PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ON DOWN'S SYNDROME

Extract from the DSi International Guidelines for the Inclusive Education of Learners with Down Syndrome

The DSi International Guidelines for the Education of Learners with Down Syndrome aim to improve the education of learners with Down syndrome internationally and to contribute to the realisation of their right to inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities.

The following text is an extract from pages 21-22 of the Guidelines (reproduced with permission).

Effective inclusive education is skilled work for teachers and requires a reflective attitude to professional practice, based on a research orientation. Adequate support in ITE is necessary for developing an ethical commitment to, and personal values around, inclusive education (Symeonidou, 2017). A thorough understanding of the legislative and policy requirements for inclusive education is also critical (Forlin et al., 2007).

Robinson (2017, p. 172) identifies the following components of an effective ITE program:

- **the importance of collaboration;**
- **the value of adopting a research orientation;**
- **the importance of carefully structured field experiences;**
- **the relevance of critical-theorising and reflexive work;**
- **the centrality of deconstructing unhelpful discourses;**
- **the centrality of belief-systems; and**
- **the promise of a theory into practice model.**

Professional experience opportunities within ITE programs are common practice and the opportunity to gain experience and to experience success working in inclusive classrooms is recognised as important.

Forlin and colleagues note that,

'teacher education programs need to consider practicum placements in schools and classrooms where inclusion has been embraced as a philosophy and practice, and where appropriate supports exist to help ensure a successful experience for pre-service teachers'

(Forlin et al., 2007, online).

Unfortunately, in most countries at present, examples of effective inclusive practice on which pre-service teachers may model their practice are inconsistently available (Robinson, 2017; Symeonidou, 2017). This may explain why research findings on the value of practicum placements infused within initial teacher education programs are mixed (Symeonidou, 2017).

On completion of ITE, students must graduate with:

a well-formed, research-based personal philosophy for inclusive education;
the skills to manage the learning in a classroom of diverse learners; and
an understanding of the legal and policy framework that underpins their practice.

References

Forlin, C., Sharma, U., & Loreman, T. (2007). An international comparison of pre-service teacher attitudes towards inclusive education. Disability Studies Quarterly, 27(4). doi:10.18061/dsq.v27i4.53

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Symeonidou, S. (2017). Initial teacher education for inclusion: A review of the literature. Disability and Society, 32(3), 401-422. doi:10.1080/09687599.2017.1298992

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