabilities.” (Participant 4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resentment</td>
<td>Reduced one-on-one attention</td>
<td>“Learners without disabilities may see the individual attention afforded learners with disabilities as favouritism” (Participant 1).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three of the participants expressed the view that some learners with anti-social behaviours seemed to exclude those learners from positive interactions with their peers without disabilities. Participant 4 was particularly emotional on this issue, arguing that some learners with anti-social behaviours make it difficult for learners to accept them. This perception seems to be consistent with the conclusion reached by Jull (2008) that classroom inclusion of learners with emotional and behavioural disorders in the inclusive classroom remains a great challenge. In this regard, Participant 2 remarked that learners with emotional and behavioural disorders require specific interventions before they are sent to inclusive classrooms. This view appears to be congruent with the opinion by Sawka et. al. (2002) that many teachers in charge of inclusive classrooms are not adequately trained to teach inclusive classes. In this sense, it follows that under-qualified teachers in inclusive classrooms may fail to promote interactions that are socially and psychologically beneficial to learners without disabilities.

Three participants expressed the opinion that classroom inclusion can create resentment among learners without disabilities and learners with disabilities. Participant 3, in particular, argued that learners without disabilities would often see the amount of special attention that learners with disabilities are receiving as a form of discrimination. Participant 1 added that learners without disabilities may also see the modified assignments that the learners with disabilities receive as a form of unfairness. Participant 2 pointed out that all these things can lead to jealousy and bitterness towards their peers with disabilities. In turn, as Jull (2008) perceptively concludes, this situation can inhibit any positive relations forming between the two groups.

CONCLUSION
The results of this study confirm the need to establish inclusive classrooms in Zimbabwe. The results of this study also clearly suggest that there are many positive social and psychological effects of classroom inclusion where both the learners with disabilities and their peers without disabilities benefit. Positive social effects for learners with disabilities tend to be in the areas of communication and peer interactions. Positive social effects on the learners without disabilities include the development of positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities and the enhancement of their own social status in the eyes of other persons without disabilities. However, the study also draws attention to some negative social and psychological effects of classroom inclusion such as increased anxiety and resentment on the part of learners with disabilities and those without disabilities respectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS
In order to maximise the participation of all learners in the classrooms of their choice, it seems imperative for educational authorities to:

- rethink and restructure policies and curricula before establishing inclusive classrooms;
- ensure that teachers are adequately capacitated to successfully handle inclusive classes;
- adapt to the social needs of learners rather than learners adapting to the needs of the classrooms and teachers; and
- view the differences between learners as a source of richness and diversity which should be supported through a wide and flexible range of responses.

REFERENCES


