



# Exploring educators' experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms

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## SUMMARY

Exploring educators' experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms

*Keywords:* disabilities, inclusive education, full-service schools, educators, empathy, qualitative research

In South Africa, educators can be seen as the pillars of the education system. Moreover, educators play a vital role in the inclusive educational system, where their skills, views and character traits influence the classroom atmosphere. Empathy as an educational trait can be seen as a core element in inclusive education, where all learners, with and without disabilities, are provided with an equal opportunity to receive basic education. Although many studies have focused on empathy, there is still a need to explore empathy within an inclusive educational setting, specifically, educators' experiences regarding their own empathy.

In the South African context, there is little qualitative research focussing on this topic. Yet it is believed to be important that educators develop empathic skills in order to accommodate all learners, with and without disabilities, in their classrooms. For the purpose of this qualitative study with a phenomenological research design, a purposive sampling method was used to obtain the participants' experience regarding their own empathy. All the participants were female educators in three schools within the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District in the North West Province between the ages of 30 and 59. The final sample for this study consisted of seven participants. Data was obtained through demographic questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes for this study.

Important themes that were identified include: intrapersonal proficiency of educators by having certain character traits and fulfilling a power role, but also feeling a decrease in their self-confidence; interpersonal understanding for learners with disabilities by earning

their trust and motivating them; having adaptive teaching skills, including the ability to differentiate between their learners' different needs and having a creative teaching approach; and situational aspects that play a role in the empathic experiences of educators, such as facilities and support, time constraints, lack of learner discipline, parental influence, household issues influencing educators' empathy, empathy being influenced through educational experience, and empathy being influenced after educators have become mothers.

This study serves as one of first conducted to explore educators' own empathic experiences within their inclusive classrooms. Thus, this study acts as a basis for future research studies. It identified the importance of empathy within inclusive classrooms, as well as the situations that influence empathy. Additionally, in the development of future programs designed to provide empathic skills training for educators, the findings of this study must be taken into consideration. This study revealed the essential role of empathy in the classroom, which enables the educator to acknowledge each learner and provide appropriate education according to each learner's need.

## OPSOMMING

„n Ondersoek na die onderwysers se ervaringe rakende empatie binne inklusiewe klaskamers

*Sleuteltermes:* gestremdhede, inklusiewe onderwys, voldienste skole, onderwysers, empatie, kwalitatiewe navorsing

In Suid Afrika kan onderwysers gesien word as die pilare binne die onderwyssisteem. Dus speel onderwysers „n kernrol binne die inklusiewe onderwyssisteem, waar hulle vaardighede, perspektief en karaktereienskappe in grootmaat die klaskamer atmosfeer beïnvloed. Gevolglik dien empatie as „n kernelement binne inklusiewe onderwys waar alle leerders, met of sonder „n gestremdheid, „n gelyke kans tot basiese onderrig gegee word. Ten spyte van laasgenoemde, fokus verskeie studies op empatie afsonderlik van onderwys, en bestaan daar „n behoefte om empatie verder te bestudeer binne die inklusiewe onderwyssisteem, spesifiek onderwysers se ervaringe rondom hulle eie empatie.

Binne die Suid Afrikaanse konteks word daar min kwalitatiewe navorsing gevind wat fokus op dié onderwerp. Tog word dit as belangrik beskou dat onderwysers die nodige empatiese vaardighede ontwikkel om sodoende alle leerders, met en sonder gestremdhede, binne hulle klaskamers te akkommodeer. Vir die doel van dié kwalitatiewe studie met „n fenomenologiese ontwerp was doelbewuste steekproefneming gebruik om die deelnemers te benader. Alle deelnemers was vroulike onderwysers van drie verskeie skole binne die Dr Kenneth Kaunda Distrik in die Noordwes Provinsie. Die finale steekproef het bestaan uit sewe onderwysers tussen die ouderdomme van 30 en 59. Data was ontgin deur demografiese vraelyste, asook in-diepte onderhoude. Tematiese analise was gebruik om temas te identifiseer vir die studie.

Relevante temas wat bevestig is deur die studie, sluit in: intrapersoonlike bevoegdheid van onderwysers deur sekere karaktereienskappe te hê, „n magsrol te vervul, asook „n afname

in self-versekerdheid; interpersoonlike begrip deur die leerder se vertrouwe te wen en aan hulle die nodige erkenning en motivering te gee; om aanpasbare onderrigvaardighede te hê wat die vermoë insluit om te differensieer tussen die leerders se verskeie behoeftes, ook om „n kreatiewe onderrigbenadering te hê; asook, situasionele aspekte wat „n rol speel in die empatiese ervarings van onderwysers, insluitend fasiliteite en ondersteuning, tekort aan tyd, tekort aan leerder dissipline, ouerlike invloed, huishoudelike kwessies, empatie deur onderwyservaring en empatie nadat die deelnemers moeders geword het.

Dié studie dien as een van die oorspronklike studies wat daarop fokus om onderwysers se eie empatiese ervarings te ondersoek binne hulle inklusiewe klaskamers. Gevolglik dien dié studie as fondasie vir toekomstige navorsingstudies. Dié studie identifiseer die belangrikheid van empatie binne die inklusiewe klaskamer, asook situasies wat empatie beïnvloed. Dus moet daar in die ontwikkeling van toekomstige programme daarop gelet word om die nodige empatiese opleiding aan onderwysers te verskaf, derhalwe moet die bevindinge van dié studie in ag geneem word. Dié studie rapporteer die belangrikheid van empatie in die klaskamer wat onderwysers instaat stel om elke leerder te erken en die nodige toepaslike onderrig aan die leerders te verskaf volgens elkeen se unieke behoeftes.

## PREFACE

- This mini-dissertation adheres to the article format identified by the North-West University in rule: A 4.4.2.9.
- This article will be submitted for possible publishing in *The Journal of Psychology in Africa*.
- This mini-dissertation adheres to the guidelines established by the American Psychological Association (APA, 6th edition). Section 2 of this mini-dissertation was compiled according to the author guidelines specified by the *Journal of Psychology in Africa* in which it might be published.
- The page numbering is chronological, starting with Section 1 and ending with Appendix F.
- A qualified language practitioner conducted the language editing of this mini-dissertation.
- The Afrikaans quotes from the participants were also translated to English by a qualified language practitioner.
- Data collection for the study (the in-depth interviews) was conducted in the language that was preferred by the participants. English and Afrikaans interview questions were concurrently established and used during the interview process.
- Consent for the submission of this mini-dissertation for examination purposes (in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master's degree in Counselling Psychology) has been provided by the research supervisor, Dr Werner de Klerk.
- This mini-dissertation was submitted to Turn-it-in (5%).

## PERMISSION LETTER FROM SUPERVISOR

Permission is hereby granted for the submission by the first author, Monique de Klerk, of the following article for examination purposes towards the obtainment of a Master's degree in Counselling Psychology:

*Exploring educators' experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms*

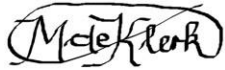
The role of the co-author was as follow: Dr W. de Klerk acted as supervisor and project head of this research inquiry and assisted in the peer review of this article.



Dr Werner de Klerk

## DECLARATION

I, Monique de Klerk, declare that this research study “*Exploring educators’ experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms*” is initial work done by myself. This study serves in the partial fulfilment of my Master’s degree in Counselling Psychology done at the North-West University in Potchefstroom. This work has never been submitted for examination. The necessary consent of all relevant parties was given to conduct this study, and throughout this dissertation the required acknowledgment was given to all reference material.



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Monique de Klerk

**20/07/2017**

Date

Student number: 22668942

## **SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Structure of the Research**

This mini-dissertation comprises three sections. Section 1 (current section) is the literature overview, which endeavours to provide the necessary and relevant information regarding this study. Section 2 presents the article (see page 31 of mini-dissertation), which contains the methodology, findings, discussion of the findings and the conclusion. The last section, Section 3 (see page 70 of mini-dissertation), is a critical reflection of the researcher on her study, together with an overview of the contributions and wider applications of the study.

### **Introduction**

Section 1 of this mini dissertation offers an in-depth literature overview to provide the opportunity for the reader to gain a broad understanding of the essential concepts relevant to this study. The topics that are reviewed include: 1) basic education in South Africa; 2) inclusive education (schools) in the South African context; 3) inclusive schools as full-service schools; 4) inclusive schools compared with special schools and integrated schools; 5) the benefits and challenges of inclusive education (schools) in South Africa; 6) learners with disabilities; 7) statistics in South Africa regarding learners with disabilities in schools; 8) the definition of an educator; 9) educators' lack of skills; 10) educators' views and attitudes towards inclusion; 11) educators' roles and traits within inclusive education; 12) the definition of empathy; 13) development of empathy; 14) empathy types; and 15) empathy in the inclusive educational setting. Section 1 will also present the problem statement and aim of the study.

## **Literature Overview**

In Section 1 of this mini-dissertation, the literature overview, the following terms were investigated: “basic education”, “disabilities”, “inclusive education”, “full-service schools”, “special and integrated schools”, “educators”, “educators and inclusive education”, “educators” preparedness for inclusive education”, “educators” view towards inclusion”, and “empathy” through the use of several databases, including Google Scholar, Science Direct, EBSCOhost and JSTOR.

### **Basic Education in South Africa**

It is clearly stated in Section 29 of the Bill of Rights that every person has the freedom to receive basic education, including learners with disabilities (Dalton, 2012; Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Although Simbo (2012) claims that there is no exact definition for the term basic education, she goes on to write that it can be understood as the gaining of basic learning needs (Simbo, 2012). These basic learning needs include: literacy, numeracy, knowledge and skills, and problem solving skills, which aid in everyday life (Simbo, 2012). According to the Basic Education Coalition (2011) and Gehring et al. (2011), basic education is a vital aspect of wellbeing, contributes to societal growth and promotes stability. The benefits of receiving basic education include equal opportunities for males and females, a better survival rate, the reduction of hunger and poverty and a decrease in the spread of diseases (Results, 2009).

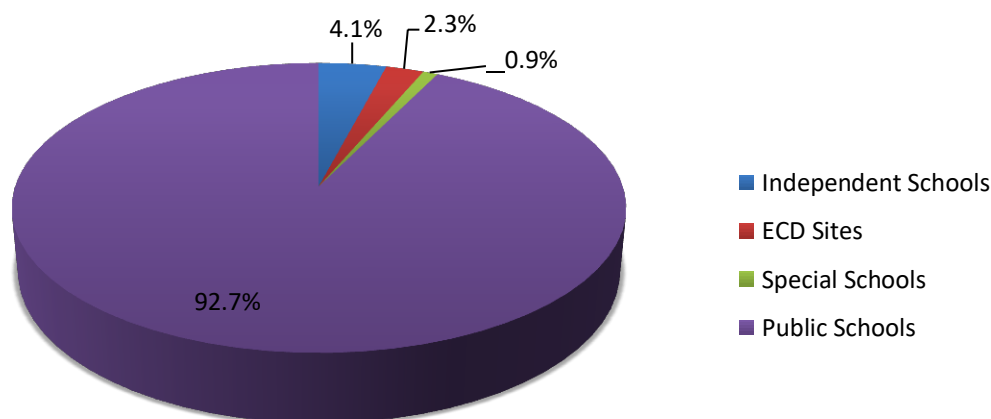
Many studies have focussed on the importance of education for all learners (see Brown, 2014; Doumbia, 2013; Humanium, 2012; Mohan, 2012; Rowan, 2014; Santiago, 2014; United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2012a; Vidyarthi, 2015). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2016a), in its report on statistics in South African education in 2014, states that there were approximately 25 741 government schools, consisting of 14 927

primary schools, with 6 655 171 learners and 201 673 educators, 6 068 secondary schools, with 3 910 643 learners and 143 990 educators, and 4 746 combined and intermediate schools, with 2 089 622 learners and 79 427 educators. Figure 1 (on the following page) provides the percentage of learners in the different educational settings in 2014 (DBE, 2016a).

Mobius (2017) claims that there seems to be a great variety in education in South Africa, ranging from government schools that have the necessary facilities and well-built buildings, to government schools in which there is a lack of quality education, and where educators with a 10th grade education teach grade 12 learners (Mobius, 2017). The National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) reports that several provinces, including Limpopo, Eastern Cape, North West Province and KwaZulu-Natal, have not met the prevailing standards (DBE, 2016b). Wilkinson (2015) writes that between 75% and 80% of schools in South Africa do not have the ability to teach learners the necessary skills. Indeed, NEIMS provides the following percentages of schools without libraries in each province: 44.97% in the Western Cape; 91.55% in the Eastern Cape; 72.10% in the Northern Cape; 65.04% in the Free State; 75.83% in KwaZulu-Natal; 76.84 % in North West Province; 36.68% in Gauteng; 80.93% in Mpumalanga; and 93.51% in Limpopo (DBE, 2016b).

Moreover, according to the NEIMS, the following number of schools in each province does not have any electricity: 177 in the Eastern Cape; 32 in the Free State; 343 in KwaZulu-Natal; 13 in Mpumalanga; one in Limpopo; and three in North West Province (DBE, 2016b). Macupe (2017) claims that water shortages are also a problem, stating that there are 4 000 schools in South Africa that still do not have water. According to Macupe (2017), only six schools in the North West Province have appropriate school structures with the necessary resources and facilities. Another concern regarding the education system in South Africa is the poor maths performance of the learners (Roberts, 2017). According to Roberts (2017),

statistics show that South Africa is second last in the international league table. Mobius (2017) concludes that education in South Africa remains one of the most concerning areas.



*Figure 1.* Percentage distribution of learners in the education system in 2014 (DBE, 2016a)

### **Inclusive Education (Schools) in the South African Context**

**The development of inclusive education in South Africa.** Inclusive education was first realised in rich, developed countries, where extensive and relatively sophisticated special education systems were already established (Zulu, 2007). In developing countries such as South Africa, however, learners with disabilities have historically been more isolated and excluded from the education system than their peers without disabilities (Srivastavaab, De Boer, & Pijl, 2015). In 1973, inclusive education was officially recognised in the United States with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which stated that all school districts had the responsibility to provide free education to all learners, including learners with disabilities (Torreno, 2012). Before 1973, learners with disabilities were excluded from the public school system and placed in special schools, separated from other learners in mainstream education (Torreno, 2012). Legislation protecting the educational rights of learners with disabilities includes the Education for All Handicapped Children Act

(EAHCA) and the No Child left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which, since 2004, has expanded educational opportunities for learners with disabilities, ensuring that approximately 90% of learners with a disability receive education in the United States (Torreno, 2012).

According to Dalton (2012), inclusive education was only introduced in South Africa in 1996 with the development and implementation of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. After Apartheid in this country, the focus has shifted to providing equal services to everyone (Walton, Nel, Hugo, & Muller, 2009), which includes every learner's right to be seen as equal to the other learners, including learners with disabilities, who are entitled to receive education along with their peers (Srivastavaab et al., 2015). According to Dalton (2012), the DBE aims to manage inclusive educational policies by means of The National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS). The SIAS provides guidelines for the roles educators and parents must fulfil in inclusive education, as well as on how to assess the level of support a learner needs (Dalton, 2012). Dalton (2012) claims that the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) also supplies educators with guidelines to meet the different educational needs of each learner.

Zingale, Trubia, Ferri and Elia (2009) describe inclusive education as the inclusion of all learners in a school, irrespective of their weaknesses. The Department of Education (DoE, 2002) itself describes inclusive education as the respectful behaviour towards all learners, despite their differences, and the provision of support to all learners in an attempt to promote successful learning. In addition, the Education White Paper 6 (2001) states that all learners have the ability to learn, and thus inclusive education serves as an opportunity to respect a learner's individuality. Inclusive education aims to assist all learners, including learners with physical, intellectual, social or emotional disabilities (Education White Paper 6, 2001; Mentz & Barrett, 2011). For the purpose of this study, inclusive education will be defined by a combination of the above-mentioned definitions: i.e. inclusive education is the educational

process in which education and learning are provided to all learners, including learners with disabilities, within mainstream schools in the same classes, by ensuring that each learner has an equal opportunity to attain the same skills as his or her peers.

**Inclusive schools as full-service schools.** Inclusive schools can also be described as full-service schools (DBE, 2010a). According to the DBE (2010a), a full-service school is a mainstream educational facility that aims to provide education to all learners, including those with special needs. By encouraging the participation of all learners and reducing barriers to education, the ideals of equity, justice and quality are upheld (DBE, 2010a). Therefore, a full-service school aims at inclusive education and is based on the tenet of inclusion by means of the following: educators must focus on the unique and different needs of each learner; all learners should receive the opportunity to attend mainstream schools and their differences must be respected; all learners are capable of acquiring skills and knowledge, and therefore should be given a fair opportunity; the curricula and environment must be adapted to meet the needs of all learners; all learners should be empowered to develop as individuals; and an environment must be created in which the learners can explore their learning style (DBE, 2010a; DoE, 2005).

Full-service schools thus form a strategy to ensure inclusive education for all, and are supported by inclusion principles (DBE, 2010a; DoE, 2005). The DBE (2010a) identifies criteria to which a school must comply if it aims to be a full-service school and therefore provide education to all learners. These criteria are: the school must have appropriate accessibility for learners with mobility difficulties; the school must embrace change and be open to support services; and the school must be willing to share resources with neighbouring schools in order to create a sufficient level of human resource capacity (DBE, 2010a).

Yet although inclusive education is the ideal educational model, and regardless of the educational policy stipulating that all learners must be given an equal learning opportunity, the reality of inclusive education has not yet been realised in many South African schools (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, & Tlale, 2015). The main reasons for this lack of application are a lack in resources and the negative attitudes educators foster towards the idea of inclusion, owing to the new demands on them and their time (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). Engelbrecht et al. (2015) also state that current education programs are short-term and lack in-depth content knowledge. Students studying an educational degree thus receive minimum training and exposure to learners with disabilities (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). Consequently, graduates enter the educational system without any formal knowledge of how to educate learners with disabilities (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). Educators and educators in training do not have much knowledge of diversity, lack the skills needed to collaborate with all parties involved, have little ability to plan and prepare for the high priority needs of the diverse class, and are unable to exhibit the much-needed support for all learners (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). In addition, the lack of facilities and over-crowded classrooms also serve as obstacles for the successful implementation of inclusive education in South Africa (Engelbrecht et al., 2015) – issues that will be discussed later in this literature overview (see below: benefits and challenges of inclusive schools in South Africa).

### **Inclusive schools in comparison with special schools and integrated schools.**

Inclusive education can be distinguished from special education and integration. Special education can be described as the action to both include and exclude learners with learning difficulties (Florian, 2008). Specifically, although special education means including learners with learning difficulties in mainstream schools, it does so by separating these learners from their peers (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006). Integration, in contrast, refers to the method of integrating learners into an education framework (House of

Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006). The Education White Paper 6 (2001) describes this concept by stating that integration is the process of fitting learners into an existing system, and providing support for them to be part of a normal classroom routine. The Education White Paper 6 (2001) states that integration means providing interventions for learners with special needs, where they are placed in regular classrooms for a certain time, but receive special education for the remainder of the school day. Inclusive education mainly differs from integration by emphasising the production of teaching strategies that benefit all learners (Education White Paper 6, 2001). Therefore, inclusive education refers to adapting the educational system for every learner, with or without a disability, so that all learners receive an opportunity that is equal to their peers, and not adapting the learner to fit into the educational system (Education White Paper 6, 2001).

**Benefits and challenges of inclusive education (schools) in South Africa.** Although inclusive education is seen as the ideal model both in South Africa and internationally (DBE, 2010a; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Mahler, 2009; Singal, 2006; Srivastavaab et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2012b), there still seems to be certain challenges regarding implementation. According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), inclusive education is challenged by two specific aspects, namely the policy of inclusive education itself, and cultural-level barriers. Regarding the former, many educators in South Africa are still unsure what the policy of inclusive education entails and how to apply it in their schools (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Nisreen (2013) adds that some educators find it difficult to manage their classrooms. They also struggle to divide their time equally between learners with disabilities and learners without disabilities (Nisreen, 2013). In addition, learners with disabilities might experience possible discomfort by being different from other learners within the classroom (Nisreen, 2013).

The second challenge, cultural-level barriers, refers to the unique set of cultural differences found in South Africa (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). According to Polat (2011), cultural values greatly determine whether people see education as being important. Additionally, many parents with a disabled child may be demotivated by the financial costs of sending their child to school (Polat, 2011). For Polat (2011), these parents would rather send a child who does not struggle with a disability to school, as that child has a higher chance of earning an income one day. Roux (2014) agrees with Donohue and Bornman's assessment (2014), and adds that the absence of appropriate school facilities also serves as a major challenge. Indeed, according to Roux (2014), the typical school environment lacks the infrastructure to accommodate learners with disabilities and therefore results in these learners not being able to attend school. Naicker (2006), Roux (2014) and Schoeman (2012) concur, arguing that the lack of sufficient resources and materials in most South African schools together with educators' limited set of necessary skills and knowledge interfere with inclusive practices and prevent quality education for all learners. Graham (2014) adds that even the lack of accessible toilet facilities prevents learners with disabilities from attending school. Additionally, inadequate lighting or environments in which there is much noise prevent learners with hearing and visual difficulties from fully participating in class (Graham, 2014). Yet despite these challenges regarding the successful implementation of inclusive education in most South African schools, Donohue and Bornman (2014) argue that in comparison with other developing countries, South Africa seems to be closer to meeting its goals regarding inclusive education.

In her work on the advantages and disadvantages of inclusive education, Nisreen (2013) claims that this type of education serves more a beneficial role than a detrimental one. Nisreen (2013) provides evidence for her argument by explaining that inclusion within schools provides a framework for the community regarding fairness and justice, and teaches

community members the importance of accepting diversity. She states that inclusive education can provide education according to the learner's needs, and not according to curricular standards, and can also foster nurturing relationships between learners with and without disabilities (Nisreen, 2013). Bui, Quirk, Almazan and Valenti (2010) found that learners with disabilities who are placed in mainstream schools display the following traits: less absenteeism from school; better employment after school; fewer behaviour difficulties; better engagement with their peers and educators; and are more likely to receive support. Consequently, inclusive educational settings serve as enriching environments in which learners with disabilities are given the opportunity to grow into unique individuals.

### **Learners with Disabilities**

A learner with disabilities is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2013) as an individual who suffers from sensory, communicative, motor, learning or behavioural problems, which impair bodily functioning, executive functioning and the individual's participation in several life situations. Disabled World (2015) lists different categories of disability, namely: mobile or physical impairment, spinal cord disability, visual and hearing disability, cognitive or learning disability, and psychological disability (referring to mental impairments). For the purpose of this study, learners with a disability in an inclusive educational system refer to those learners with visual disabilities (impaired vision), hearing disabilities (impaired hearing), cognitive disabilities (problems with learning) and physical disabilities (impaired mobility).

**Statistics in South Africa regarding learners with disabilities in schools.** The World Bank (2014) records that approximately 15% of the world population struggles with some form of disability. Locally, Statistics South Africa General Household Survey (GHS) (2014) reports that 5% of South African learners are classified as disabled. The following

table shows the statistical data of the number of schools, educators and learners in the special needs education sector in each province in South Africa in 2014\* (DBE, 2016a).

Table 1

*Statistics in 2014 Regarding Special Needs Education in South Africa*

Province	Schools	Educators	Learners
Eastern Cape	42	888	9 236
Free State	21	638	6 149
Gauteng	136	3 602	44 065
KwaZulu-Natal	72	1 528	17 180
Limpopo	34	705	8 530
Mpumalanga	20	418	3 872
Northern Cape	11	185	1 897
North West	32	592	6 943
Western Cape	79	1 808	19 605
Total in South Africa	447	10 364	117 477

The population for this study included educators teaching in inclusive schools in the North West Province, South Africa. According to the DBE (2016a), in schools in the North West Province, 19 learners are blind and 192 are partially sighted, 327 learners are deaf and 83 find it difficult to hear, 222 learners have a physical disability, 2 081 are mild to moderately intellectually disabled, and 593 have a specific learning disability (DBE, 2016a). According to DBE (2016a), an educator must be well equipped in order to provide equal learning opportunities for all learners. However, there are several aspects that influence an educator's openness to inclusion and teaching learners with disabilities, including the educator's skill set, view, attitude, role in the classroom, and personality traits.

\*According to the Department of Basic Education, the DBE (2016a) statistics that display data from 2014 are most recent.

## **Definition of an Educator**

The DBE (2010b) defines an educator as any individual who has the ability to provide education or training to other people. Merriam Webster (2015) adds that an educator can be described as an individual who passes certain information or skills on to another person. Kutlu and Coskun (2014) believe that educators must have the ability to help all learners engage and attain relevant information. For the purpose of this study, educators will be defined as individuals who possess the necessary skills to adapt to any learning environment, in order to provide equal and comprehensive academic opportunities to all learners so that they are able to succeed. Smith and Tyler (2011) claim in their study that educators who are willing to provide education to learners with disabilities tend to experience more happiness with their profession and are less likely to leave their careers. In contrast, however, Machi (2007) argues that some educators do not display a willingness to provide education to learners with disabilities, and might approach learners with disabilities from a traditional and medical paradigm, which states that a disability is the effect of a disease or social deviance.

**Educator's lack of skills.** Zulu (2007) states that educators' lack of skills serves as a challenge to the successful implementation of inclusive education within South African schools. Hence, it is clear that inclusive education requires educators to acquire the necessary skills and develop new methods in order to be competent to provide quality education to all learners (Machi, 2007). Moreover, Frankel, Gold and Ajodhia-Andrews (2010, as cited in Donohue & Bornman, 2014) state that in order for South Africa to successfully implement inclusive education, educators must be skilled and have a positive attitude regarding inclusion. However, research shows that educators are not willing to acquire new skills owing to their lack of confidence in helping learners with disabilities (Machi, 2007). Research done by Chimhenga (2016) concurs, finding that there are still many educators who lack confidence and feel inadequate regarding the education of learners with disabilities, and

therefore also develop a negative attitude towards those learners, which may influence these learners' academic performance.

**Educators' views and attitudes towards inclusion.** Nisreen's study (2013) on educators' view and attitudes towards inclusion found that most educators agree with the philosophy of inclusion within schools only if the following is made possible: educators are provided with continuous training to accommodate learners with disabilities; an environment is created in which the value of diversity is respected by the whole society; the schools are equipped with the necessary facilities in order to aid in the learning process; and the school environment is adapted to accommodate learners with physical disabilities. In addition, Bradshaw and Mundia (2006) claim that educators who have had previous experience with inclusive education are more likely to maintain a positive attitude regarding the inclusion of all learners.

Chimhenga (2016) argues that if educators foster a negative attitude towards inclusion, they might exhibit feelings such as frustration and anger towards learners with disabilities. Moreover, Chimhenga (2016) adds that the quality interaction between educators and learners is dependent upon the way in which the educator views the learner. Research done by Samuel and Erten (2015) confirms that the attitudes educators have towards different learners in their class are essential for creating an inclusive environment for the learners. Thus, educators must positively transform their views and attitudes towards inclusive education in order to provide equal educational opportunities for every learner. These equal opportunities can determine the disabled learners' future behaviour, social acceptance, academic performance and engagement in academic activities (Eisenhower, Baker, & Blacher, 2007).

**Educators' roles and traits within inclusive education.** Educators greatly influence the successful implementation of inclusive education and can be seen as essential to the educational process (Hanford, 2016). Thus, it is of vast importance that educators enact different roles in order to create an environment in which every learner feels welcome. Stojiljkovic, Djigic and Zlatkovic (2012) claim that an educator has two main tasks, namely promoting the learners' personal growth and providing the necessary knowledge. Harrison and Killion (2007) further describe ten roles an educator must fulfil: resource provider, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, mentor, school leader, data coach, catalyst for change, and a learner themselves (Harrison & Killion, 2007). Stojiljkovic et al. (2012) add that the educator must also serve a motivational role, regulate social relations within the class, and promote emotional interaction. All these roles will enable them to adapt to an inclusive educational setting and thus make equal learning opportunities available to every learner, with or without a disability (Peck, Maude, & Brotherson, 2015).

Apart from the roles the educator must fulfil, certain traits are essential for the teacher in the inclusive classroom. According to Zeiger (2016), focussing on the traits of educators within an inclusive educational setting will provide enriching information on how to teach educators how to approach inclusive education, and how to create an appropriate learning environment for learners with disabilities. Certain traits of educators will also promote adjustment to inclusive education (Peck et al., 2015). These traits include critical thinking skills, and the ability to academically stimulate the learners for them to achieve the necessary outcomes (Weimer, 2013).

Alrubail (2015) adds that educators must be kind and compassionate, able to create a caring environment for all learners, and be positive by focusing on building trusting relationships with each learner. Moreover, educators must always be empathic, or able to put

themselves in each learner's situation in order to develop a perspective of the child's life. Empathy is a vital trait for educators in an inclusive educational setting. Indeed, Stojiljkovic et al. (2012) claim that empathy can aid in the communicative process and encourages learners to experience pleasure, freedom, engagement and comprehension within the classroom. Stojiljkovic et al. (2012) add that educators in inclusive education who portray high empathy levels are more open to others in a sensitive manner. However, there is little research that emphasises empathy as an important trait that an educator must have in order to make the academic environment suitable for every learner within an inclusive educational setting (Altay & Demirkan, 2014).

## **Empathy**

**Definition of empathy.** Bernhardt and Singer (2012) differentiate between sympathy and empathy by referring to sympathy as the subjective feeling someone has for another person, and the need to see others well. An alternative definition for sympathy is concern about another person's functioning (Burton, 2015). According to theorists, there is no universal definition of empathy (Bernhardt & Singer, 2012; Stojiljkovic et al., 2012; Swan & Riley, 2015). Rogers defines empathy (as cited in Elliott, Bohart, Watson, & Greenberg, 2011) as the sensitive ability to understand a person's feelings from his or her perspective. Stojiljkovic et al. (2012) explain that empathy refers to the preoccupation with another person's thoughts by putting oneself in the other person's position. Bernhardt and Singer (2012) add that empathy is the ability to share another's feelings, and it can be seen as an essential part of everyone's social lives. Kutlu and Coskun (2014) explain Alfred Adler's view on empathy as the ability to feel through the heart of someone else. For McDonald and Messinger (2012), it is the capacity to imagine the emotional experience of another individual. Taking a different approach, Swan and Riley (2015) illustrate the meaning of empathy by referring to three elements, namely: the ability to understand another's goals, the

ability to understand their thoughts, and having a perspective regarding their feelings. Burton (2015) distinguishes between empathy and sympathy by stating that sympathy does not include a mutual or shared perspective or a shared distress for another person. For the purpose of this study, empathy will refer to an individual's ability to put oneself in another's emotional and cognitive situation, and act accordingly with support and understanding.

**Development of empathy.** McDonald and Messinger (2012) describe the development of empathy, stating that it appears and matures early and rapidly in most individuals' lives. According to McDonald and Messinger (2012), this development is influenced by an individual's socialisation skills, genetics, neural development and temperament. Nakao and Itakura (2009) name two different theories regarding empathy, namely Martin Hoffman's empathy and moral development theory, and Daniel Batson's empathy-induced altruistic motivation model. One on hand, Hoffman (2000) explains empathy in terms of the experience of empathic distress, which is converted into empathic altruism, which in turn enables an individual to empathise and support another. Hoffman (2000) adds that in order to feel empathy, a person must experience empathic distress, meaning that a feeling of discomfort and distress is present when someone who is in actual distress is being observed. The empathic distress is then converted into empathic altruism, which consists of sympathy, pity and compassion (Nakao & Itakura, 2009).

One the other hand, Daniel Batson argues that empathic distress does not lead to empathic altruism, but rather produces motivation to relieve distress (Batson, 2008; Nakao & Itakura, 2009). Hence, according to Batson's theory, empathic altruism drives people to support someone in need, and therefore relieve their empathic distress (Nakao & Itakura, 2009). Batson thus disagrees with Hoffman in that empathic distress does not lead to empathic altruism, but rather produces the motivation to relieve distress (Batson, 2008; Nakao & Itakura, 2009). In other words, while Hoffman believes that empathic distress leads

to empathic altruism and enables people to help or support others (Nakao & Itakura, 2009), Batson's theory posits that empathic altruism drives people to support someone in need, and thus relieve their own empathic distress (Nakao & Itakura, 2009). In either case, empathy would serve as a motivational aspect for educators to deal with each learner, regardless of their situation, with the necessary support and guidance, which in turn will create an environment in which equal learning opportunities are provided to all learners within the inclusive educational setting.

**Empathy types.** According to Elliott et al. (2011), three types of empathy can be identified. The first is empathic rapport, which means to build a support system where there is mutual understanding (Elliott et al., 2011). The second is communicative atonement, which refers to a person's effort to keep focussing on the other individual on a moment-to-moment basis. The third, person empathy, means to understand the other person's world (Elliott et al., 2011). Swan and Riley (2015) add that empathy also consists of three elements: understanding other's goals, understanding their thoughts, and having a perspective regarding their feelings. Decety and Cowell (2014) claim that empirical findings show that a relationship exists between morality and empathy, and that empathy can guide or interfere with moral judgement. Furthermore, empathy contributes to pro-social behaviour (Decety & Cowell, 2014), and can be deemed an essential aspect in teaching, helping educators to gain a perspective of what others in the educational setting feel (Kutlu & Coskun, 2014).

**Empathy in the inclusive educational setting.** According to Magare, Kitching and Roos (2010), the effective application of inclusive education mainly relies on the educators. Stojiljkovic et al. (2012) state that an educator must have emotional stability and empathic sensitivity. Empathic sensitivity, according to Stojiljkovic et al. (2012), is a vital aspect within inclusive education, one which enables educators to communicate effectively with the different role players in the educational system, and also to provide a classroom atmosphere

in which every learner feels free, involved and respected. Stojiljkovic et al. (2012) explain that empathy can thus be seen as essential to achieve success in the educational setting. Peck et al. (2015) concur that empathy helps the role players to understand the thoughts and actions of others, and to react in a suitable manner.

In addition, Swan and Riley (2015) state that educational empathy enables educators to express concern for every learner, as well as transform their methods of teaching in order to meet all the learners' needs. By embracing empathy in the classroom, the educators are able to respond to every learner's need and provide an equal learning environment for all (Peck et al., 2015). Peck et al. (2015) claim that empathy in the classroom enables educators to treat every learner fairly, without expressing any judgement, but rather valuing each learner's uniqueness and supporting each learner. Peck et al. (2015) also state that a shortage of empathy can lead to burnout, causing the educator to no longer have the ability to contribute to the successful learning of each learner. Swan and Riley (2015) believe that empathy in the classroom serves as the foundation for learner care.

Thus, it is of paramount importance that the focus of inclusive education shifts from the preparations and importance thereof to the empathic responses of educators, in order to accept and accommodate each learner. Kutlu and Coskun (2014) concur that the essential aspect of empathy is its application. According to Zahavi and Overgaard (as cited in Swan and Riley, 2015), empathy in an educational setting can be seen as the ability of the educators to have insight into the mind and behaviour of others. Kutlu and Coskun (2014) add that empathy helps with the educational process in delivering positive outcomes. Swan and Riley (2015) agree that empathy can be seen as an essential skill that helps educators to create a positive academic setting for learners, while Peck et al. (2015) believe that educators' philosophy must be inclusion for all learners, including those with disabilities and learners from different backgrounds. By embracing empathy in the classroom, the educators will be

able to respond to every learner's needs and provide an equal learning environment for all (Peck et al., 2015). Nisreen (2013) thus argues that because educators are the most important pillars within the education system, it is essential to investigate their empathic experiences within inclusive education.

### **Problem Statement**

From the foregoing literature study, it is evident that empathy plays an essential role in inclusive education (Swan & Riley, 2015). The lack of skills and unwillingness of educators to teach learners with disabilities is problematic within the South African context (Dalton, 2012). Indeed, the negative views and attitudes educators foster towards learners with disabilities prevent them from creating an empathic atmosphere in which all learners are treated equally (Samuel & Erten, 2015).

Although various research has already been done regarding empathy in inclusive classrooms, no study focuses on the educators' own experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms. Past research done on empathy places emphasis on the role, development and importance of empathy in general (see Barr, 2010; Batson, 2008; Burton, 2015; Decety & Cowell, 2014; Elliott et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2000; Kutlu & Coskun, 2014; McDonald & Messinger, 2012; Nakao & Itakura, 2009; Stojiljkovic et al., 2012; Swan & Riley, 2015). Therefore, these studies overlook the importance of empathic responses from educators within an inclusive classroom, as emphasised by Barr (2010), who states that educator empathy is an area that requires more study. Swan and Riley (2015) add that only a moderate amount of research has been done on the impact of an educator's empathy in the classroom. Previous research have investigated the roles of educators in education (see Alrubail, 2015; Harrison & Killion, 2007; Soni, 2012; Weimer, 2013), educators' views towards inclusive education (see Bradshaw & Mundia, 2006; McFarlane & Wolfson, 2013;

Nel, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Tlale, 2014; Oswald & Swart, 2011; Schoeman, 2012), preparations for and implementation of inclusive education (see Chireshe, 2011; Dalton, 2012; DoE, 2002; Education White Paper 6, 2001; Florian, 2008; Greyling, 2009; Hay & Beyers, 2011; Kim, 2014; Mentz & Barrett, 2011; Naicker, 2006; Polat, 2011; Torreno, 2012; UNICEF, 2012a; Zingale et al., 2009; Zulu, 2007), possible challenges of inclusive education (see Donohue & Bornman, 2014), the role and importance of empathy (see Batson, 2008; Burton, 2015; Elliott et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2000; Kutlu & Coskun, 2014; Nakao & Itakura, 2009), and empathy within inclusive education (see Barr, 2010; Stojiljkovic et al., 2012; Swan & Riley, 2015).

There is an evident gap in the research regarding the educators' own experiences regarding empathy within an inclusive classroom – which is imperative for educators to provide an inviting academic atmosphere for every learner (Barr, 2010; Swan & Riley, 2015). By focussing on the empathic experiences of educators, this qualitative study with a phenomenological research design will enable the researcher to collect rich data and thus identify and describe empathy within an inclusive educational setting. Therefore, the research question that was identified for the purpose of this study is: What are educators' experiences regarding their own empathy within inclusive classrooms?

### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this research study is to identify and describe educators' own empathic experiences in inclusive classrooms in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District in the North West Province. These findings will possibly provide rich data regarding the importance of empathy in inclusive settings, and offer future guidance for educators for the successful implementation of inclusive education and the provision of equal learning opportunity for every learner, no matter his or her educational need.

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## **SECTION 2: ARTICLE**

### **Exploring educators' experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms**

#### *2.1 Guidelines for authors: Journal of Psychology in Africa*

This article will be submitted for possible publication in *Journal of Psychology in Africa*. Thus, there will first be a summary of the author guidelines for this specific journal, followed by the article.

### **Instructions for Authors**

#### **Manuscripts**

Manuscripts should be written in English and conform to the publication guidelines of the latest edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) publication manual of instructions for authors. Manuscripts can be a maximum of 7 000 words.

#### **Submission**

Manuscripts should be prepared in MSWord, double spaced with wide margins and submitted via email to the Editor-in-Chief at the following address: [elias.mpofu@sydney.edu.au](mailto:elias.mpofu@sydney.edu.au). Before submitting a manuscript, authors should peruse and consult a recent issue of the *Journal of Psychology in Africa* for general layout and style.

#### **Manuscript Format**

All pages must be numbered consecutively, including those containing the references, tables and figures. The typescript of a manuscript should be arranged as follows:

- Title: this should be brief, sufficiently informative for retrieval by automatic searching techniques and contain important keywords (preferably <13).
- Author(s) and address(es) of author(s): The corresponding author(s) must be indicated. The author“s/authors“ respective address(es) where the work was done must be indicated. An e-mail address, telephone number and fax number for each corresponding author must be provided.
- Abstract: Articles and abstracts must be in English. Submission of abstracts translated into French, Portuguese and/or Spanish is encouraged. For data-based contributions, the abstract should be structured as follows: Objective – the primary purpose of the paper; Method – data source, participants, design, measures, data analysis; Results – key findings, implications, future directions; and Conclusions – summary in relation to the research questions and theory development. For all other contributions (except editorials, book reviews and special announcements), the abstract must be a concise statement of the content of the paper. Abstracts must not exceed 150 words. The statement of the abstract should summarise the information presented in the paper but should not include references.
- Text: (1) Per APA guidelines, only one space should follow any punctuation; (2) Do not insert spaces at the beginning or end of paragraphs; (3) Do not use colour in text; and (4) Do not align references using spaces or tabs; use a hanging indent.
- Tables and figures: These should contain only information directly relevant to the content of the paper. Each table and figure must include a full, stand-alone caption, and each must be sequentially mentioned in the text. Collect tables and figures together at the end of the manuscript or supply as separate files. Indicate the correct placement in the text in this form <insert Table 1 here>. Figures must conform to the journal’s style. Pay particular attention to line thickness, font and figure proportions, taking into account the

journal's printed page size – plan around one column width (82 mm) or two column widths (170 mm). For digital photographs or scanned images, the resolution should be at least 300 dpi for colour or greyscale artwork and a minimum of 600 dpi for black line drawings. These files can be saved (in order of preference) in PSD, PDF or JPEG format. Graphs, charts or maps can be saved in AI, PDF or EPS format. MS Office files (Word, Powerpoint, Excel) are also acceptable but DO NOT EMBED Excel graphs or Powerpoint slides in a MS Word document.

## Referencing

Referencing style should follow latest edition of the APA manual of instructions for authors.

- References in text: References in running text should be quoted as follows: (Louw & Mkize, 2012), or ( Louw, 2011), or Louw (2000, 2004a, 2004b). All surnames should be cited the first time the reference occurs, e.g., Louw, Mkize, and Naidoo (2009) or (Louw, Mkize, & Naidoo, 2010). Subsequent citations should use et al., e.g. Louw et al. (2004) or (Louw et al., 2004). “Unpublished observations” and “personal communications” may be cited in the text, but not in the reference list. Manuscripts submitted but not yet published can be included as references followed by “in press”.
- Reference list: Full references should be given at the end of the article in alphabetical order, using double spacing. References to journals should include the author's/authors' surname(s) and initial(s), the full title of the paper, the full name of the journal, the year of publication, the volume number and inclusive page numbers. Titles of journals must not be abbreviated. References to books should include the author's/authors' surname(s) and initial(s), the year of publication, the full title of the book, the place of publication, and the publisher's name. References should be cited as per the examples below:

### **Journal Article**

Peltzer, K. (2001). Factors at follow-up associated with adherence with adherence with directly observed therapy (DOT) for tuberculosis patients in South Africa. *Journal of Psychology in Africa, 11*(2), 165–185.

### **Book**

Gore, A. (2006). *An inconvenient truth: The planetary emergency of global warming and what we can do about it*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale.

### **Edited Book**

Galley, K. E. (Ed.). (2004). *Global climate change and wildlife in North America*. Bethesda, MD: Wildlife Society.

### **Chapter in a Book**

Cook, D. A., & Wiley, C. Y. (2000). Psychotherapy with members of the African American churches and spiritual traditions. In P. S. Richards & A. E. Bergin (Eds), *Handbook of psychotherapy and religiosity diversity* (pp 369–396). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

### **Newspaper Article (Signed)**

Landler, M. (2007, June 2). Bush's greenhouse gas plan throws europe off guard. *New York Times*, p. A7.

### **Unpublished Thesis**

Appoh, L. (1995). The effects of parental attitudes, beliefs and values on the nutritional status of their children in two communities in Ghana (Unpublished master's thesis).  
University of Trondheim, Norway.

### **Conference Paper**

Sternberg, R. J. (2001, June). *Cultural approaches to intellectual and social competencies*.  
Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Society,  
Toronto, Canada.

## 2.2 Article:

Exploring educators' experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms

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## Abstract

An inclusive educational setting is a model in which educators must have empathic sensitivity, which will enable them to identify the different needs of the various learners. However, there is gap in research concerning educators' own experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms. This qualitative study with a phenomenological research design thus aimed to identify, through the use of in-depth interviews, the educators' own empathic experiences within their inclusive classrooms in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District in the North West Province, South Africa. A sample of seven female educators from three schools participated in this study. The data was analysed thematically, and the following main themes were identified: intrapersonal proficiency of educators; interpersonal understanding for learners with disabilities; having adaptive skills; and situational aspects that play a role in the empathic experiences of educators. It was determined that future research should focus on more districts in order to gain better representations of the North-West Province, also in other provinces to get a better representation of South Africa. In addition, a program must be developed in which educators are trained in the necessary empathic skills.

*Keywords:* disabilities, inclusive education, full-service schools, educators, empathy, qualitative research

## **Orientation and Problem Statement**

Section 29 of the Bill of Rights states all South Africans have the freedom to receive basic education (Dalton, 2012; Donohue & Bornman, 2014). There are several advantages to receiving basic education, including equal prospects for males and females, a reduction in hunger and poverty, and a better survival rate (Results, 2009). The Basic Education Coalition (2011) and Gehring et al. (2011) claim that basic education is an essential aspect of wellbeing, contributes to societal growth and promotes stability. Türkkahraman (2012) believes that basic education can permit economic growth and community development, as well as empower learners with the necessary skills and abilities to contribute to societal issues. Basic education can be seen as a vital tool that broadens learners' knowledge and enhances their skill set (Türkkahraman, 2012), thus it is important that each learner has the opportunity to receive such education.

Inclusive education is arguably an ideal educational model, where the educational system is adapted for every learner (whether they have a disability or not) so that all receive equal education (Education White Paper 6, 2001). Dalton (2012) states that after the development of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in 1996, inclusive education was introduced in South Africa. According to the Department of Education (DoE, 2002), inclusive education entails respect towards every learner, despite their differences, by providing support to all learners in an attempt to promote successful learning. Furthermore, the goal of inclusive education is to assist all learners, including learners with physical, intellectual, social or emotional disabilities (Education White Paper 6, 2001; Mentz & Barrett, 2011). Inclusive schools can also be described as full-service schools, which, according to the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2010), can be defined as mainstream educational facilities that aim to provide education to all learners, regardless of their needs. Such schools focus on equity, justice and quality, and aim to increase participation of all

learners as well as reduce barriers to education (DBE, 2010). For the purpose of this study, inclusive education is defined as the educational process in which education and learning are provided to all learners, including learners with disabilities, within mainstream schools in the same classes by ensuring that each learner has an equal opportunity to learn the necessary skills.

Even though inclusive education serves as the ideal educational setting, and educational policy specifies that equal learning opportunities must be provided to all learners, Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, and Tlale (2015) claim that the reality of inclusive education has not yet been realised in many South African schools. This failure of application is largely a consequence of a lack in resources and facilities, as well as over-crowded classrooms (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). In addition, many educators hold negative attitudes towards inclusion, owing to the new demands on them and their time (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

For the successful implementation of inclusion within classrooms, educators must therefore have empathy, which serves the foundation for learner care (Swan & Riley, 2015). Rogers (as cited in Elliott, Bohart, Watson, & Greenberg, 2011) defines empathy as the sensitive ability to understand a person's feelings from his or her perspective. According to Stojiljkovic, Djigic, and Zlatkovic (2012), it is important that an educator has emotional stability and empathic sensitivity. Empathic sensitivity helps educators create an atmosphere in their classroom in which every learner feels safe, involved and respected (Stojiljkovic et al., 2012). For the purpose of this study, empathy refers to one's ability to put oneself in another's emotional and cognitive situation, and act accordingly with support and understanding. Peck, Maude, and Brotherson (2015) claim that educators who embrace empathy within their classrooms are better able to respond to the different needs of every learner and provide a learning environment characterised by equality.

As it stands, educators' lack of skills and unwillingness to teach learners with disabilities is problematic within the South African context (Dalton, 2012). The negative attitudes educators have towards learners with disabilities prevent them from creating an empathic atmosphere in which all learners are treated equally (Samuel & Erten, 2015). It thus seems of paramount importance that inclusive education's focus be on the empathic responses of educators, in order to teach them to accept and accommodate each learner in their classrooms. Although various studies (see Barr, 2010; Batson, 2008; Burton, 2015; Decety & Cowell, 2014; Elliott et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2000; Kutlu & Coskun, 2014; McDonald & Messinger, 2012; Nakao & Itakura, 2009; Stojiljkovic et al., 2012; Swan & Riley, 2015) focus on empathy in inclusive classrooms, none emphasise the importance of educators' own experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms. Thus, these studies overlook the essential aspect of empathic responses from educators within an inclusive classroom. Indeed, as summarised by Barr (2010), educator empathy is a vital area that requires more study. It is this issue that this study aimed to address, and a phenomenological research design allowed us to collect rich data and identify and describe empathy within an inclusive educational setting.

### **Goal of the Study**

This qualitative study with a phenomenological research design aimed to identify and describe educators' own empathic experiences in inclusive classrooms in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District in the North West Province. Therefore, the following research question directed this study: What are educators' experiences regarding their own empathy within inclusive classrooms?

## **Method of Investigation**

### **Research Method**

In this study, a qualitative research method was used. Nieuwenhuis (2016a) describes qualitative research as a descriptive method in which the process, meaning and comprehension of obtaining information through words are vital to the researcher when studying social phenomena. The qualitative research method was appropriate for the purpose of this study as it enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of empathy within an inclusive setting, and thus provide insight into the lived experiences of educators' empathy within inclusive classrooms.

### **Research Design**

A phenomenological research design was used for this study as it provided the researcher with the opportunity to acquire an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of the participants regarding a specific phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b), i.e. the lived experiences of educators' own empathetic experiences within an inclusive classroom. According to Nieuwenhuis (2016b, p. 78), "like other qualitative designs, phenomenology is popular in the social and health sciences, but also in education research".

### **Participants and Research Context**

To meet the aim of the study, the participants had to comply with certain criteria. The educators had to be employed at a school within the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District, which is situated in the North West Province, South Africa. This educational setting had to be inclusive, where education is provided to learners without disability along with those who suffer from a visual disability (impaired vision), hearing disability (impaired hearing), cognitive disability (problems with learning), or physical disability (impaired mobility).

Furthermore, the educators also had to be willing to participate by signing the informed consent form, be able to speak either English or Afrikaans, have one year of teaching experience within the inclusive educational setting, and be registered as a qualified educator at the Education Association of South Africa. The educators were informed about this study via the principals who served as gatekeepers. The contact details of the mediator (the independent person within this research inquiry) were given to the participants by the principals, which allowed the participants to contact the mediator if they were interested in participating. The final research sample was seven educators who voluntarily participated in this study, all of whom were women, from three schools in the district. Six of the seven educators were White, and one was an Indian woman. Their years of experience in teaching and in inclusive education varied (see table 1).

Table 1

*Demographic Information of Participants*

Participant number	Age	Race	Home language	Years of experience in teaching	Years of experience in inclusive education
P1	51	White	English	29 years	5 years
P2	51	White	Afrikaans	22 years	5 years
P3	46	White	English	17 years	8 years
P4	47	White	English	23 years	20 years
P5	59	White	Afrikaans	26 years	11 years
P6	30	Indian	English	9 years	2 years
P7	55	White	Afrikaans	20 years	2 years

**Data Collection**

As already mentioned, a phenomenological research design (see Nieuwenhuis, 2016b) was used in this study, where the researcher aimed to understand educators' empathic experiences regarding a specific phenomenon, i.e. inclusive classroom. Different data

collection methods were used. Firstly, a demographic questionnaire was used to gather the basic information of the participants and included questions that established the participants' age, ethnicity, teacher qualification(s), years of teaching experience, as well as years of teaching at specific school. Secondly, an in-depth interview was conducted that provided the participants with the opportunity to share their lived experiences regarding their own empathy in an inclusive classroom. According to Greeff (2011), sharing one's experiences concerning a specific phenomenon entails a meaning-making process in which the researcher explores and tries to understand the participants' perspectives or experiences of a certain idea or situation. The in-depth interview was best suited for the purpose of this study, as it allowed the researcher greater flexibility in asking the participants questions, who were then able to give a fuller account of their lived experience. It also provided the opportunity for probing and clarification (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b) in order to get the best possible understanding about the empathic experiences of the educators within inclusive classrooms.

In order to achieve the aim of this study, two open-ended questions were asked during the in-depth interview: the first was to address the experiences of each participant regarding her own empathy within inclusive classroom, and the second addressed the contexts or situations that have typically influenced or affected her experiences regarding her own empathy within the inclusive classroom. These two broad questions were in accordance with the guidelines provided by Moustakas (1994, as cited in Creswell, 2007) for asking in-depth interview questions that are appropriate for the phenomenological research design. The definition of empathy (i.e. an individual's ability to put oneself in another's emotional and cognitive situation, and act accordingly with support and understanding) used for the purpose of this research inquiry was provided and explained to each participant prior to the in-depth interview.

Lastly, the researcher made use of field notes. The use of field notes was necessary in ensuring the “bracketing” that is essential for phenomenological research (see Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). Bracketing is where researchers set aside their own experiences “to take a fresh perspective towards the phenomenon” (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b, p. 78). The researcher thus made use of field notes throughout her research process (data collection and analysis) as part of her “bracketing” process.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected through the in-depth interviews was transcribed verbatim prior to thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, according to Clarke and Braun (2013), can be described as the process in which data is studied thoroughly through reading, coding and identifying themes. This process enabled the researcher to follow a structured and chronological method, which in turn increased the level of trustworthiness (Morgan, 2013). The researcher continuously focused on the empathic experiences of the educators in inclusive classrooms by reviewing the description of the terms (empathy and inclusive classrooms) throughout the analysis.

Thematic analysis in this study consisted of the following steps (Clarke & Braun, 2013): firstly, the researcher familiarised herself with the data by actively reading and re-reading through the data and transcribing it verbatim. Secondly, codes were created according to significance. Thirdly, possible themes were highlighted from the codes and categorised under an overarching theme. Next, the researcher revised the themes by making them significant to the data. The last phase of thematic analysis required the researcher to label the themes and identify possible subthemes for each theme. According to Nieuwenhuis (2016b), as part of the phenomenological research process, once the themes have been identified, the researcher must develop the following: a textual description of what the participants

experienced; a structural description of the participants' experiences regarding how they experienced the phenomenon in terms of conditions, situations and/or context; and "a combination of the textual and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience" (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b, p. 78).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was ensured by following the model of Lincoln and Guba provided by Krefting (1991), which motivated the researcher to focus on four aspects. The first aspect is truth value, which establishes confidence and credibility in the researcher's findings about the context and themes presented by the participants (Krefting, 1991). The researcher had to be truthful about the data collected regarding the lived experiences of the educators' empathy in inclusive classrooms, and present accurate interpretations thereof (Krefting, 1991). Truth value was ensured by accurate verbatim transcriptions of the data collected, active engagement with the data (code and re-coding of all the data), and making use of a co-coder (a registered research psychologist within the School of Psychosocial Health). The second aspect of Lincoln and Guba's model is applicability. In this study, the researcher presented the methodology in a comprehensive and detailed manner to aid in future research. The third aspect, consistency, was ensured by the researcher through asking prepared questions in the interview stage of data collection stage. The final aspect is neutrality, which requires the researcher to be objective (Schurink, Fouché, & De Vos, 2011). Neutrality was achieved by only focussing on the information provided by the participants, and not integrating the researcher's own perspectives and motivations (Krefting, 1991) via bracketing, making sure that the data collected supported any interpretations and conclusions made. The researcher also made use of an audit strategy (record keeping) to ensure objectivity.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the North-West University (NWU-00342-16-A1), as well as from the District Director of Education and Sport Development, Dr Kenneth Kaunda District, North West Province, South Africa.

After approval was obtained from all relevant legal parties, schools (principals) and governing bodies were approached for permission to conduct the proposed research study at their schools. After permission was received, the researcher assigned a mediator who provided the educators (participants) with a consent form to complete if they agreed to participate in the study. Both the participant and the mediator signed the consent form in each other's presence. An eyewitness was also asked to sign the consent forms.

Ethical considerations were taken into account by communicating to each participant the importance of confidentiality and ensuring that no personal details would be made public. In addition, the anonymity of each participant was maintained at all times by assigning each one a participant number during the data analysis process. It was also made clear to the participants that they could withdraw from the study before data analysis if they wished. The principal at each school provided an available and appropriate room for the purpose of conducting the in-depth interviews. These rooms provided a comfortable, familiar and safe environment for the participants. Finally, safe keeping of all data and findings is the responsibility of the North-West University.

## **Findings**

Through the process of thematic analysis, four core themes (educators' experiences of their own empathy: themes 1 to 3; and situational aspects that played a role: theme 4) with

their subthemes (see table 2) were identified. The appropriate verbatim quotations were also provided as support for the themes.

Table 2

*Themes and Subthemes Regarding Educators' Own Empathic Experience within Their Inclusive Classrooms*

<b>Theme 1:</b>	<b>Intrapersonal proficiency of educators</b>
Subthemes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Having certain character traits</li> <li>1.2 Portraying a power role</li> <li>1.3 Decrease in self-confidence by feeling that they do not have enough empathy</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2:</b>	<b>Interpersonal understanding for learners with disabilities</b>
Subthemes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Earning the learners' trust</li> <li>2.2 Motivating and acknowledging the learners</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 3:</b>	<b>Adaptive teaching skills</b>
Subthemes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 Differentiating between the different needs of the learners</li> <li>3.2 Having a creative teaching approach</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 4:</b>	<b>Situational aspects playing a role in the empathic experiences of educators</b>
Subthemes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1 Facilities and support</li> <li>4.2 Time constraints</li> <li>4.3 Lack of learner discipline</li> <li>4.4 Parental influence</li> <li>4.5 Household issues influencing educators' empathy</li> <li>4.6 Empathy being influenced through educational experience</li> <li>4.7 Empathy being influenced after educators have become mothers</li> </ul>

## **Theme 1: Intrapersonal Proficiency of Educators**

During the data collection process, it was apparent that certain intrapersonal aspects played an important role in the empathic experiences of educators. These intrapersonal aspects can be explained as having certain character traits that enabled the participants to be empathic, as well as to portray a power role. However, some participants believed that they experienced a decrease in self-confidence because they did not feel as if they had enough empathy for the different learners in their classroom.

**Having certain character traits.** Having certain character traits was reported as playing a vital role in the empathic experiences of educators in their inclusive classroom. One participant stated the following regarding empathy for learners with disabilities: “[...] *So for a long time I had a heart for children who struggle, who really struggle [...] But I often feel the pain of others very easily and I can put myself in the same situation*” (P1). Two other participants added that, “*I think you must have it in your heart*” (P2) and that “[...] *what we do here comes from our hearts*” (P7).

Other character traits that were mentioned by the participants include having patience as well as passion, as noted by one participant: “*This position allows me to have more patience*” (P1). Another said that, “*You must definitely have the patience and a passion for people because if you don’t have passion for people’s children, then it doesn’t help that you are a teacher*” (P3). In addition, it is necessary to be emotionally available for the learners, as specified by one participant, who stated that, “*I get very emotionally involved and I get a lot of criticism, I know, but I feel that’s the only way I reach the children [...] I easily get emotionally involved and I feel it makes me a better teacher*” (P3). Another participant said,

*I will always tell a child to come to me during break if I observed something, or [...] I will sometimes just, I do this often, sometimes a person can just see*

*that a child hasn't had a good day today, then [...] I write a note and then in passing just put it in the child's pencil case [...] (P5).*

Furthermore, some participants stated that inquisitiveness also seems vital in order to experience empathy in their classroom: *"To understand them and to want to work with people, want to find out and want to know about them [...] The fact that I can understand and I want to know what the conditions are at home" (P3).* Also, to be committed serves as an opportunity for educators to be empathic towards the learners in their classroom, as seen in the following statements: *"You can have how many prescriptions and documents that tell you what to do, but [...] [you have to be] committed [...]" (P2),* and that *"I search images mainly from a point of view; I look for apparatus and stuff like that [...] You can't stop and say you know everything" (P1).* Therefore, it appears as if these character traits helped the participants to understand the learners and their situations.

**Portraying a power role.** Certain rules and boundaries need to be set, and the teacher needs to fulfil a power role to encourage or discipline a learner, as noted by one participant, who reported that, *"[...] the boundaries that I set [...] you take a parental position first before you can even take a teachers role" (P1).* Another participant said, *"[...] as an educator, I don't think we realise the influence we can have on the total development of a child [...] we are in a position, and we might say or do something that could hurt or damage a child" (P4).* Additionally, rules play an essential role, as specified by one participant: *"On my class rules, there is a lot of stuff, but the most important is: believe in themselves, never give up" (P7).* Hence, it is important that educators realise the influence they can have on the learners, and the tremendous power they have to build or undermine a learner's confidence.

**Decrease in self-confidence by not feeling adequate.** It was evident that some participants do not feel good enough as educators, because of all the demands that are placed on them. This observation is supported by a participant, who stated that,

*[...] at times you go home feeling I achieved nothing today and all I did was moan and correct [...] I often thought that maybe I'm not good enough as a teacher and that I don't do enough [...] There's far more that I can do [...]* (P1).

Another participant observed, *"[...] the pressure and extra admin and extra stuff we have, I feel that I am no longer a good teacher, because I don't have the empathy that I had when I began."* (P3). Therefore, educators who feel inadequate owing to their feelings of not doing enough or having too much work results in them experiencing a decrease in self-confidence.

## **Theme 2: Interpersonal Understanding for Learners with Disabilities**

During data gathering, it was evident that the participants showed understanding of the learners' situations by trying to earn the learners' trust, and trying to create an environment in which the learners were acknowledged and motivated to learn.

**Earning the learners' trust.** It was apparent to most participants that earning the trust of their learners enables them to experience empathy, as mentioned by one participant: *"You must win their trust, because [...] we actually live in such a broken world that there are so few people that children can really trust [...]* (P2). For another participant, it was necessary to earn the trust of the learners in order for the learners to be able to open up: *"But I just feel it's the only way I get to the children [learners], and you build their trust [...] and as they learn to trust you, they open up..."* (P3). Hence, earning the learner's trust enables the participants to show interpersonal understanding of the learners' situation.

**Motivating and acknowledging the learners.** To acknowledge and motivate the learners and to empower them seem to play important roles for the participants regarding how they deal with the various academic abilities of their learners, as stated by one participant: *“You have to get them [learners] to decide for themselves [make own choices]”* (P1). In addition, one needs *“[...] to praise and really try to motivate them [...] and that motivation helps them to be more self-assured [...]”* (P2). Another participant said that one should motivate the learners to work to the best of their academic capabilities: *“[...] most of the time I try to get them feel a little bit of pressure so that they motivate themselves to work on the same pace as the classroom”* (P6). To continue to motivate the learners and reinforce positive academic performance, one participant said, *“[...] I motivate my [learners] with gold stars [...] so I try to motivate each one on their level [...] and I think it is very important to keep boosting it”* (P7). Participant 5 noted the importance of acknowledging the learners: *“[...] say to a child in the morning „your hair looks nice“ [...] and sometimes give [them] a hug [...] and if I know a child has excelled [...] I will go out of my way to congratulate them”* (P5). Evidently, most participants considered motivation and acknowledgment as important for empowering the learners.

### **Theme 3: Adaptive Teaching Skills**

The data gathered also showed that participants’ experience of empathy inspired them to adapt to the new educational environment of inclusion. They did so by differentiating between the learners’ different needs, and developing a creative teaching approach in order to comply with their different needs.

**Differentiating between the different needs of the learners.** One participant emphasised the uniqueness of every learner, stating that, *“We do a lot of differentiation [...] within the class because of inclusion [...] So in my class especially, you try because everyone*

*is different*” (P3). Some participants focussed on differentiating by providing suitable learning materials appropriate to each learner’s need, as indicated by one participant who claimed that she “...[had] another [learner] who is partially sighted [...] for example I enlarge things [worksheets] for her” (P2). Another participant said, “[...] with the worksheets I make an adjustment [...] I would do an alternative assessment, so I will perhaps ask verbal questions and I am going to test the skill, not the work [...]” (P4). Thus, differentiation plays a vital role for educators, helping them to adapt to learners’ needs and provide the relevant learning material.

**Having a creative teaching approach.** Adapting their teaching approach in order to meet the different needs of each learner motivates most participants to think creatively. One participant said that, “*We come to the class, and then I go back to the very concrete [...] It’s a constant repeat: finding different ways, creative ways of trying to get them see that even games work wonderfully [...]*” (P1). Another participant pointed to identifying innovative ways to convey the work in a comprehensive manner:

*[...] you got to play around and you got to be open to look for different options and I do a lot of Google [...] So then we need to make ourselves available to find ways to make it understandable to them and that’s not always easy* (P1).

Additionally, it seemed vital for the participants to be inventive, for example, “[we] put music on and we do a lot of movement [...] I have a trampoline at the back” (P3). Another technique is to make use of visual aids: “*I love the projector and showing them videos, and actually for children with barriers the videos work so well [...] In the beginning I also played music [...] and I believe in a lot of visual work with our learners*” (P6). Yet another participant said, “*I believe in a lot of visual work with the learners [...] I work a lot on the*

*carpet for them to feel and touch” (P7). Participant 7 went on to note the importance of focussing on the reality of the learners: “[...] everything we do we must pull it through to the reality. The other day we did an advertisement [...] I had to teach them what a slogan means, and when I said „finger liking good“, they immediately answered KFC” (P7). Therefore, educators are able to adjust to the new educational system of inclusion by adapting their teaching style through differentiation and being creative.*

#### **Theme 4: Situational Aspects Playing a Role in the Empathic Experiences of Educators**

During the in-depth interview it became clear that there are certain situational aspects that play a role in the educators’ empathy within their inclusive classrooms. These situational aspects include: facilities and support, time constraints, lack of learner discipline, parental interference, household issues of educators, empathy being influenced through educational experience, and empathy being influenced after educators have become mothers.

**Facilities and support.** It was evident that most participants’ empathy is influenced by facilities provided by and support from the Department of Education. One participant voiced her frustration with the lack of facilities and support provided, stating that,

*[...] now we’re a mainstream school and that label, that etiquette of you are now an inclusive school, [is] forced upon us. Because actually we don’t have the facilities to do that [such as] hearing aids [...] we were supposed to have assistance [such as] occupational therapists, and psychologists, and everything at your disposal, but none of that is here [...]. How do you cope with that in a big class without an assistant? (P1)*

In contrast with the above, another participant from a different school indicated that, *“We are now very happy that the Department has helped us. They gave us money to buy [some] stuff*

*[...] but they also said that they would send us an occupational therapist or a psychologist”* (P4). Thus, a lack of facilities and support can cause a lot of frustration; the provision thereof allows educators to provide the best teaching environment for the learners.

**Time constraints.** Data showed that several participants experienced frustration regarding the time constraints in accordance with their work demands. One participant said,

*I mean, the teachers then have to accommodate for one learner: change a worksheet, change her whole way of doing things to make it easier for her [...]*  
*You don't always have the time and the places available, or you've got other stuff on your desk that you have to do [...]* (P1).

Also, there is additional pressure placed upon educators to complete their assessments in a limited amount of time. One participant complained of *“[...] the pressure and extra admin and the extra stuff that we have”* (P3). Another participant admitted that the unreliability of the education system negatively impacts the learners. She said, *“Our education system is letting the children down [...] they are expecting a whole lot of work, a lot of paperwork, a lot of double work”* (P4). Importantly, one participant believed that not having enough time impacts her ability to feel empathy: *“people don't have time to get to everything. I think it is one of the [...] empathy thieves”* (P2). Another participant elaborated: *“I think also the time constraint is one of the main things that would probably influence our empathy towards the children [...]. The amount of work content to be covered in a certain period of time [...] definitely frustrating most of the time”* (P6). Thus, a lack of time for the amount of work that is expected of educators seems to be a frustration, which negatively influences their empathy.

**Lack of learner discipline.** According to the data gathered, the lack of discipline among learners greatly influences the participants’ empathy within their inclusive classrooms. One participant voiced her frustration, stating that a lack of discipline deprives

her of her empathy: “...If there is no discipline [...] it steals my empathy that I should have for the [learner]” (P2). Another participant also pointed to discipline: “[...] disobedient children I think have a great influence [on empathy] (P5). Evidently, the lack of discipline among learners causes some participants to feel frustrated and prevents them from focussing on the learners.

**Parental influence.** According to most participants, the role that parents play influences their empathy in a negative manner. For one participant, “*Parents interfere tremendously [...]. I’ve had the most parental interference that I have had to deal with in all my teaching years*” (P1). Moreover, “*No parent cooperation makes you lose empathy [...]*” (P3), and “[...] a lot of the time they’re reluctant to help [...] that’s the biggest challenge we’re dealing with” (P6). One participant, however, realised that support from the parents can aid in her empathic experiences: “[...] You must have a good relationship with the parents. You go much further if you work with them [parents] [...]. Have a good relationship with the parents and the child” (P4). Thus, according to the participants, parents play a very important role and can have a definite influence on their own empathy.

**Household issues influencing educators’ empathy.** Participants’ personal responsibilities at home also play a role in their empathy, as noted by one participant: “*I think your own household circumstances also play a role because [...] if I [...] am stressed, my empathy levels are low*” (P3). Another participant pointed to the personal roles one must fulfil at home as well: “[...] you have responsibilities, your personal responsibilities, your family and things you need at home” (P6). Thus, the personal responsibilities educators have in their lives outside school also influence their empathy towards the learners, either positively or negatively.

**Empathy being influenced through educational experience.** It was clearly stated by one participant that her empathy only started to develop with teaching experience: *“I think with my age I also became more empathic [...] when I was younger I mainly focused on teaching my subject”* (P5). Her educational experience thus aided in her development of empathy in her classroom.

**Empathy being influenced after educators had become mothers.** It was apparent that one participant had low levels of empathy, which was enhanced until she herself became a mother:

*I actually as a start off teacher, I did not have that much empathy [...]. And I actually started in a sense to realise that this is somebody’s child [...]. And I think as time goes by like now, I have a lot of sympathy and empathy for children who struggle* (P4).

She further explained that,

*Because I felt that was not what I studied to do. I did not study to go beyond the call of duty and then I came here and I’ve learned to make a lot with a little bit of stuff [...]. When I had my own children it made a big difference because I didn’t have empathy towards other people’s children [...]. This is what I studied to do and this is what I am going to do. I ignored the children that struggled and it was wrong of me I think that now I feel really bad about it* (P4).

Another participant also explained the effect of having a child with a disability and how it influences her empathy, explaining that, *“I have a son who has Asperger [Syndrome] and I think that opened my eyes [...]”* (P7). It is clear that these two participants have developed

empathy as part of both their experience in their inclusive classrooms, as well as in their personal lives.

## **Discussion**

This qualitative study with a phenomenological research design aimed to identify educators' own empathic experiences in inclusive classrooms in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District in the North West Province. The following research question directed this study: What are educators' experiences regarding their own empathy within inclusive classrooms?

The educators had several experiences regarding empathy in their inclusive classrooms. Previous research done by Zeiger (2016) found that focusing on certain traits that an educator must have serves as an opportunity to create a suitable environment for the learners. Zeiger's finding was confirmed by this study, as participants noted that certain traits must be present within educators. In addition, Kelly (2017) claims that along with these traits, educators have a power role, which has a large influence in the lives of learners. This claim was also supported by the study's findings, as educators emphasised the power role they have in the lives of their classroom learners, whether it be through their words, actions or the classroom rules they set.

Yet despite having certain traits and a power role, educators still might experience low self-confidence owing to several factors. According to Machi (2007), educators feel a decrease in their self-esteem because of their unwillingness to find new ways to help learners with barriers to learning. Research done by Chimhenga (2016) concurs, finding that educators' lack of confidence makes them feel inadequate to teach learners who experience barriers to learning. This research study supported this finding, as participants noted that because of their own personal deficiency, they do not feel good enough as educators, and feel that they must do more in order to feel adequate.

Alrubail (2015) emphasises the importance of educators creating a trusting relationship with the learners, which is verified by the study's findings. A trusting relationship aids in the understanding of the learner as a whole, including why the learner acts in a certain manner. Zeiger (2016) not only affirms the importance of creating a trusting relationship with the learners, but also states why it is necessary to motivate the learners. Weimer (2013) argues that motivation helps the learners to achieve the necessary outcomes, while Magare, Kitching and Roos (2010) believe that educators who focus on the successful outcomes of the learners encourage them to progress by reinforcing their successes. In this current study, participants stated that they try stimulating the learners by motivating them to work according to their own pace, and also encourage their growth by giving them gold stars.

Differentiation between the different needs of the learners also serves as a motivation for the educators to experience empathy. According to Thakur (2014), differentiation is an important tool in inclusive classrooms, requiring educators to restructure their classroom and ways of teaching. Differentiation can be seen as an effective and creative strategy that enables learners, despite their needs, to receive the appropriate education (Thakur, 2014). Magare et al. (2010) add that educators must intentionally adjust their teaching approach in order to provide a suitable learning environment for all learners. Participants in this study acknowledged the importance of differentiation by drawing attention to the need in the inclusive classroom to first do an assessment of the child's needs, and then to provide learning opportunities according to each learners' ability. The participants also highlighted the necessity to enlarge the font of some learners' worksheets and to handle each learner according to their individual abilities.

Several situational aspects were also reported to play a role in the educators' experience regarding their empathy in the classroom. For instance, facilities and support serve as situational factors. According to Roux (2014), the absence of appropriate school

facilities serves as a major challenge. Naicker (2006), Roux (2014) and Schoeman (2012) add that a lack in proper infrastructure and resources at schools prohibits the accommodation of all learners with different types of disabilities. Moreover, inadequate lighting or an excess of loud noise prevents learners with hearing and visual difficulties from fully participating in class (Graham, 2014). In this study, the participants admitted that resources, facilities and support play a vital role in their experiences regarding empathy. The participants' frustration was evident if their school was not fully equipped with the necessary resources to accommodate learners with disabilities. In contrast are the views of those participants who worked at a school where the vital resources are provided by the Department of Education. Thus, facilities and resources influence the empathic experiences of educators within their inclusive classrooms.

Other relevant factors are time constraints and lack of learner discipline. Time constraints can cause educators to foster a negative attitude towards inclusion, as stated by Engelbrecht et al. (2015) and confirmed by the participants in this study. They pointed out their dissatisfaction at not being able to complete all their work in the limited amount of time that is provided to them. One participant also stated that there is not enough time for the number of assessments that educators are expected to do within their classrooms. A lack of learner discipline also leads to difficulties being experienced by educators in managing their classrooms (Nisreen, 2013). In this study, the participants explained their frustration at the disobedience of learners who interrupt their classrooms.

Factors outside the classroom also influence the empathic experiences of educators. According to Mare (2014) and Magare et al. (2010), parental influence plays a significant role in the academic performance of the learner. In a study done by Johnson and Descartes (2017), they claim that all parents try to influence their children's studies. Participants in this study also showed that parental influence plays an important role in educators' empathic

experiences. According to the participants, if the parents work cooperatively with the educators, it will aid in the learning process of the learners. Another outside factor is household issues. According to Lynch (2015), some educators find it difficult to keep their personal life separate from their work life, which may cause educators to become tired. Indeed, in this study participants admitted to experiencing a change in their empathic experiences after a troublesome night at home, or having personal responsibilities.

Previous experience with inclusive education is also a factor in the theme of personal experience in the inclusive classroom. Bradshaw and Mundia (2006) claim that educators who have had previous experience with inclusive education are more likely to maintain a positive attitude regarding the inclusion of all learners. In this study, participants stated that they became more empathic as they gained educational experience. Similarly, the empathic experiences of educators can be influenced by their role as mothers. Thomas (2015) states that having children can motivate an educator to be prouder of the good work learners do and to motivate them to achieve what they can. This assertion was confirmed by the participants, who claimed that their empathy had grown since they had children of their own. Such empathy is important, for, as Konrath and Grynberg (2013) emphasise, high levels of empathy can lead to prosocial behaviour, where an individual learns to help others. Therefore, educators with high empathy levels are able to understand the learners' needs.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

Limitations of this study include the small number of participants – all of whom were female educators. Moreover, the majority (six) were White, and one was Indian. Thus the sample shows limited variation, which makes generalisation to the broader Dr Kenneth Kaunda District not possible, as is not representative of all gender and ethnic groups in the district. Furthermore, most schools that are listed as full-service schools in the Dr Kenneth

Kaunda District are not inclusive, and only three full-service schools were willing to participate, of which only one had the necessary facilities.

Possible recommendations for further research regarding this topic include focussing on more than one district, because of the limited number of schools actually complying with the criteria of a full-service school. Doing so would allow the researchers to possibly interview more educators, from a variety of age groups, gender and race, which will provide a more in-depth perspective on the empathic experiences of educators within their inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, it is recommended that a possible program be put in place that teaches educators the necessity of empathy in the inclusive classroom. This program can also include training to provide the essential skills for educators to apply in their inclusive classroom. Because empathy can be seen as a core element in the inclusive classrooms, where learners are considered as individuals with unique needs, it is necessary that further research is done in order to ensure that each educator is equipped with the vital empathy skills to accommodate these learners' needs.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this research study was to identify educators' own empathic experiences in inclusive classrooms in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District in the North West Province. The researcher found that empathy plays a vital role in the educational experiences of educators within their inclusive classrooms. In addition, there are also situations and factors that influence such experiences. The empathic experiences of educators within their inclusive classrooms, which were explicitly specified in the findings of this study and substantiated by other literature, include the educators' ability to have intrapersonal proficiency; the educator's ability to show interpersonal understanding for learners with barriers; the educator

having adaptive teaching skills; and situational aspects that play a role in the empathic experiences of educators.

Empathy can be identified as a fundamental aspect in education, where educators are thus motivated to acknowledge every learner, with or without a barrier to learning, and help to fully understand their needs in order to provide the necessary education and equal learning opportunities to all. Educators in inclusive schools have been identified as the population group on which future researchers must focus, mainly because educators within an inclusive educational setting endure a variety of situations that impact on their educational experience. Also, educators can be seen as key in the transference of knowledge and skills to the learners, and need empathy to do so in a suitable manner, and according to each learner's need. Programs teaching the importance of empathy and conveying empathic skills are necessary in the training of each educator.

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### **SECTION 3: CRITICAL REFLECTION**

Section 3 of this study entails a personal reflection by the researcher regarding her overall experience of this study.

#### **Critical Reflection**

This critical reflection on the researcher's experience regarding this qualitative research process will include a discussion of certain elements, including data collection, data analysis and the findings of this study. According to Carl Rogers, there are three essential stances a professional health worker must have when working with people (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008). These are authenticity, where a person must be true to whom he or she is; unconditional positive regard, where a person accepts the individual differences of other people; and empathy, which requires a person to understand the hidden meanings of what others are saying (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008). These stances are essential, as a researcher serves as an instrument during the process, aiming to capture the phenomenal world of the participants in a sensitive manner (Barret, 2007; Brinkmann, 2007). Thus, the researcher must engage in a reflective manner in order to become aware of the situation as a whole, as well as the different parts thereof (Finlay, 2008). Each element will be discussed individually below.

#### **Data Collection**

Brinkmann (2007) emphasises the essential responsibility of the researcher to create a trusting and empathic atmosphere in which the participants have the opportunity to freely express their opinions. Harré (2004) adds that by focusing on the lived experiences of the participants, the researcher must be open to exploring their emotions and recollections in order to fully comprehend their phenomenological experiences.

Throughout the entire data gathering process in this study, I as the researcher felt both daunted and excited. The experience of data gathering (and conducting in-depth interviews) for the first time was a very enriching one, motivating me to leave my comfort zone and explore the participants' lived experiences in an empathic manner. Before I could approach the in-depth interviews, I first had to do research on exactly how I should conduct the in-depth interviews. This research helped me to be prepared for the process, and also to be aware of what is ethically acceptable and what is not.

In addition, it was also very important for me to make sure that all informed consent forms were signed by each school's principal, governing body and the participants who were willing to form part of the study. This process was very frustrating, because some schools delayed the process through relevant individuals forgetting where they put the forms and forgetting to sign. I felt I needed to make frequent contact with the schools in order to ensure their willing participation. It was also quite unsettling for me to find out how few schools, which are listed as being full-service schools (inclusive schools), actually have the needed facilities and resources in order to accommodate learners with barriers to learning. I realised how many learners with disabilities are possibly being excluded from schools because of their disabilities.

It was also very important for me to keep all the relevant logistical aspects in mind, such as where the schools are situated and how long it would take me to reach the schools so I could be on time for the scheduled interviews. Throughout this process, I learned how to properly plan, how to conduct several in-depth interviews, how to respect the experiences of each participant and how to probe and reflect in a sensitive and accurate manner.

According to Brinkmann (2007), interviews can be manipulated with subtle therapeutic techniques, which enable the researcher to find ways through the participant's

defences. The exposure I received thus far throughout my Master's year and internship helped me to become aware of various aspects that are involved with the in-depth interview. These aspects include building a relationship with the participants – one in which they feel safe enough to share their personal experiences; respecting the participants' views and experiences in a non-judgmental manner; and listening to what the participants had to say and responding in an appropriate manner.

I had to remind myself that my main goal was to gather information relevant to the research study, and not fulfil the role of a therapist who searches for information that might not have been important to this study. Thus, I had to remember my role as a researcher during each interview. However, I did have outside psychological services on standby for the participants if they needed them. Knowing that there was help available for the participants also helped me to approach the process in a more objective manner. Furthermore, the two open ended questions that I set up before the interviews also helped me to keep my focus on the research study and the goal thereof. These techniques helped me not to be biased and to be open to all their unique experiences. The data gathering process was such a valuable experience, and enabled me to listen to the participants' narratives and acknowledge each part of their story in an empathic manner.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

During the research process, it is of utmost importance that the researcher does not impose her own ideas, biases and views onto the situation, but portrays an objective role (Brinkmann, 2007). This role includes being objective during the data analysis and interpretation process by relying on one's logic and knowledge regarding the study (Barrett, 2007), as well as focusing on available patterns, and interpreting and describing the data in a comprehensive manner (Barrett, 2007).

Initially, I had to familiarise myself with the data by reading through it multiple times and transcribing it verbatim according to the guidelines set out by Clarke and Braun (2013). This process was very time consuming, needing much of my attention in order to communicate the findings in the most accurate manner possible. I thus needed to have the best possible understanding of the data in order to identify codes and, later on, themes. I thus used a mind map format to help me visualise the possible themes. This process too was a long one, as I had to review my themes a few times until it accurately represented what the participants said. My supervisor served as a co-coder, which eased the process and made it possible for me to feel more confident with the findings of this study, and helped me not to be biased.

According to Tobias (2008), the researcher must at all times try and avoid bias during the conduction of the study, and should rather aim to identify their own bias and the possible effects it might have on the study. During the study, it was evident that I had to be aware of my own bias by reflecting on what I expected from the study. Often, I would focus on not asking leading questions – those that would give me the answers that I wanted to hear. Furthermore, it helped me to be open to what the participants said, as well as during the analysis and interpretation processes. Personal reflection after each interview and reflection on the study’s aim motivated me to be attentive to the objective findings and my own views. In addition, my supervisor monitored the process in order to minimise the effect of any possible bias I might have had.

## **Findings**

My study aimed to explore educators’ empathic experiences within their inclusive classrooms. After themes for this study were identified, it was exciting to find literature that confirmed these findings (see Alrubail, 2015; Bradshaw & Mundia, 2006; Chimhenga, 2016;

Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Magare, Kitching, & Roos, 2010; Naicker, 2006; Nisreen, 2013; Peck, Maude, & Brotherson, 2015; Roux, 2014; Samuel & Erten, 2015; Schoeman, 2012; Stojiljkovic, Djigic, & Zlatkovic, 2012; and Zulu, 2007). With regards to the literature overview and gathering the data and establishing themes, it was enriching to see that the findings were in accordance with what has been found in other studies. One theme that was particularly important to me was the importance of being creative and thinking innovatively. This theme motivates me as an intern psychologist to get on the level of the child (client) in order to communicate the necessary information to the child (client) in an understandable manner, as well as to be creative and adapt my approach to suit the different needs of each client.

Before doing my Honour's and Master's degrees in Counselling Psychology, I completed my Educational degree; therefore placing my research focus in an educational setting was something that was of great interest to me. Previous studies done on empathy focus on it in a general sense (see Barr, 2010; Batson, 2008; Burton, 2015; Decety & Cowell, 2014; Elliott, Bohart, Watson, & Greenberg, 2011; Hoffman, 2000; Kutlu & Coskun, 2014; McDonald & Messinger, 2012; Nakao & Itakura, 2009; Stojiljkovic et al., 2012; Swan & Riley, 2015), but none of these studies focus on the empathic responses from educators within an inclusive classroom. In my study, the importance of focussing on the educators' empathic experiences within their inclusive classrooms seemed evident, especially in a South African context, where there are many schools that still exclude learners with barriers to learning.

My respect and empathy for the educators who go out of their way in order to accommodate all learners in their classrooms have also grown. Although this study has made only a small contribution, my hope is that all educators in South Africa develop their own empathic sensitivity in order to support and acknowledge each learner's need, and to find

creative ways in which they can teach. Also, I hope that this study encourages further research to develop a program that aims to train all educators in basic empathic skills.

On a personal level, this research study expanded my knowledge not only regarding empathy, but also on the educational situation in South Africa. This study challenged me in many ways, but was tremendously enriching and exciting to be a part of, and definitely serves as an exceptional learning experience.

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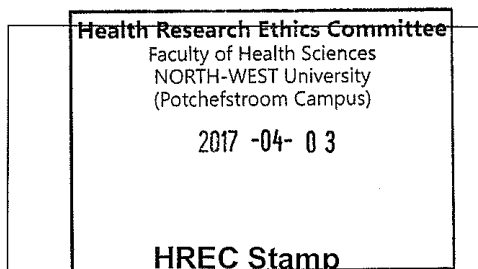
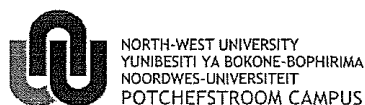
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## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM: PARTICIPANTS



### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTATION FOR EDUCATORS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE (DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT), SOUTH AFRICA

**TITLE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY:** Exploring educators' experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms

**ETHICS REFERENCE NUMBERS:** NWU-00342-16-S1

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Mrs Monique de Klerk (MA Counselling Psychology Student)  
Dr Werner de Klerk (Project Head: Registered Research Psychologist)

**POST GRADUATE STUDENT:** Mrs Monique de Klerk

**ADDRESS:** North-West University  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences  
Private bag X6001  
Box 206  
Potchefstroom  
2520

**CONTACT NUMBER:** 078 802 6478

You are being invited to take part in a **research study** that forms part of my (Monique de Klerk) Masters Research Dissertation in Counselling Psychology. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this study. Please ask the researcher or person explaining the research to you any questions about any part of this study that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you might be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to say no to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You

are also free to withdraw from the study at any point (prior data analysis), even if you do agree to take part now.

This study has been approved by the **Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the North-West University (NWU-00342-16-S1)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of Ethics in Health Research: Principles, Processes and Structures (DoH, 2015) and other international ethical guidelines applicable to this study. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or other relevant people to inspect the research records. Permission was also obtained from the District Director (Mr Hasimbhay Motara)

#### **What is this research study all about?**

- *This study will be conducted at different schools in the North West Province (Dr Kenneth Kaunda District) and will involve in-depth interviews with educators who are currently employed at an inclusive educational setting, regarding their empathic experiences within their inclusive classrooms. The researcher (Mrs Monique de Klerk) trained in interviewing by a registered Research Psychologist with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) will lead this study. A minimum of 15 participants will be included in this study.*
- *We plan to identify and describe the empathic experiences of educators in inclusive classrooms in the North West Province. These findings will possibly provide enriching data regarding the importance of empathy in inclusive settings and therefore, offer future guidance for educators for the successful implementation of inclusive education and hence, provide equal learning opportunity for every learner with a variety of educational needs.*

#### **Why have you been invited to participate?**

- *You have been invited to be part of this research because you are an educator at an inclusive educational setting in the North West Province (Dr Kenneth Kaunda District) who has valuable information regarding your own experience of empathy within your classroom.*
- *You also fit the research because you are willing to participate in the research, willing to sign informed consent and willing to be interviewed and recorded (audio recording). This educational setting must be an inclusive setting where education is provided to learners who suffers from a visual disability (not being able to see properly), hearing disability (problems with hearing), cognitive disability (having problems with learning), or children who suffers from a physical disability (problems with mobility).*
- *You are also able to participate because you have at least one year experience in an inclusive educational setting, and are a qualified educator.*
- *You will not be able to take part in this research if you are not a qualified educator at an inclusive educational setting (as explained above) in the North West Province. You will also be excluded if you are a familiar peer of the researcher (studied with the researcher).*

#### **What will be expected of you?**

- *You will be expected to participate in an in-depth interview where you will be required to share your own experiences regarding empathy in inclusive classrooms. The interview will be scheduled on a time and date that suits you and the researcher (Mrs Monique de Klerk) and will take approximately 60*

minutes. You will also be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire which will take approximately 5 minutes.

- It is expected that both you and the independent person (who have provided you this consent form) will sign the consent form in each other's presence. An eyewitness will also be asked to sign the consent form.
- Once all the consent forms have been provided to the researcher (Mrs Monique de Klerk), will she then make contact with you to decide on a date and time to conduct the interview.
- Refreshments (Bottled Valpré water) will be provided to you during your interview.
- After your permission, you will again be informed that the interview sessions will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim with the purpose to prevent any assumptions on the research's part.

#### **Will you gain anything from taking part in this research?**

- There are no direct benefits foreseen in this study. However, the following indirect benefits are foreseen:
  1. The study will contribute to the knowledge of the role of empathy within inclusive classrooms.
  2. Recommendations will be made for future research studies.
  3. Participants have the opportunity to reflect upon their own empathic experiences in their inclusive classrooms.
  4. Participants will receive the findings of the research study (if requested), which can contribute to their own knowledge regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms.

#### **Are there risks involved in you taking part in this research and what will be done to prevent them?**

- The risks in this study are medium. However, no physical risks are evident. The in-depth interview will be held in a secure and private room (which will be identified at each school by the principal) with a comfortable atmosphere.
- The aspects discussed in the interviews are psychological so if at any point during the interviewing process or afterwards you feel emotional or upset about any aspects discussed, the researcher will contain the situation (if needed during the interview) and there will be debriefing as well as psychological services available (free of charge). Because of the possible sensitive nature of the content the researcher will take extra precaution to act with empathy and confidentiality at all times.

#### **How will we protect your confidentiality and who will see your findings?**

- Anonymity of your findings will be protected by allocating numbers to participants and also by coding the data during transcription. This will ensure that no link can be made to a specific participant. Findings will be kept confidential by the way the data will be captured- by changing identifying data during the transcription phase.
- All voice recordings on the audio recording device will be copied (transferred) to the researcher and project head computers. Once this has been done, the original recordings on the audio recording device will be deleted. Only the transferred recordings on the password protected computers of the researcher and project head will exist. After this, the audio recordings will be transcribed and

all identifying data will be changed by giving each participant a participant number (as explained earlier).

- Reporting of findings will be anonymous. Only the researcher (Mrs Monique de Klerk) and her study leader (Project Head: Dr Werner de Klerk) will have access to the data and will be able to look at your findings. Data will be kept safe by locking hard copies in locked cupboards in the researcher's office and for electronic data (audio recordings and transcriptions) it will be password protected. (As soon as data has been transcribed it will be deleted from the recorders.) Data will be stored for seven years at the North-West University (within COMPRES [Community Psychosocial Research]), after which it will be destroyed by the North-West University. The HREC will be monitoring the research process to ensure that all aspect regarding this research project that has been approved will be adhered to.

#### **What will happen with the findings or samples?**

- This is a once off collection and data will be analysed in South Africa. After data analysis is completed, an article will be written reporting the findings and conclusions and it will then be submitted for possible publication in an accredited scientific journal. Please take note that findings of this research will also be reported in the Masters Dissertation of the researcher (Mrs Monique de Klerk) as part of obtaining her MA Degree in Counselling Psychology at the North-West University.
- The findings (copy of dissertation) will be emailed to you as participant (if requested) and an appointment will be made to give feedback to you in person with regards to the findings on a time and date that suits both the researcher and you the participant. If the submission of an article is successful, findings of the study will also be available when it gets published.

#### **How will you know about the findings of this research?**

- We will give you the findings of this research after the data analysis has been completed and a dissertation has been compiled a copy will be sent to you electronically (if requested). Furthermore the researcher will contact you to establish a time and date that will suit both of you for feedback of the study in person as well. If the submission of an article for possible publication is successful, findings of the study will also be available when it gets published.
- You will be informed of any new relevant findings by means of email.

#### **Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs for you?**

- No, you will not be paid to take part in the study. There will also be no costs involved for you, if you do take part.

#### **What will the role of the researcher be?**

- An independent person (registered intern in research psychology at the HPCSA) will be responsible for the administrative duties of the administering and the collecting (obtaining) of your consent form. The independent person will be present when you, the participant, sign the informed consent form and will sign the consent form as well in your presence. An eyewitness will also be asked to sign.
- The researcher (Mrs Monique de Klerk) will conduct the in-depth interviews as well as administer the demographic questionnaires. Because of the possible

*sensitive nature of the content the researcher will take extra precaution to act with empathy and confidentiality at all times, and ensure that you as participant is comfortable. She will ensure that the in-depth interview will be conducted within a secure and private room (as mentioned previously) and that the interview will take place at a time and date that suits you both as participant and researcher. The researcher will make sure before the interview commence that you, the participant, did give written consent to partake in this research study and that you are willing to be audio recorded. The researcher will also clarify that you understand the focus of the research study that you have given consent for and that you understand what is meant by empathy. At any time you as participant feel that you want to withdraw from the research study, Mrs Monique de Klerk will ensure that this will happen without any prejudice and if during the interview you feel uncomfortable/ emotional she will contain the situation and debriefing and psychological services will be available (free of charge) if needed. The researcher (Mrs Monique de Klerk) will be responsible for the autonomy and confidentiality of the data collected (as mentioned previously). Mrs Monique de Klerk will analyse the data and will report the findings in her research dissertation (for the purpose of obtaining her MA Degree in Counselling Psychology at the North-West University), as well as an article for possible publication. Mrs Monique de Klerk will also be responsible for reporting the findings to you as participant (via email) as well as in person (as explained earlier).*

- *The project head (Dr Werner de Klerk) will act as the study leader for Mrs Monique de Klerk research dissertation and will oversee the whole research project to ensure that all ethical aspect are adhered to and that the independent person and researcher act accordingly regarding their research roles as specified. Dr Werner de Klerk will also provide monitoring reports to the HREC regarding the progress of this research study.*

**Is there anything else that you should know or do?**

- You can contact Mrs Monique de Klerk at 078 802 6478 if you have any further questions or have any problems.
- You can also contact the Health Research Ethics Committee via Mrs Carolien van Zyl at 018 299 1206 or [carolien.vanzyl@nwu.ac.za](mailto:carolien.vanzyl@nwu.ac.za) if you have any concerns that were not answered about the research or if you have complaints about the research.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own purposes.

**Declaration by participant**

By signing below, I ..... agree to take part in the research study titled: Exploring educators’ experiences regarding empathy within their inclusive classrooms.

I declare that:

- I have read this information/it was explained to me by a trusted person in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- The research was clearly explained to me.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person getting the consent from me, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be handled in a negative way if I do so.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in the best interest, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) ..... on (*date*) ..... 20....

.....  
**Signature of participant**

.....  
**Signature of witness**

**Declaration by person obtaining consent**

I (*name*) ..... declare that:

- I clearly and in detail explained the information in this document to  
.....
- I did/did not use an interpreter.
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I gave him/her time to discuss it with others if he/she wished to do so.

Signed at (*place*) ..... on (*date*) ..... 20....

.....  
**Signature of person obtaining consent**

.....  
**Signature of witness**

**Declaration by researcher**

I (*Monique de Klerk*) declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to .....
- I did/did not use an interpreter
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer
- I was available should he/she want to ask any further questions
- The informed consent was obtained by an independent person.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as described above.
- I am satisfied that he/she had time to discuss it with others if he/she wished to do so.

Signed at (*place*) ..... on (*date*) ..... 20....

.....  
**Signature of researcher**

.....  
**Signature of witness**

## APPENDIX B: GOODWILL PERMISSION

### FORM: PRINCIPALS



Privaatsak X6001, Potchefstroom  
Suid-Afrika, 2520

Tel: (018) 299-1111/2222  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

**School of Psychosocial Behavioural  
Sciences: Psychology**

Tel: (018) 299 1725  
Faks: (018) 299 1730  
E-pos: 12998699@nwu.ac.za

To whom it may concern

#### **Exploring educators' experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms**

My name is Werner de Klerk (Senior Lecturer and Registered Research Psychologist) and the student that I am supervising is Mrs Monique de Klerk (Master student in Counselling Psychology, North-West University). We have developed a research project with the main aim to identify and describe the empathic experiences of educators in inclusive classrooms in the North West Province, Dr Kenneth Kaunda District. It is foreseen that these findings will possibly provide enriching data regarding the importance of empathy in inclusive settings and therefore, offer future guidance for educators for the successful implementation of inclusive education and hence, provide equal learning opportunity for every learner with a variety of educational needs. Ethical approval was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University with the clearance number (NWU-00342-16-S1). Permission was obtained from the District Director (10 November 2016), please see permission letter provided.

The proposed sample for this study is educators within inclusive schools in the North West Province (Dr Kenneth Kaunda District), South Africa. A minimum of 15 participants will be included in this study, and in-depth interviews will be conducted. The participants will also be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and this will take approximately 5 minutes. The interview will be scheduled on a time and date that suits the participant and the researcher and will take approximately 60 minutes.

You, the principal (gatekeeper) will inform the educators as well as give them the contact details of the mediator (independent person within this research inquiry). Two weeks before the scheduled interviews, the informed consent form will be given to the educators (participants) for them to make an informed decision and should be returned to the researcher (via the independent person) prior to the interview. Both the participant and the independent person will sign the consent form in each other's presence. An eyewitness will also be asked to sign the consent form. Once all the consent forms have been provided to the researcher (Monique de Klerk), will she then make contact with the participants to decide on a date and time to conduct the interview. The principal at each school will identify a room that will be available and most appropriate for the conduction of the interviews.

Participants will be excluded from this study if they are educators who are not currently employed at an inclusive educational setting in the North West Province, Dr Kenneth Kaunda District. In addition, educators in a special school or integrated school will also not be included in the study, and if the educators are employed at an inclusive educational setting where children (learners) have spinal cord disabilities, or psychological disabilities (a psychological disability refers to a spectrum of mental disorders or conditions that influence a persons' emotions, cognitions, and/or behaviour). Participants will also be excluded if they have less than one year teaching experience within the inclusive educational setting and if they are not a qualified educator. Participants will also be excluded if they are familiar peers (studied with researcher) as this will be seen as a possible power relationship.

No direct benefits can be predicted for the participants of this study. Possible benefits (indirect) include the opportunity for the participants to reflect on their own experiences and maybe get insight into their empathic responses in their inclusive classrooms. After completion of the study, the participants will also get the option to receive feedback regarding the data and findings in person.

It is foreseen that risks do not outweigh the benefits. A possible risk include the participant feeling emotionally upset due to talking about their work with disabled children. The researcher will take the best interest of the participants into account by respecting their well-being, also ensuring their safety and act in an empathic manner. Emphasis will be on voluntary participation, and therefore, the participants can withdraw whenever they want (prior data analysis). Debriefing will be available for participants who would have a need for it. A registered Psychologist will be available.

Anonymity will be maintained as far as possible by allocating numbers to participants and also by coding the data during transcription. This will ensure that no link can be made to a specific participant. Confidentiality will be ensured by the way the data will be captured- by changing identifying data during the transcription phase. Reporting of findings will be anonymous. Only the researcher (Mrs de Klerk) and I will have access to the data. Data will be kept safe and secure by locking hard copies in locked cupboards in my office and for electronic data it will be password protected. Data will be stored for seven years at the North-West University. The HREC will be monitoring the research process to ensure that all aspects regarding the research procedure that has been approved will be adhered to.

Participants will not be paid to partake in this study and there will also be no costs involved for them to partake.

Upon your permission, it would really help us if we could have a letter of support as well as guidelines and rules you may wish to indicate for us to follow. As per ethical guidelines, no educator would be forced to participate as we encourage voluntary participation. All information would be treated with confidentiality. General feedback would be offered to you and to all willing educators who participate in the study.

I am also willing to provide you with any further documentation such as the research proposal and letters of approval.



Dr Werner de Klerk  
Programme Coordinator (MA/MSc Research Psychology)  
Senior Lecturer / Research Psychologist  
School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences  
North-West University  
Potchefstroom

**Signed on:**

**LETTER OF SUPPORT: PRINCIPAL OF SCHOOL**

Herewith I.....give permission to Dr Werner de Klerk and Mrs Monique de Klerk to conduct their proposed study with inclusive education school settings within the North West Province, Dr Kenneth Kaunda District entitled: *Exploring educators" experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms*

**Signed on:**

## APPENDIX C: GOODWILL PERMISSION

### FORM: GOVERNING BODY



Privaatsak X6001, Potchefstroom  
Suid-Afrika, 2520

Tel: (018) 299-1111/2222  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

**School of Psychosocial Behavioural  
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The proposed sample for this study is educators within inclusive schools in the North West Province (Dr Kenneth Kaunda District), South Africa. A minimum of 15 participants will be included in this study, and in-depth interviews will be conducted. The participants will also be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and this will take approximately 5 minutes. The interview will be scheduled on a time and date that suits the participant and the researcher and will take approximately 60 minutes.

The principal (gatekeeper) will inform the educators as well as give them the contact details of the mediator (independent person within this research inquiry). Two weeks before the scheduled interviews, the informed consent form will be given to the educators (participants) for them to make an informed decision and should be returned to the researcher (via the independent person) prior to the interview. Both the participant and the independent person will sign the consent form in each other's presence. An eyewitness will also be asked to sign the consent form. Once all the consent forms have been provided to the researcher (Monique de Klerk), will she then make contact with the participants to decide on a date and time to conduct the interview. The principal at each school will identify a room that will be available and most appropriate for the conduction of the interviews.

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No direct benefits can be predicted for the participants of this study. Possible benefits (indirect) include the opportunity for the participants to reflect on their own experiences and maybe get insight into their empathic responses in their inclusive classrooms. After completion of the study, the participants will also get the option to receive feedback regarding the data and findings in person.

It is foreseen that risks do not outweigh the benefits. A possible risk include the participant feeling emotionally upset due to talking about their work with disabled children. The researcher will take the best interest of the participants into account by respecting their well-being, also ensuring their safety and act in an empathic manner. Emphasis will be on voluntary participation, and therefore, the participants can withdraw whenever they want (prior data analysis). Debriefing will be available for participants who would have a need for it. A registered Psychologist will be available.

Anonymity will be maintained as far as possible by allocating numbers to participants and also by coding the data during transcription. This will ensure that no link can be made to a specific participant. Confidentiality will be ensured by the way the data will be captured- by changing identifying data during the transcription phase. Reporting of findings will be anonymous. Only the researcher (Mrs de Klerk) and I will have access to the data. Data will be kept safe and secure by locking hard copies in locked cupboards in my office and for electronic data it will be password protected. Data will be stored for seven years at the North-West University. The HREC will be monitoring the research process to ensure that all aspects regarding the research procedure that has been approved will be adhered to.

Participants will not be paid to partake in this study and there will also be no costs involved for them to partake.

Upon your permission, it would really help us if we could have a letter of support as well as guidelines and rules you may wish to indicate for us to follow. As per ethical guidelines, no educator would be forced to participate as we encourage voluntary participation. All information would be treated with confidentiality. General feedback would be offered to you and to all willing educators who participate in the study.

I am also willing to provide you with any further documentation such as the research proposal and letters of approval.



Dr Werner de Klerk  
Programme Coordinator (MA/MSc Research Psychology)  
Senior Lecturer / Research Psychologist  
School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences  
North-West University  
Potchefstroom

**Signed on:**

**LETTER OF SUPPORT: GOVERNING BODY OF SCHOOL**

Herewith I.....give permission to Dr Werner de Klerk and Mrs Monique de Klerk to conduct their proposed study with inclusive education school settings within the North West Province, Dr Kenneth Kaunda District entitled: *Exploring educators' experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms*

**Signed on:**

## APPENDIX D: APPROVAL LETTER FROM DISTRICT DIRECTOR



### Education and Sport Development

Department of Education and Sport Development  
Departement van Onderwys en Sport Ontwikkeling  
Lefapha la Thuto le Tlhabololo ya Metshameko  
**NORTH WEST PROVINCE**

8 O.R. Tambo Street, Potchefstroom  
Private Bag X1256,  
Potchefstroom 2520  
Tel.: (018) 299-8216  
Fax: (018) 294-8234  
Enquiries: Mr H. Motara  
e-mail: hmotara@nwpg.gov.za

### DR KENNETH KAUNDA DISTRICT

### OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR

Enquiries: Peter Phamodi	Tel:(018) 299 8264 / e-mail <a href="mailto:pphamodi@nwpg.gov.za">pphamodi@nwpg.gov.za</a>	Fax: 018 294 8234
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To : University of the North West  
School of Psychosocial Sciences  
Potchefstroom Campus

Attention: Dr. Werner de Klerk  
o.b.o. Mrs Monique De Klerk

From : Mr. H. Motara  
District Director

Date : 10 November 2016

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: "EDUCATORS`S EXPIRIENCES REGARDING EMPHATHY WITHIN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS"

I refer to your letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> November 2016, being a request for Mrs. Monique De Klerk to conduct research in schools around Dr. Kenneth Kaunda District on the topic, "Educators' Experiences regarding Empathy within Inclusive Classrooms"

Accordingly, permission is herewith granted for Mrs. De Klerk to conduct the research work as per request, subject to the following provisions:

- That the onus to contact your target schools about your request and this letter of permission rests with your good self.
- Considering that the research work will involve educators, the general functionality in terms of learning and teaching should not be compromised by this project.
- That educator participation in the research project remains voluntary.
- That the research findings will be made available to the Inclusive Education Unit of the Department of Education and Sport Development, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda District.
- That the principle of confidentiality will be observed in its strictest terms, in relation to information sourced from the research work conducted.

With our best wishes

**Mr. H. Motara**  
District Director  
Dr Kenneth Kaunda District

## APPENDIX E: DECLARATION BY THE LANGUAGE EDITOR

K Gilbertson | 2016

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To whom it may concern,

This letter serves to confirm that the attached Masters dissertation, "Exploring educators' experiences regarding empathy within inclusive classrooms", has been edited by a qualified language practitioner. For further verification, I may be contacted by email: [kellygilbertson@gmail.com](mailto:kellygilbertson@gmail.com) or by cellphone: 0616150292/+447984529866.

Kind regards,

Kelly-Anne Gilbertson

## APPENDIX F: TRANSLATION OF PARTICIPANT QUOTES

### Theme 1: Intrapersonal Proficiency of Educators

#### Having certain character traits

P2: Ek dink jy moet maar dit in jou hart hê

*I think you must have it in your heart.*

P7: dit wat ons doen hier kom uit ons harte uit

*What we do here come from our hearts.*

P3: Jy moet definitief *patience* jy jy moet definiteif die geduld hê en „n *passion* vir mense want as jy nie *passion* vir mense se kinders het nie dan help dit nie jy is „n onderwyser nie en en die passie om „n kind te sien wil groei jy weet daai daai om „n kind wil vat waar hy is nou en jy weet aan die einde van die jaar as die kind uitstap jy weet

*You must definitely [have] patience, you, you must definitely have the patience and a passion for people, because if you don't have patience for people's children, then it doesn't help that you are a teacher. And, and the passion to see a child will grow, you know, to take a child where he is now, you know, to the end of the year when the child leaves, you know.*

P3: Ek raak baie emosioneel betrokke en ek word baie gekritiseer ek weet, maar ek voel net dis die enigste manier wat ek by die kinders uitkom, en jy bou hulle trust. Ons het baie kindertjies ook al in die verlede wat abuse was wat jy nie geweet het nie, en soos wat hulle jou leer vertrou, maak hulle oop, en dis ook „n special need.

*I become very emotionally involved and I get a lot of criticism, I know, but I just feel it's the only way that I get to the children, and you build their trust. We have also had many children in the past that were abused but you did not know, and as they learn to trust you, they open up, and that is also a special need.*

P5: Uhm weet jy ek ek doen nooit uhm, ek raak nooit persoonlik teenoor die spesifieke leerling kwaad of iets nie. Ek sal altyd vir „n kind sê kom pouse na my toe as ek iets gewaar het, of uhm ek sal sommer partykeer, ek doen dit baie, partykeer kan mens mos sien „n kind het vandag nie „n lekker dag nie

*Umm, you know what? I do nothing. Umm, I do not personally become angry at the specific learner or anything. I will always tell the child to come to me at break if I observed something, or, umm, I will sometimes just – I do this often – sometimes you can just see that a child hasn't had a good day today.*

P5: Dan sal ek sommer ek ek doen dit noggals dikwels, op „n briefie skryf en dan in die verbygang sommer in die kind se pennesakkie druk dan sê ek sien jy voel nie lekker vandag nie, jy kan met my kom praat as jy wil so, of die ander kinders kom sê so en so voel nie lekker nie dan sal ek, as ek weet hulle is by my in die klas, so ek sal nooit voor die ander kinders sê of met hulle, uh ek doen dit altyd in „n een tot een situasie.

*Then I will just, I, I do this rather often, write a note and then in passing just put it in the child's pencil case and say „I see you feel don't feel good today; you can come and talk to me if you want to" or if the other children come and say „so-and-so doesn't feel good today" then I will, if I know that they are near me in the class, so that I say nothing in front of the other children or with them, uh, I always do this in a one-on-one situation.*

P2: Sjoue ek dink dit hang baie af van persoon tot persoon. Ek bedoel uh jy kan hoeveel voorskrifte en dokumente hê wat vir jou sê wat om te doen, maar as jy hulle nie uh hoe kan ek nou sê as jy nie committed is om daardie persoon te help nie

*Phew, I think it differs from person to person. I mean, uh, you can have how many prescriptions and documents that tell you what to do, but if you, um, how can I say it, if you are not committed to help that other person.*

P3: Die feit dat ek kan verstaan en ek wil weet wat is die huislike omstandighede

*The fact that I can understand and I want to know what the conditions are at home.*

### **Portraying a power role**

P7: Weet jy wat nhe, jy sal sien op my klas se reëltjies nhe is daar baie goed, maar die belangrikste is: believe in themselves, never give up, en vir my, as my kinders uitstap uit my klas uit moet hulle gelukkig wees.

*You know what, you will see on my class rules there is a lot of stuff, but the most important is „believe in themselves, never give up," and for me, when my children leave my class they must be very happy.*

## **Decrease in self-confidence by not feeling as if they have enough empathy**

P3: Ek dink regtig maar maar soos ek sê ook, die druk en die ekstra admin en die ekstra goed wat ons het, ek voel nie eks meer „n goeie onderwyser nie want ek het nie meer die empatie as wat ek gehad het toe ek begin het nie.

*I really think, but, but as I also say, the pressure and the extra admin and the extra stuff that we have, I feel that I am no longer a good teacher, because I no longer have the empathy that I had when I began.*

## **Theme 2: Interpersonal Understanding for Learners with Disabilities**

### **Earning the learners' trust**

P2: Jy moet hulle vertrouwe wen want uh ons leef eintlik in so „n gebroke wêreld daar is eintlik so min mense wat kinders wel kan vertrou

*You must win their trust, because, uh, we actually live in in such a broken world that there is really so few people that children can trust well.*

P3: Ons het baie kindertjies ook al in die verlede wat abuse was wat jy nie geweet het nie, en soos wat hulle jou leer vertrou, maak hulle oop, en dis ook „n special need.

*We have also had many children in the past that were abused but you did not know, and this is what teaches them to trust you, and open up, and that is also a special need.*

### **Motivating and acknowledging the learners**

P2: En en daai uhm uh motivering wat hulle help om ja om meer selfversekerd te wees dink ek is wat hulle gevra het hoe sal ek dit eintlik doen, jy weet hoe sal ek dit eintlik doen

*And, and that, um, motivation that helps them to, yes, to be more self-confident I think they have asked, how I will actually do that, you know, how I will actually do that.*

P7: ek motiveer my kinders noggal met goue sterretjies

*I motivate my children with gold stars*

P5: Baie ander onderwysers hou niks daarvan nie, maar ek sal sommer vir „n kind in die oggend sê jou hare lyk mooi, uhm en dan gee ek sommer „n drukkie, ons is baie en ons druk mekaar baie, dis noggal, en ek is ingestel en ek sal byvoorbeeld as ek weet „n kind het

presteer, en hulle sê mos altyd in die personeelkamer wie het almal, of soos vandag met die top 10ne, dan sal ek uit my pad uitgegaan om as ek hulle sien, geluk te sê

*Many other teachers do not like that, but I will sometimes say to a child in the morning „you hair looks nice“, um, I then, I sometimes give [them] a hug, we are very ... we hug each other a lot ... it's quite ... and I am established. And I will, for example, if I know a child has excelled, and they always say in the staffroom who of you have, like today with the top ten, then I will go out of my way if I see them to congratulate them.*

### **Theme 3: Adaptive Teaching Skills**

#### **Differentiating between the different needs of the learners**

P3: So in in my klas veral, jy probeer want elkeen is anders

*So in, in my class especially, you try because everyone is different.*

P2: Ja glad nie want vir die een as ek nou mooi dink. Vir die een uh sy was oraait maar nou het ek „n ander enetjie wat swaksiende is en dit was vir haar elke keer uh „n hekkie om te oorkom as ek byvoorbeeld haar goedjies vir haar vergroot

*Not at all, because of the one, if I think properly now. For the one, uh, she was okay but now I have another little one who is partially sighted and for her every time it was, uh, a hurdle to overcome, if I, for example, enlarge things for her.*

### **Theme 4: Situational Aspects Playing a Role in the Empathic Experiences of Educators**

#### **Facilities and support**

P4: uhm ons is nou baie gelukkig dat die departement eintlik vir ons bietjie help. Hulle het nou vir ons „n geldjie gee dat ons klomp goedjies, aparate, kan koop wat ons kan gebruik,

*Uh, we are now very happy that the department is actually helping us a little. They have now given us a little money so that we can by a bunch of stuff, appliances, that we use.*

### **Time constraints**

P3: Ek dink regtig maar maar soos ek sê ook, die druk en die ekstra admin en die ekstra goed wat ons het, ek voel nie eks meer „n goeie onderwyser nie want ek het nie meer die empatie as wat ek gehad het toe ek begin het nie.

*I really think, but, but as I said, the pressure and the extra admin and the extra stuff that we have, I feel that I am no longer a good teacher, because I no longer have the empathy that I had when I started.*

P2: mens nie tyd het om by elke een uit te kom nie. En dit is dink ek een van die uhm empatie stellers

*You do not have the time to get to everything. And that I think it one of the, um, empathy thieves.*

### **Lack of learners' discipline**

P2: Dis eintlik wat ek bedoel nhe. As daar nie dissipline is nie dink ek ontnem dit uhm dit steel dan my empatie wat ek dan moes vir die kind gehad het.

*It is actually what I mean, hey. If there is no discipline I am deprived of it, um, it then steals my empathy that I then should have for the child.*

P5: So uhm kinders, ongehoorsame kinders dink ek het noggal „n bitterlike groot invloed.

*So, um, children, disobedient children I think have a great influence.*

### **Parental influence**

P3: Daai geen ouer samewerking laat jou noggal empatie verloor, maar jy probeer.

*No parent co-operation makes you lose empathy, but you try.*

P4: Mens besef dit as jy jou eie kind het, en hoe jy wil hê ander moet jou kind hanteer. En dit is iets anders, mens moet „n goeie relationship met die ouers hê. Jy gaan baie verder as mens saam met hulle werk.

*You realise that if you have your own child, and how you would have others handle your child. And that is something else – you must have a good relationship with the parents. You go much further if you work with them.*

### **Household issues influencing educators' empathy**

P3: (Lag). Irratibility as ek nie geslaap het nie, nee maar dit doen. Ek weet nie, maar ek dink jou eie huislike omstandighede speel ook „n rol want soos ek sê, as ek as onderwyser gestres is, is my empatie levels low.

*(Laughs.) Irritability if I have not slept, no but it does! I don't know, but I think your own home circumstances also play a role because as I said, if I as a teacher am stressed, my empathy levels are low.*