

Learning and Learning Difficulties in Africa

ISSUE 4.

JANUARY 2011

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- International ISSBD congress, Lusaka, Zambia 2010
- iSchool project
- Running a Learning Support Department
- Research abstracts

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- ISchool.zm 2
- Perceptions of SEN 3
- News in pictures 4
- Research 5
- Newsletter details 6

UNZA Hosts the 21ST Biennial Meeting of the ISSBD

By Mrs Jacqueline Jere-Folotiya, UNZA Dept of Psychology

The University of Zambia through the Department of Psychology (School of Humanities and Social Sciences), in collaboration with the Departments of Educational Psychology, Sociology and Special Education (School of Education) and PCH (School of Medicine) hosted the 21st Biennial meeting of International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development from 18th to 22nd July, 2010 at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre (ISSBD).

ISSBD is an international organization with more than 1,100 members from 60 countries. Its mission is to promote research on human development all over the world, with special attention to the changes in behaviour that occur over the life-span from conception to old age.

Since 1971, the ISSBD has held 17 Biennial Meetings on four continents: nine in Europe, five in North America, one in South America and two in Asia. This was the first time ever that the congress was held in Africa and the University of Zambia was proud to be the host. The congress was officially opened by the Deputy Minister of Education, Honorable Clement Sinyinda and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Zambia, Prof. Stephan Simukanga. The convenor of the congress was Prof. Robert Serpell.

The congress featured invited lectures, symposia, poster workshops and individual posters from around the world. The congress attracted 526 delegates from 57 different countries around the world.



ISSBD opening ceremony July 2010, at the Mulungushi International Conference Centre, Lusaka, Zambia

The field of Education for Children with Learning Disabilities was well represented during the congress with an invited Symposium convened by Profs Heikki Lyytinen (University of Jyväskylä) and Elena Grigorenko (Yale University) on “Reading acquisition in Africa: Typical and atypical pathways” as well as two symposia on “Neuropsychology in Sub-Saharan Africa – The Identification and Management of Child Disease and Disability I & II” convened by Penny Holding (Case Western Reserve University, USA) and Amina Abubakar (Tilburg University, Netherlands). Poster presentations that addressed issues in special education included the following: “The prediction of ADHD inattentive and hypoactive impulsive

symptoms in 4-5 Year old boys from parental ADHD symptoms, maternal parenting style and child genotype”, “prevalence of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms in preschool-aged children – a longitudinal study”, “Engagement of differently-abled learners in inclusive schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa: a case study”, “Nature of Reading Disabilities in grade one and grade two schools in Zambia”, “Development of language in Down syndrome children in a group speech therapy context” and “A research on the application of D-N: cognitive assessment system in the cognitive evaluation of the AD/HD children”.

The congress provided a unique opportunity for researchers around the world to showcase their work. Many of those visiting Zambia for the first time have since written to express their appreciation for the efficient organization and friendly hospitality they experienced. Furthermore, it provided a platform to initiate and expand international partnerships for strengthening research not just in Zambia but around the world.

By Jacqueline.folotiya@unza.zm

iSchool.zm - Learning to Learn with the Internet

by Ms Clare Stead and Ms Angeline Royall-Kahin, iSchool

In Zambia, there are 70,000 teachers for 3.4 million students. As a result, educators are teaching long hours, multiple grades, and up to 100 students at a time. There is also a severe lack of text books, therefore attention paid to individual student needs and internalization of information is minimal in most schools.

iSchool sees that there is potential for this to be different, through the use of interactive, enquiry based teaching and learning content that is delivered via computers to pupils and teachers in schools. In 2007, as the main vision of AfriConnect Development Company, Lusaka-based iSchool (in its first phase) was created to explore the intervention computers and the internet could have in schools. The project sought to determine whether with the basic provisions of internet and desktops, schools would be able to exploit the computer lab as a learning resource, an income generating internet cafe, and a place where the process of education could be taken to another level of involvement and success.

Though the project discovered that putting computers in schools had a good outcome, there was little Zambian based content on the web. It was likely that many children were learning more about Niagara Falls than Victoria Falls or a

snowy winter rather than a rainy season. Phase I also determined a need to change teacher attitudes and behavior in the classroom in order for children to be able to fully embrace, understand, and apply what they had learned. In 2011, iSchool is making larger strides in an effort to create a full year-long program initially for grade 1, with Zambian-based learning materials and lesson plans, all easily accessible, for free, via the internet. This year marks the first year-long trial of the iSchool program, which will be hosted by an assortment of 15 schools, testing several variables: rural/urban, government/community, medium/high density, electricity/no electricity, computers already present, no previous use of computers in the school, poor/well performing schools, trained/untrained educators. Other schools that wish to join the project are welcome to, though they will need to have computers, an internet connection and be prepared to communicate regularly with the project team. The project is creating high-quality, interactive, innovative material that can reach the entire country and correspond with the Zambian curriculum. The creative content of the project provokes students to ask who, what, when, where, why, how. The expectation is that Zambian students will acquire a real understanding

of information they are given in the classroom as opposed to the tendency for visual memorization that is currently dominant in most learning environments. To further address this problem, teachers will undergo a training that will prepare them for interactive lessons requiring more open-ended questions and group work of the students.

The iSchool material contains a lesson plan, complete with directions on how/where to conduct the lesson, what materials need to be used, and what questions are to be asked by the teacher. iSchool's "Total Learning Environment" is home to the online portions of the lesson that are to teach children concepts (in both Nyanja and English) with potentially minimal assistance from the teacher. The online lesson is accompanied by online quizzes and offline activities, directly reflective of material learned and familiar concepts and objects from previous lessons. In addition to this, there are extensions to lessons that link to online games, encyclopedia entries, and additional coursework from other educator websites.

The beginning of 2011 also brings another change in iSchool partnerships and a focus on the predominant issue of illiteracy in the country. The project is harnessing the technology wave that is quickly spreading through

"In 2010, iSchool is making larger strides in an effort to create a full year-long program initially for grade 1, with Zambian-based learning materials and lesson plans, all easily accessible, for free, via the Internet."

out Zambia and working with the University of Jyväskylä and Niilo Mäki Institute in Finland to collaborate on a phoneme reading scheme game, "Graphogame." This program which works in computers is now moved to work also in smart-phones, which will become more common place within the next few years. While using this learning game level by level, children will acquire the basic reading skill. The first step is to learn the sounds of Cinyanja by recognize the letters representing each of them. After thus learning the letter-

sound relations the second step is learn to identify written syllables and then words corresponding the spoken items they hear from headphones. The last step to be able to complete one's basic reading and writing skill is to learn to create (spell) written items which represent given spoken words.

The culmination of iSchool's internal work and external partnerships make up a strong effort to understand and address the intellectual disparity within the country's edu-

cation system. The project is looking towards Zambia's future. It is iSchool's belief that the graduates of their program, the minds of a new method of learning, will become life-long learners and contributors towards a progressive, international economy. The country has fallen behind in competition with the rest of the world but education can target development problems that hinder effective growth within Zambia.



Revolutionising Education in Zambia through E-Learning

For further information, please visit iSchool website www.ischool.zm or contact Clare at [clare\(at\)ischool.zm](mailto:clare(at)ischool.zm).

People's perceptions on SEN - Running a Learning Support department at a Private School The Lake Road PTA School Experience By Grace Bwalya Kombe Kalinda

Lake Road PTA School though under the Ministry of Education is a privately run school. It recently intensified its assistance to children having learning difficulties in class.

The Learning Support Department was supported by the top management of the School. It was however received with mixed emotions by the rest of the school populace which included the parents of the children with Learning Difficulties.

Lack of adequate information by generally all the teachers and especially those in the Secondary section led to the stigmatisation of the Department to such an extreme that very few students wanted to be seen in the Department. The teachers themselves would recommend that particular children be seen but I realized that it was mostly

the children perceived to have mental' problems that were referred.

With some sensitization there was a change and some students even started referring themselves for help to the Learning Support Department. The majority still did not want to be associated with the department which rendered it practically impossible for assistance to be given them.

A few students were selected to undergo standard assessments put in place by the Ministry of Education with the help of the University Teaching Hospital (UTH). This also gave further insight into the non acceptance of the possibilities of intellectual disabilities in certain children. Parents, teachers and even a particular school administrator refused to have their biological

children taken for assessments. This could be attributed to their being in a state of denial at something they already fear to be inadequate with their child/children. Also this just showed what an uphill battle the Learning Support Department has to fight in reaching levels of acceptance for the varying conditions students may have in terms of learning difficulties. The few parents who consented to having their children assessed were quite happy with the information they were getting from the various experts although the assessments are yet to be concluded. In one particular case it was discovered that a student needed spectacles to enable him see well. The cause of the learning difficulty was identified and he has since improved in his performance. The other was a case of a child with hardened wax

"The majority still did not want to be associated with the department which rendered it practically impossible for assistance to be given them."

“There is still stigmatization in relation to issues of HIV/AIDS so levels of confidentiality are very high.”

(severe) in his left ear. This particular case seemed to have other health issues which the Health officials could only disclose to the parent which I feel presents another obstacle to the Learning Support Department. If the department is not privy to all the information that can enable them get to the root cause of the learning difficulty it would be difficult to offer the appropriate assistance needed by the particular student. There is still stigmatiza-

tion in relation to issues of HIV/AIDS so levels of confidentiality are very high.

I recently conducted an in-house workshop to assess the level of knowledge the teachers have on various SEN issues. There is need to educate the teachers further and continually.

The Learning Support Department at Lake Road School is still in its early days so I hope to see positive improvements

as it becomes a permanent feature within the school. Perceptions will improve I feel especially when the school community sees improvements however slight in the students being assisted by the department.

The author can be contacted at [gracekalinda\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:gracekalinda(at)gmail.com)

News in pictures



Niilo Mäki Institute 20th Anniversary, Sept 2010. From the left Prof Heikki Lyytinen, HC Onerva Mäki, Executive Director Kirsti Laakso and Prof Timo Ahonen.



HC Onerva Mäki giving a speech at the 20th Anniversary celebrations.



4th Edulink project workshop activities in July 2010, Lusaka, Zambia.



The views of educators regarding inclusive education in Namibia

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D), University of Stellenbosch, Dr Andrew Mowes

The move towards greater inclusion of learners with special educational needs into regular classrooms has resulted from a human rights perspective. This is based on the social justice approach of equal opportunities for all learners within the same classroom. The efficacy of this pedagogical change relies heavily upon educator's perceptions and views. Against this background, the study investigated the views of educators regarding inclusive education in Namibia.

To achieve the objectives, a quantitative research approach was used. Data collection methods included a literature review and a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to a stratified sample of 616 Namibian primary, combined and secondary school educators.

The results of the questionnaire, have provided evidence that Namibian educators indeed hold a variety of views towards inclusive education.

Some of the major findings were the following:

- Namibia does not have a clear and implementable policy on the education of Namibian learners with special educational needs.
- The results showed that funds for education are not allocated in line with an explicit inclusionary policy.
- It is evident that the current curriculum being followed in regular schools is not suitable for learners with special educational needs.

• The results showed that the vast majority of educators educating in Namibian schools have never undergone any training in special needs education.

• Results also showed that educators are in need of support services in the form of social workers, psychologists and therapists.

• The results further indicated that schools need to be modified in order to accommodate learners with special educational needs.

In view of these findings it becomes vitally important to address educator's views and concerns before inclusive educational policies are implemented.

The author can be contacted at amowes@unam.na.

Teaching Literacy in Zambia Languages: A challenge to first grade teachers.

A Pro Gradu Thesis in Education, University of Jyväskylä, 2010. Mr Christopher K. Yalukanda

In this study the knowledge levels of first grade teachers in reading literacy in Cinyanja were investigated. A total of 78 first teachers from 28 basic schools in Lusaka and Chongwe districts participated in the study. Cinyanja is one of the Zambian languages considered to be transparent and consistent inform, and therefore easy to teach and learn because the grapheme-phoneme correspondences are one to one. It also sought to compare and establish the relationships between and

within teacher background variables and teacher knowledge levels in reading literacy. Teachers' attitude towards reading literacy was also investigated.

Data was collected using questionnaires and data was analyzed statistically using SPSS. The results revealed that about half of the teachers had insufficient knowledge about reading instruction. Younger (<40 year old) teachers were better informed.

Keywords: Zambian languages, knowledge levels, reading literacy, transparent languages

The author can be contacted at [cyalukanda\(at\)yahoo.co.uk](mailto:cyalukanda(at)yahoo.co.uk).



*Funded by the
European Union*



NMI Niilo Mäki Instituutti
Niilo Mäki Institute

Newsletter details

The Newsletter is a joint publication of Niilo Mäki Institute, Finland and EU funded Edulink project. The aim is to provide a forum to network and exchange knowledge on learning difficulties. Niilo Mäki Institute has been working in Africa for 20 years, providing neuropsychology training for education professionals in the continent. The Newsletter links partners and colleagues from previous and present NMI Africa projects.

The aim of the Edulink project is to enhance the skills and knowledge of educationalists in the area of learning disabilities.

We are always looking for contributions, articles and comments for next issue. Those interested in contributing to the next issue, please contact: Emma ([emma.ojanen\(at\)nmi.fi](mailto:emma.ojanen@nmi.fi)) or Pia ([piakrimark\(at\)yahoo.co.uk](mailto:piakrimark@yahoo.co.uk)) **by MAY 2011**.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this Newsletter are the views of the authors and are not the views of any organisation or institution.