

# Changing deaf education in South Africa

The Eduplex mainstream school in Pretoria aims to educate deaf pupils alongside their hearing peers and provides an inclusion model that could serve as inspiration to many. [Nico van der Merwe Sr](#) and [Susan Strauss](#) reveal the details



In 1992 the Foundation for Children with a Hearing Loss in Southern Africa was established with the vision 'to make a difference in deaf education'. It took six years of preparation and in 1998 Dr Morag Clark from the UK became part of the team and played a major role in executing this vision. Training of the first professionals from existing schools for deaf children started in 1998 and two years later it became clear that to expand the vision we needed our own training facility in an inclusive school environment. It was decided to establish the Eduplex (Educational Complex) in Pretoria, which would be a mainstream school following an inclusive programme with separate Afrikaans and English classes. The facilities were designed for the specific needs of deaf children in a mainstream school and included acoustically treated classrooms, the latest technology and award-winning interactive gardens.

When Nelson Mandela opened the Eduplex pre-school in March 2002 he said, 'What you are doing here is changing tragedy into triumph.' The primary school opened in 2003 and the high school in 2011. We currently have 586 children of whom 98 are deaf; 58 of these children are dependent on bursaries, offered by the Foundation.

## Our programme

Every class has 25 children, of whom five are deaf, and the Natural Auditory Oral Approach forms the basis of language learning. The comprehensive language development programme encompasses all aspects of language learning, and activities are incorporated into several contexts (classroom, individual conversations, therapy, small groups and

more). The emphasis on spoken language ensures that all children reach a level of linguistic maturity that lays a firm foundation for literacy, numeracy and academic success. The thematic and group work approach provides opportunities for the children to become independent learners, which in itself is a further basis for the development of good study and work attitudes.

The emphasis placed on the development of listening skills ensures focused attention in class. In this very visual world where children spend hours in front of the television and computer, it is necessary to encourage all children to listen attentively.

Deaf children are given optimal support to maximise their learning opportunities and this includes:

- Small classes with a high staff:pupil ratio and a teacher and classroom assistant in every class.
- Developing individual working habits – learning how to learn.
- Emphasis on the development of the whole child, with a wide range of activities, including music and sport, during and after the school day.
- Quiet classrooms, acoustically treated.
- Additional separate rooms off each classroom for small group and individual work. The child's own teacher, who knows the individual needs of each child, provides this support.
- Five audiologists/speech therapists providing additional help for the deaf children as needed.
- Interactive gardens as an extension of the classroom.
- Well-equipped hall/training facility for up to 300 people.



The normally hearing children benefit tremendously from the small and quiet classroom environment, high staff:pupil ratio, the accent on listening skills and the creative planning of the facilities. The broad curriculum and the high academic standards make the Eduplex one of the leading educational facilities in South Africa. The curriculum is wide ranging and also includes aspects such as nutrition (pre-school children get two balanced meals per day and a healthy snack), muscle development (through sport and motor development activities) and social development.

#### Parent guidance

Parent guidance forms an integral part of the programme. Parents become partners with the professionals and, in the case of deaf children, regular sessions are offered to the families in the specially equipped Parent Guidance facility. Audiologists make use of four two-roomed suites equipped with CCTV for the recording of parent guidance sessions. These video records form part of the longitudinal video records that are kept of each child from their first visit and these make a comprehensive database for research and training.

#### Audiological and medical support

The audiological support at the Eduplex is provided by audiologists at the nearby Ear Institute. They follow evidence-based practice in the evaluation of the child's hearing, the fitting of amplification devices and the verification of the fittings. The Eduplex audiologists also participate in the continued professional development programme at the Ear Institute. The in-house ear, nose and throat specialist forms an important part of the team and provides treatment to many of the deaf children with bursaries.

#### Technology

In the Eduplex, modern technology (hearing aids, cochlear implants, dynamic FM communication, classroom amplification and interactive whiteboards) plays a critical role in the education of deaf children. All deaf children are equipped with the very latest hearing aids or cochlear implants and the school provides the dynamic FM systems. A full-time



technician ensures the optimum functioning of all the equipment and is supported on a regular basis by factory trained technicians from the Ear Institute. The classroom assistant performs a listening check of every child's amplification system before the school day starts. Same-day hearing aid service and repair and ear-mould manufacture form part of the services offered by the Ear Institute to the Eduplex.

#### Training

The Eduplex is not only an educational programme for children and their parents, but also a training facility for professionals (teachers, audiologists/speech and hearing therapists) and students from various universities in our inclusive approach to the education of the deaf. In addition to ongoing training of our own staff, numerous professionals and students from as far afield as Austria, Botswana, Germany, Jordan, Kenya, Qatar, Singapore, Tanzania, the USA, Zambia and Zimbabwe have already received training in our centre.

#### Future expansion

As children grow older their needs change. The high school was developed with the unique needs of the older deaf child in mind. In a developing country like South Africa, additional factors such as the late identification of hearing loss play a role in adding to the demands of deaf education. A specially developed academic curriculum caters for the academically strong child and an occupationally based curriculum serves the vocationally inclined child. Although technology and support are still provided to deaf teenagers, independence and integration into the real world form a specific focus of the high school programme.

A high school, sports academy, upgraded after-school care centre, a skills centre and new training and music academies are being planned and will be rolled out as donors come on board. Currently an additional six high school classrooms are being constructed to accommodate learners up to grade 10.

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