

**An Exploration of Teaching Practices of Special Needs
Educators in the Context of Building an
Inclusive Education System**

by

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PREFACE

I, Primmithi Naidoo, hereby certify that this research project, conducted under the supervision of Dr Martin Combrinck at the Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for the acquisition of any degree or diploma at another tertiary institution. Where use was made of the work of others, these have been duly acknowledged in the text.

P. Naidoo

5 December 2005

As the candidate's supervisor, I have / have not approved this thesis dissertation for submission.

Name

Signature

Date

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ABSTRACT

In the past learners with disabilities have experienced severe forms of discrimination, isolation and separation. They were perceived as persons with deficits and in need of help. They were separated from society as they were considered to be inadequate people. The discriminative practices against learners with disabilities and the doctrines of apartheid that contributed to discrimination and separation on racial differences resulted in learners with disabilities being doubly handicapped. The discrimination against learners with disabilities is largely the result of adherence to the medical model and deficit theory to disability.

However, the current trends which support the social rights theory and ecological systems theory to disability which are consistent with the Constitution and its Bill of Rights, adopts an inclusive approach and promotes equal rights and equal opportunity to all people, including learners with disabilities. This commits schools to enrolling learners with disabilities and providing equal education opportunities for them. To provide a meaningful educational experience for all learners, education structures need to be enabled, and attitudes, teaching and learning methodologies, and the curriculum changed to reflect inclusive values. Furthermore, Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) clearly states that classroom educators are the primary resource for achieving the goal of inclusive education. This implies that educators will need to be empowered to change their attitudes, refine their teaching practice and where necessary, develop new ones. Hence, this study aims to explore the teaching practices of special needs educators in the context of building an inclusive education system.

A qualitative case study approach was adopted in this study, whereby six participants who were teaching at special schools were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule, exploring their day to day teaching practices. The findings reveal that the teaching practices of special needs educators are in line with inclusive practices that could benefit mainstream educators. Special needs educators adjust and adapt their teaching practice to accommodate and address the diverse needs of all the learners so that each individual learner receives a learning experience that “fits”. However, acknowledgement and recommendations are made with regard to the challenges encountered when adapting teaching practices.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the context of building an inclusive education and training system, for the purpose of providing the background necessary for appreciating the origins of the study. It then outlines the statement of the problem, defines teaching practice, provides the motivation for and significance of the study and includes the aims of the research, which have framed the research. Finally, it outlines the scope of the investigation and sketches an outline of the ensuing chapters.

1.1 The context of the study

The advent of the democratic government, where all South Africans voted on 27 April 1994, saw wide scale transformation and the official ending of the apartheid era. Of significance, was the transformation of the 17 education departments into a single unified ministry of education (Naicker, 1999a). Transformation in education was signalled by many influential reports, both before and after the new democratic government came to power. Lazarus and Donald (1997) state that one such document was the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) report published in 1992, which proposed five goals for education: non-discrimination, democratic governance, development of a unified education system, establishment of equity and effecting redress (Van Rooyen, Le Grange and Newmark, 2004). Furthermore, Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (1997: 238) describe the idea of 'progressive mainstreaming' suggested by NEPI as 'probably the most realistic proposal to effect redress', through placing learners with disabilities in mainstream education alongside able-bodied peers (Meijer, Pijl and Hegarty, 1994).

In 1995, the South African Federal Council on Disability (Naicker, 1999b) called for the development of a single education system in South Africa, to which learners with special needs would have access and which would be responsive to the diverse needs of all learners. In the same year, the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education [DoE], 1995) was released. The White Paper acknowledged the importance of providing an effective response to the unsatisfactory educational experience of learners with special educational needs, including those within the mainstream whose educational needs were inadequately accommodated. In

addition, Lazarus and Donald (1997: 98) describe the White Paper as a step towards meeting the five goals of NEPI, 'but the challenge ... is to see them take root in practice'. Hence, the focus of this study is to explore teaching practices of special needs educators as an effective response to the educational experience of learners with disabilities.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was published in 1996. According to the Constitution, South Africa's democratic state and common citizenship are founded on the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedom (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). These values encourage all of us to take up the responsibility and challenge of building a humane and caring society, not for the few, but for all South Africans. In establishing an education system, we carry a special responsibility to implement these values and to ensure that all learners, with and without disabilities, pursue their learning potential to the fullest. The Constitution also asserts the right of everyone to basic education, which the state 'must make progressively available and accessible'(Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996:14). The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 also stresses the need to redress past injustices and the need to provide quality education for all learners and to uphold the rights of learners, parents and educators.

The next document released by the DoE (1997) was the report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS). Naicker (1999a) believes that this report recognises the need for all learners to gain access to a single education system in order to participate in mainstream economic and social life. This joint report emphasised a human rights perspective, which was a radical departure from the traditional medical perspective (to be discussed in chapter 2). Likewise, Muthukrishna and Schoeman (2000: 315) regard this report as a shift in thinking from the deficit perspective of the medical or 'special needs education' model to 'barriers to learning and development' within the education system from an ecosystemic perspective (to be discussed in chapter 2). There is a paradigm shift from primarily focusing on special needs within the learner to focusing on understanding barriers to learning and development within the school.

Thereafter, the DoE (1999) released Consultative Paper No.1 on Special Education for public comment. This paper has been criticised by Muthukrishna and Schoeman (2000) because of the retention of the language of the traditional, medical, deficit model that reflects serious contradictions in terms of the paradigm shift to inclusion. Submissions and information received from the public were analysed and the next policy document released by the DoE (2001) was Education White Paper No. 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (hereafter White Paper 6). White Paper 6 is a response of the South African government's DoE to the inclusion movement (Van Rooyen, Le Grange and Newmark, 2004). White Paper 6, arose out of the need for changes to be made to the provision of education and training so that it is responsive to the diverse range of learning needs and sensitive to addressing barriers to learning (DoE, 2001).

Barriers to learning are constituted as factors contributing to learning breakdown and exclusion (DoE, 1997). These barriers could include: socio-economic factors, attitudes, inflexible curriculum, inappropriate language and teaching medium, inaccessible and unsafe built environments, inadequate support services, lack of enabling and protective legislation and policy, lack of parental recognition and involvement, disability (learning needs not met) and lack of human resource development strategies (DoE, 1997). The joint report elaborates that barriers can be located within the learner, within the school, within the education system and within the social, economic and political context.

These barriers manifest themselves in different ways and only become obvious when learning breakdown occurs and when learners 'drop out' of the system. Sometimes it is possible to identify permanent barriers in the learner or system that can be addressed through enabling processes. However, barriers may also arise during the learning process and are seen as transitory in nature. These may require different strategies to prevent learning breakdown. The key to preventing barriers from occurring is the effective monitoring and meeting of the different needs among the learner population (DoE, 1997). Hence, the focus of this study is to explore teaching practices and strategies that meet the different needs of the learners to prevent learning breakdown.

There are many barriers to learning operating within the learner or the education system that contributes to the diverse range of learning needs in a given context. A significant barrier to learning is the 'curriculum' (DoE, 2001:19). In this case, barriers to learning arise from different aspects of the curriculum, such as:

- The content (that is, what is taught);
- The language or medium of instruction;
- How the classroom or lecture is organised;
- The methods and processes used in teaching;
- The pace of teaching and the time available to complete the curriculum;
- The learning materials and the equipment that is used;
- How learning is assessed.

One way of addressing barriers arising from the curriculum is to ensure that the process of teaching and learning is flexible enough to accommodate different learning needs and styles. Thus, exploring teaching practices of special needs educators will make a critical contribution to inclusion, as 'educators are the primary resource for establishing an inclusive education system' (DoE, 2001: 18).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Special schools and special needs educators can make a difference when they provide a responsive and sensitive educational experience for learners with disabilities. White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001:21) states that 'considerable professional expertise, support and resources are invested in special schools that needs to be made progressively available to neighbourhood schools', in order to build an inclusive education system. The problem, however, is the lack of communication and collaboration between special and mainstream settings to understand the nature of this specialised support and expertise. Hence, the present study is an effort to gain more insight about the professional teaching practices of special needs educators in order to share and disseminate information to mainstream settings. The study will therefore serve as a communication link to provide some understanding on the nature of special educational teaching practices that could serve as a resource to mainstream educators.

1.3 Defining teaching practice

'Teaching practice' is directly and practically concerned with learning about how teachers do their jobs (Duminy, MacLarty and Maasdorp, 1992). It is coming to grips with real teaching experience, that is, the actual teaching of pupils. What is done and how it is done depends upon a number of factors such as the particular subject area, topic or skill under consideration, the age and the capabilities of the pupils, the range of equipment and materials available (Cohen and Manion, 1989). The belief that teaching practice is about the acquisition of techniques is misleading. Whereas *technique* will tell someone *what to do*, it is *practice* that tells you *how to do it*. It is understanding the nature and function of professional practical work (Stones and Morris, 1972). Teaching practice occurs throughout the whole of one's life in the profession, as one continues to experiment with new ideas, new methods, individualised programmes specifically designed to cater for and cope with the countless individual children with whom one will work (Tindall, 1982).

In addition, Perry (1997) writes that teaching practice refers to gaining first hand experience in working with a particular group of children in a particular setting, that is, it is about the process of being an educator. It refers to the experience and realities of professional activity, the immediacy, complexity and reality of real life work. Teaching practice not only considers the 'what' and 'how to' of teaching young children, but also considers and questions *how to think as an educator* (Perry, 1997: xi). Effective educators should develop a language and manner which makes their teaching and learning accessible to their pupils and which invites them to become conscious of their own meaning, to recognise that teaching has more to do with negotiation than simple transmission (Hadley, 1982).

1.4 Motivation for the research

The vision of inclusive education is radically different from the traditional perspective where special needs educators responded to particular problems of their learners rather than the problems created by the structure of the school, curriculum, or society (Starkey, 1991). White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) states that learning difficulties do not reside only in learners, but also reside within the learning system. The school, curricula, assessment, learning materials and instruction methods provide inadequate

access for most learners to receive quality education, and as many as 70% of learners face such daily barriers, resulting in many dropping out of the education system (DoE, 1997). Hence, I have chosen to explore how teaching practices provide a quality and relevant learning experience for learners who experience barriers to learning in a specialised setting.

In addition, White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) states that classroom educators are the primary resource for establishing inclusive education. Therefore educators will need to refine their knowledge and skills and develop new ones. In this respect, educators need support from many sectors, including collaboration with special schools as a means to provide support and guidelines in developing flexible and adaptable approaches to teaching and learning. The present study will explore how teaching practices secure access and entitlement to the full curriculum for learners who might otherwise be discriminated against or excluded.

In an inclusive education system, education structures need to be enabled, and attitudes, teaching and learning methodologies, and the curriculum changed to reflect inclusive values. These values are based on inclusive principles, which acknowledge and respect that all people can learn, and that all people learn differently and have different learning needs (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). It is important to remember that inclusion is about all learners and not just a few. It is not just about disability, but means responding to all learners' individual needs. Inclusion is concerned with school reform and educational change. Elements of educational change (Swart and Pettipher, 2005) include the following:

- Vision and leadership;
- Whole-school development;
- Support and collaboration;
- Attitudes;
- Resources; and
- Professional development.

The last of these elements (professional development) has also given rise to the need to explore teaching practices as an area of study that continually undergoes change. Furthermore, the DoE has transformed the education system from traditional to

Outcomes Based Education that underpins Curriculum 2005 [C2005]. Implicit in this transformation, are the simultaneous changes in teaching practice that should provide an appropriate and quality educational service.

Specialised education has been provided for a small percentage of learners with disabilities, while most learners with disability have either fallen outside of the system or been 'mainstreamed by default' (DoE, 2001:5). Furthermore, the curriculum and education system have failed to respond to the diverse needs of learners, resulting in drop-outs, push-outs and failures. Consequently, identifying and exploring teaching practices of specialised educators may help to open up new opportunities and experiences for diverse learners experiencing barriers to learning in mainstream schools. Identifying teaching practices, therefore, would be very useful to mainstream educators to encourage them to embrace or adopt a more flexible accommodating attitude, to improve and expand their skills and knowledge, to develop new ones, and to help them cope with disabled learners. In this way there would be sharing of knowledge and skills from one setting (special school) to another (mainstream schools). This would allow all differently-abled (disabled) learners in both mainstream and special schools to participate actively in the education process, so that they could develop and extend their potential and participate as equal members of society.

A further challenge is that with the continued push to inclusive education, the number of learners with special needs at schools will increase and the process of inclusion is likely to be accompanied by social and academic challenges as learners from differing academic, cultural and minority backgrounds come together. One of the greatest challenges of human rights to the education of all children is the acceptance and accommodation of all differences, needs and interests (Starkey, 1991). This makes it crucial that studies of this nature are undertaken in order to understand the influence of teaching practices on the process of inclusion and to suggest strategies to facilitate the process and minimise problems, especially for greatly disadvantaged learners who are coming into these new environments. Moreover, in addressing issues of educational transformation, more has to be done to prepare educators, schools, administrators and other stakeholders to tackle the complex dynamics involved in the process of inclusion (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). Research of this nature can help to

inform provincial initiatives in developing relevant policies and strategies at different levels.

The nature of the present study may serve to demystify the teaching practices and roles of special needs educators. Special education discourses function like rationalised myths about the actions taking place in schools (Allan, 1999). Special education discourses have helped to mythologize a sense of progress in the education of learners with special needs, and have helped to preserve the mystique of special education (Tomlinson, 1982). The study may bring an awareness that mainstream teaching practices are not that dissimilar to the teaching practices of special needs educators.

Finally, the process of inclusive education in schools constitutes only the first few steps towards the total transformation of the segregated system inherited from apartheid. Although the formal barriers to discrimination have been removed, the traditional discriminatory values and practices of many communities still remain and are reflected in the various schools. The way in which schools and particularly educators adapt their teaching practices in the future is therefore critical for the implementation of inclusion.

1.5 Significance of the research

The process of inclusion has aroused some emotional responses. According to Mashiya (2003), 59 % of educators who did not have contact with special education personnel held negative attitudes towards inclusion, while 41% who did have contact with special education personnel displayed positive attitudes towards inclusion. Hence, the present study is especially vital to show that objections to inclusion may not be based on sound educational judgements. Furthermore, preliminary information was obtained from a group interview of three female foundation phase mainstream educators about their feelings and concerns towards inclusion. The overwhelming response to inclusion was negative! Educators were concerned about their lack of knowledge, training, skills and experience in teaching learners with disabilities. Thus, exploring teaching practices of special needs educators may also serve to highlight, alleviate or address concerns of mainstream educators towards inclusive education. While the mainstream educators did not form the primary focus of the present study,

they did offer valuable insights into the contextual difficulties faced by educators in mainstream settings. As a result, the analytical summary about their concerns and fears of inclusive education has been included to reveal the possible contextual constraints experienced in mainstream settings (Appendix G, pages 93 -99).

By exploring the teaching practices and experiences of special needs educators, it should be possible to anticipate and predict some of the difficulties which will be faced in many schools in the future and to suggest certain strategies and guidelines to cope with problems. A series of micro studies, such as this one, are necessary to feed into the policy formulation process at institutional, regional, provincial and national level. Studies dealing with the process of inclusion are especially significant in the context of the current transformation of the curriculum. The present study highlights the fact that curriculum changes being suggested at a macro-level will be to no avail in addressing issues of democracy and equity, unless educators engage in changes at the micro level, that is, adapting teaching practices to accommodate all learners.

In the context of inclusion, the question of access and exclusion has become a salient issue because any form of discrimination is outlawed by the Constitution and the White Papers. It is through research of this kind that marks of discrimination, both of an overt and covert nature, can be identified and exposed. Such research may enable educators, learners, parents and policy makers to identify and remedy discriminatory teaching practices wherever they exist in schools.

1.6 Aims of the research

The main aim of the study is to explore teaching practices in special schools in the context of building an inclusive education system. This was completed through interviewing six special needs educators-persons with and without a disability-from specialised settings in KwaZulu-Natal. In describing factors relating to teaching practice, this study provides an opportunity for participants in the process to evaluate their own teaching practice and to consider approaches, strategies, processes and decision-making, that will make a practical contribution towards effective and relevant educational change in their particular schools.

Arising from this all embracing aim are specific research questions that underpin the investigation:

- 1) What are the teaching practices of special needs educators within specialised settings?
- 2) What factors inform or influence these teaching practices?
- 3) How do these teaching practices serve learners with disabilities?

1.7 Scope of the investigation

This investigation focused on teaching practices in special schools in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The specialised settings include a school for the physically disabled, one for learners with visual impairments and one for learners with hearing impairments. The schools serve a range of learners and local communities, with diverse ethnic and social-economic backgrounds. The investigation examines teaching practices from the perspective of special needs educators, with a focus on the day-to-day challenges occurring in the classroom. It attempts to highlight attitudes and actions of these educators that may influence their teaching practice in some way. In so doing, it emphasises that teaching practice is not a one-off event, but is an ongoing educational process.

The scope of this research is limited by three factors. First, its primary focus is on exploring teaching practices. Therefore, it does not attempt to say anything definitive about the possible structure of teaching practices, nor about its implementation issues, although it touches on these areas. Second, the research is limited in that it focuses on three particular institutional contexts, namely, a school for the physically disabled, one for learners with visual impairments and one for learners with hearing impairments. Thus, the research is for the purpose of promoting new thinking and innovation about teaching practices in these three particular contexts. Third, the focus is only on foundation phase teaching practices in specialised settings. In spite of the limitations, this study is not intended as a means of imposing the insights gained on any stakeholder, but should rather be intended as a contribution to an understanding of

teaching practices of six particular special needs educators and should not assume any sort of definitive status.

1.8 Outline of the research report

The purpose of Chapter 1 has been to introduce the reader to the development of an inclusive education system in South Africa, in order to provide contextual familiarity and to indicate the origins of this research. Chapter 1 has also outlined the statement of the problem, defined teaching practice, and discussed the motivation, significance, aims and scope of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the available literature on the definition and history of special education, theoretical influences of the medical model, social rights model and the ecological systems theory on teaching practice, and special needs education prior to inclusion in the South African context.

Chapter 3 addresses the rationale for adopting the qualitative methodological approach for the study. This chapter focuses on the research design, sampling plan, fieldwork, data collection methods, data analysis and presentation, protection and anonymity of research participants and a possible limitation of the study.

Chapter 4 focuses on the rich and ‘thick’ results and discussion of the investigation.

Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on the implications, recommendations and conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 2: PERSPECTIVES ON SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

This chapter provides an overview of what special education means and how it has historically and theoretically developed, from an initially narrow concept into the broad field it now covers. Although specialised education can be expected to share universal characteristics, the particular context in which they have developed may influence them to such an extent that specific characteristics emerge. The latter point is significant as it will be noted how, in the South African context, political factors influenced education so extensively, that vast numbers of learners have become educationally disadvantaged and require special educational assistance.

2.1 SPECIAL EDUCATION

2.1.1 Defining special education

“Specialised education refers to all forms of assistance rendered to learners who require additional educational assistance” (Du Toit, 1996:5). This includes the education of learners with disabilities (learners in special schools), remedial teaching for learners with learning difficulties, compensatory programmes for learners who are at risk of becoming underachievers, and enrichment programmes for gifted learners.

Currently in South Africa, the education of some learners with disabilities occurs in special schools. One of the challenges experienced in special settings is the defining and classification of learners with disabilities. According to Mertens and McLaughlin (2004), the definition of who constitutes the special education population is not clear-cut. Definitions of who is and who is not included in a disability category are quite variable. This implies that the concept of ‘disability’ is a socially constructed phenomenon that means different things to different people (Dyson and Forlin, 1999: 26). How we define disability, reflects to a large extent on how we treat and care for persons with disabilities; it gives an indication of the attitudes and social customs that exist at a particular time in history. A positive definition of disability as a dimension of human difference and not a defect (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004), reflects the prevailing values we place on the worth of human life. The worth of human life of persons with a disability may be placed on a historical continuum shifting from a

negative, defective perspective to an enlightened positive worldview of ability rather than disability.

2.1.2 Extermination of the disabled and the establishment of asylums

Children with educational difficulties have been part of normal societies from the earliest times, while theory on specialised education may be regarded as a recent development (Du Toit, 1996). Regrettably, yet understandably, the basic struggle to survive in primitive communities led to the extermination or abandonment of children with severe disabilities (Preen, 1976). In the early Greek civilisations and the early Roman Empire, extermination was also common practice. However, not all early civilisations and religious scriptures practiced extermination. Ancient Egypt and India, the Old Testament and the Talmud either forbid extermination by law or referred sympathetically to the blind and crippled (Du Toit, 1996). After Christ's gospel of charity, love and the salvation of humanity, Christian communities established asylums as places of refuge for disabled and rejected persons. Asylum seeking continued through the Middle Ages, but was unfortunately accompanied by superstition and ignorance that led to persons with disabilities being ridiculed or maltreated (Du Toit, 1991).

2.1.3 Early education of the disabled

Events such as the Renaissance, the Reformation and the French Revolution ushered in the scientific approach to the treatment of persons with disabilities (Du Toit, 1996). The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced many pioneers in specialised education. For example, a priest began teaching the deaf in Paris; a German lawyer established a school for the deaf; a Frenchman started teaching the blind and one of his pupils invented the raised Braille script; and medical doctors from France became pioneers in educating the mentally disabled (Du Toit, 1996). The latter developments resulted in similar developments in other countries including England and the United States. It is significant that interest in educating persons with disabilities mainly came from doctors and clergyman. It was only during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries that educationists became interested in the education of persons with disabilities.

In the beginning, interest was focused on educating learners who were blind, deaf and mentally challenged. However, during the twentieth century, rapid developments in the fields of medicine and clinical psychology led to the identification of a proliferation of categories of handicaps, resulting in the establishment of separate or special schools for each category (DuToit, 1996; Dyson and Forlin, 1999). It was accepted that each group of learners with disabilities had their own particular characteristics and that their learning problems were directly related to their specific, unique defects. The objective of education therefore, was to alleviate the deficiency from within the child (Swart and Pettipher, 2005), which in the history of special education heralded the era of the clinical or medical theoretical model to specialised education (Du Toit, 1996; Bailey, 1998; Lewis, 1998; Clark, Dyson and Millward, 1998; Dyson and Forlin, 1999; Naicker, 1999a; Naicker, 1999b; Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004; Swart and Pettipher, 2005).

2.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.2.1 Theoretical influence on practice

Theory not only provides a 'scheme of ideas to explain practice', but also 'a framework to guide practice' (Booth, 1998:79). Medical, social rights and ecological systems models compete for influence in the special education field; in terms of their powers of explanation, ideology and interests they hold. It appears that the medical model still dominates thinking in the special education field, particularly the conceptualising of the problems students face in schools (Booth, 1998). However, Booth (1998) states that separate theories cannot have a distinct object of study, since people exist in the context of their bodies, culture, societies and histories. There are a range of influences in the learners' context, for example, familial, personal, intellectual, developmental and educational influences. Learners are a product of all the influences acting upon them, with education being one of them (Bailey, 1998).

Bayliss (1998: 61) suggests that in an educational context or system, there is the notion of intervention, which implies that special educators must undertake some action to make the 'special' 'ordinary'. Implicit in this assumption, is that 'special' equals 'bad' and the direction of change is from 'bad' to 'good'. An alternative view sees 'special' as 'different', which does not imply change but rather a celebration of

difference. Whichever view is held by educators will affect what is done in practice for an individual learner. Ainscow (1999) also states that contexts of teaching practice are multifaceted, dynamic and complex. Learners and educators change, grow, develop, act and react from moment to moment. As an educator working with learners, the 'reality' of intervention practice is chaotic and messy. Research demands that we make sense of the chaos of experience, that we try to understand complex realities; as the outcomes of actions derived from chaotic views are put into practice that affects learners' lives in fundamental ways. Thus, teaching practice is guided by theories and the decision to act is underpinned by a set of culturally bound definitions, values, beliefs and attitudes of special education (Bayliss, 1998). Theorising is necessary to enable us to grasp, understand, and explain so as to produce a more adequate knowledge of the historical world and its processes and thereby to inform our practice so that we may transform it. Following is a discussion of the medical, social rights and ecological systems model and their influence in special education.

2.2.2 THE MEDICAL MODEL

The medical or within-child model was popular from the 1900's and is a model of diagnosis and treatment (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). According to Fulcher (1989), the initial association with disability from a medical perspective was the clinical concern with the body, the physical changes to the body and its effects on the individual. The medical model and its associated deficit discourse focuses on pathology not normalcy, on sickness not well-being, on the nature and etiology of the problem itself and not on the individual who has the problem, on dealing with the specific pathology and not on the social context or ecosystem which surrounds the problem, that is, the patient, the family, social and financial considerations, values and attitudes (Bailey, 1998). The strength of the medical model is evident when an individual presents with pathology, for example, severe chest pains. The client wants the pathology identified, wants immediate restorative action and wants to quickly resume a state of well-being. The client is happy for the doctor to use a diagnostic-prescriptive intervention model, is happy to take medication initially, while recognising the long-term considerations for a change in lifestyle to promote wellness (Bailey, 1998). Unfortunately, when applying the medical model to understand the

potential and capabilities of persons with disabilities, disability is often seen as limited to 'what people cannot do' - a reductionist perspective (Lewis, 1998: 94).

2.2.2.1 Limitations of the medical model

One of the first limitations of the medical model arises from the manner in which medical practitioners conduct themselves (Bailey, 1998). First, they tend towards an authoritative and dominant style of consulting and expect patient compliance.

Second, there is resistance to the idea of professional care and support for a participatory model of health care management, in which the patient plays an active role. Third, there are concerns about the diagnostic-prescriptive approach where symptoms are grouped into categories to produce diagnostic labels, which are seen as dehumanising (Bailey, 1998). Considerable controversy exists as to the wisdom of using labels for children with disabilities as labels signal deviance and social exclusion (Armstrong, 2003; Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). Proponents of labelling believe labels help identify children with special needs, help in further diagnosis and treatment, and facilitate communication, legislation, and administration in serving exceptional learners. Opponents feel that labels are misleading, allow for misdiagnosis, and encourage stereotyping instead of encouraging accurate assessment and treatment of learners needs. For instance, in his autobiography William N Zulu (2005) writes that after having contracted spinal TB as a baby (his condition was misdiagnosed), he underwent misplaced corrective surgery to his spine in his late teens that left him paralysed and permanently wheelchair-bound. The problem with labels is further illustrated by the following comment from a parent (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004:129), "The school staff see my son as mentally retarded and ask, 'What can mentally retarded kids do?' They never say, 'What can Sam do?'" Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) feel that categories should be broad, but they should not conceal the range and complexity of the characteristics, needs, and abilities of the learners.

Yet another negative attribute of the medical model is the functionalist perspective, in which people are allocated to their places in society according to their abilities (Peters, 1993). The functionalist perspective tends to label learners as diseased and separates them on the basis of these diagnoses into separate programmes, where they are made functional for their place in society as handicapped people. When applying

the functionalist perspective to defining persons with disability, disability becomes the paramount characteristic of an individual and it is used to describe functional limitations that interfere with the person's ability to perform. The latter focus and emphasis is on negative valuations and inadequacies (Fulcher, 1989; Peters, 1993), rather than based on the golden rule of the disability movement that persons with disabilities are people first and disabled second.

2.2.2.2 Application of the medical model in education

The medical model is less helpful when applied to the social sciences field, namely education, where the location of barriers to learning and development is not only within the person, but may be situated in other contexts like the school and community (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). The perspective espoused by medical, charity and lay discourses which views the person as a helpless, dependent being, has unfortunately influenced exclusionary practices in education. Disability is used to exclude rather than include and to oppress rather than enable (Fulcher, 1989). The medical model inadvertently associates disability with impairment and loss, which results in the person receiving treatment outside mainstream education. Thus, learners with disabilities are categorised, labelled and separated according to disabilities and placed in special schools for the blind, the deaf or the physically impaired.

Special education aims to offer the learner a special curriculum and interventions by specialist staff to alleviate the deficiencies from within the child (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). However, no attempt is made to establish deficiencies of the education system (Naicker, 1999b). In addition, separate special education is thought to be for the benefit of the learner as well as for the benefit of the majority of learners not labelled with a disability. Educators in these schools are considered to be specialists in their training and have to ensure successful adaptation of learners to their disability. There are also stereotyped training and career goals developed for persons with specific disabilities; for instance, people who are blind are switchboard operators and piano teachers (Peters, 1993). The consequences of the medical perspective to disability are two-fold, first, individual differences are collectivised, whereby individual differences in adaptability, motivation and interest are ignored. Second, professionals determine the fate of people with disabilities and their families. Special needs educators are

viewed as possessing specialised knowledge and skills, which means that they and other professionals are the only knowledgeable ones in assessing and treating the disability within the learner. The education support professional's role is seen as indispensable and 'cure' is impossible without the professional's intervention (Swart and Pettipher, 2005:5). Regrettably, people with disabilities are made to feel fortunate for receiving the services of these professionals, they are also denied intervention choice to enhance educational opportunities, and their roles in society are prescribed. Limited in their ability to assume social roles, they are confined to a narrow future position in society (Peters, 1993).

This professionalisation within the education sector, in particular specialised settings, led to the mystification of special education in South Africa for mainstream educators (Naicker, 1999b). Fulcher (1989:28) comments on the medical discourse, "It professionalises disability: the notion of medical expertise allows the claim that this technical and personal trouble is a matter for professional judgement". Thus mainstream educators may be led to believe that it is beyond their level of expertise to teach learners who are classed as disabled, that this has to be done by specialists, and that inclusive education is not a possibility (Naicker, 1999b). As a result, access to education is prevented as a result of barriers (mystification of special education teaching practices) that reflect a deficient system and not a deficient person (Naicker, 1999b). Hence, towards the middle of the twentieth century, the medical perspective based on positivist philosophy and scientific knowledge as the only source of correct knowledge about reality, has been challenged with a subjective philosophy that has given rise to the social rights model and ecological systems model (Du Toit, 1996; Lewis, 1998; Dyson and Forlin, 1999; Naicker, 1999b; Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004; Van Rooyen, Le Grange and Newmark, 2004; Swart and Pettipher, 2005).

2.2.3 THE SOCIAL RIGHTS MODEL

2.2.3.1 Normalisation concept

The social rights and ecological systems perspective heralded a paradigm shift away from the 'specialness' of learners and their 'special' forms of provision, towards removing stumbling blocks within society and involved the participation of all people, particularly those with differences, in the daily life of society (Florian, Rose and

Tilstone, 1998). Related to the latter is the changing of societal attitudes, regulations and institutions that maintain exclusion. The promulgation of the normalisation concept in the 1960's contributed to the social rights and ecological systems paradigm shift, in which societies view of people with disabilities was transformed from a focus on abnormality to one of a human rights perspective (Wolfensberger, 1972).

Normalisation can be defined as 'making available to all handicapped people patterns of life and conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to the regular circumstances and ways of life of society' (Nirje 1976 in Du Toit, 1996:7).

Normalisation has also been described as the social and physical integration of persons with disabilities into mainstream community life (Dyson and Forlin, 1999).

This means that children with disabilities have the right to normal home and school circumstances, normal respect from others, normal economic and environmental standards (Du Toit, 1996). This normalisation philosophy was in conflict with the earlier practice of separate schooling and gave rise to the human rights discourse, which led to mainstreaming and then to integration policies in education (Swart and Pettipher, 2005).

2.2.3.2 Human rights discourse

According to Fulcher (1989), equality and equal rights means taking control of one's life. The themes of the rights discourse are self-reliance, independence, equality of citizenship, and consumer wants (Fulcher, 1989). In America the development of rights to equality for persons with disability emerged with the civil rights movement in the 1960's, while in South Africa, the legislative conditions for equal rights for people with disabilities received recognition with the new democratic constitution in 1996. The rights strategy is one of confrontation and demand, which is seen as most progressive, especially for those excluded from full citizenship, in particular persons with disabilities (Peters, 1993).

Underpinning the rights perspective is a reconstruction of notions of disability. Historically disability has been constructed as 'personal trouble' (Barton and Oliver, 1992). Unfortunately, disability has been seen as an affliction from which a minority of individuals suffer and which is attributable to natural causes that is, physical and medical causes. In recent years however, many people, including people with disabilities have rejected the medical, charitable and lay discourses. For some people,

disability is not an affliction from which an individual suffers, but is something which is created by the refusal of society to create social conditions in which people with a disability can receive the full benefits of social participation. Societies excluding, repudiating gaze exerts a supremacy and power over a 'deviant' disabled minority (Armstrong, 2003: 25). It follows that people who are disabled are oppressed by current social conditions and the interest of groups, which maintain these conditions (Dyson and Forlin, 1999). Thus, special education has simply acted as part of an oppressive social apparatus through which people with disabilities are excluded from social participation (Oliver, 1988).

Furthermore, although segregated special education is presented as being in the best interest of learners with disabilities, it actually serves the interests of those professionals who find employment and status in this special system, and also the mainstream education system does not have to re-organise itself to take into account the needs of learners with disabilities (Tomlinson, 1995; Armstrong, 2003). Hence, disability and the education of learners with disabilities are seen as a political issue. It appears that the educational arrangements made for people with disabilities are not the products of charitable concern guided by the medical model, but are concerns dealing with power and interest. The political struggle in which people with disabilities and their allies seek to challenge vested interests, under the auspices of a human rights discourse, will continue until they are allowed to take control of their own destinies (Dyson and Forlin, 1999). Promoting greater awareness of the educational needs and rights of learners with a disability has contributed to the mainstreaming movement and integration of learners in regular schools.

2.2.3.3 Mainstreaming and integration movements

Mainstreaming is the educational equivalent of the normalisation philosophy that suggests that persons with disabilities have a right to similar life experiences to those of others in society (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). Disability is viewed no longer as a handicap, which requires people to be segregated from the mainstream of society (Dyson and Forlin, 1999). The goal of mainstreaming is to return or place learners with disabilities in mainstream education, alongside able-bodied peers (Meijer et al., 1994). Learners, particularly those with mild disabilities, need to prove their readiness to 'fit into' the mainstream by keeping up with assigned work. In

mainstreaming, the classroom and school remain unchanged and so the setting never has to prove its readiness to accommodate a child (Dyson and Forlin, 1999; Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). Mainstreaming reinforces the medical model by focusing on the disability within the child as a problem, as different, and in need of repair (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). Mainstreaming has been criticised for failing to provide learners with enough support to benefit from regular schooling and is referred to as 'mainstreaming by default' (Department of Education, 2001:5).

Integration, on the other hand, relies extensively on social rights issues that emphasise the democratic right of every child to public education (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). In contrast to mainstreaming, the goal of integration is to ensure that learners with disabilities are assigned equal membership in the community. Integration is meant to encourage social interaction between the disabled and the non-disabled, it involves more holistic participation of learners with disabilities, and there is limited provision of special services for learners with disabilities in regular schools- with the onus still being on the learner to fit in (Frederickson and Cline, 2002). Integration has been criticised for failing to uphold its promise of a mainstream that tolerates and incorporates more differences in abilities of learners.

2.2.3.4 From integration to inclusion

While integration requires special learners to adapt to the classroom, inclusion emphasises reorganising or adapting the classroom environment to fit the learning needs of all children (Du Toit, 1996; Engelbrecht, 1999). It is realised that children with a disability should be prepared to live within a social context, and also that environments could have an effect on disabled learners' problems positively, by reducing them or negatively, by contributing towards their difficulties, thereby exacerbating their handicap (Du Toit, 1996). For instance, a mentally disabled learner could comply with the requirements of a relatively uncomplicated ecosystem, however, in a sophisticated environment, the learner might struggle with advanced academic skills and be labelled as 'abnormal'.

The shift from integration to inclusion today, signals a new way of thinking about specialised education. New terminology associated with inclusion includes concepts such as barriers to learning instead of special needs, learning support rather than

remedial education, and systems changes in contrast to changes within the individual (Armstrong, 2003). Moreover, inclusion is aimed at enabling schools to serve all learners, including those experiencing barriers to learning, and it also acknowledges processes such as education systems that respond effectively to diversity (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). Therefore, the ecological systems model extends the philosophical framework of inclusion by viewing individual people in relation to their social context (Donald et al., 1997; Lewis, 1998; Engelbrecht, 1999).

2.2.4 ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS MODEL [Refer to Figure 1]

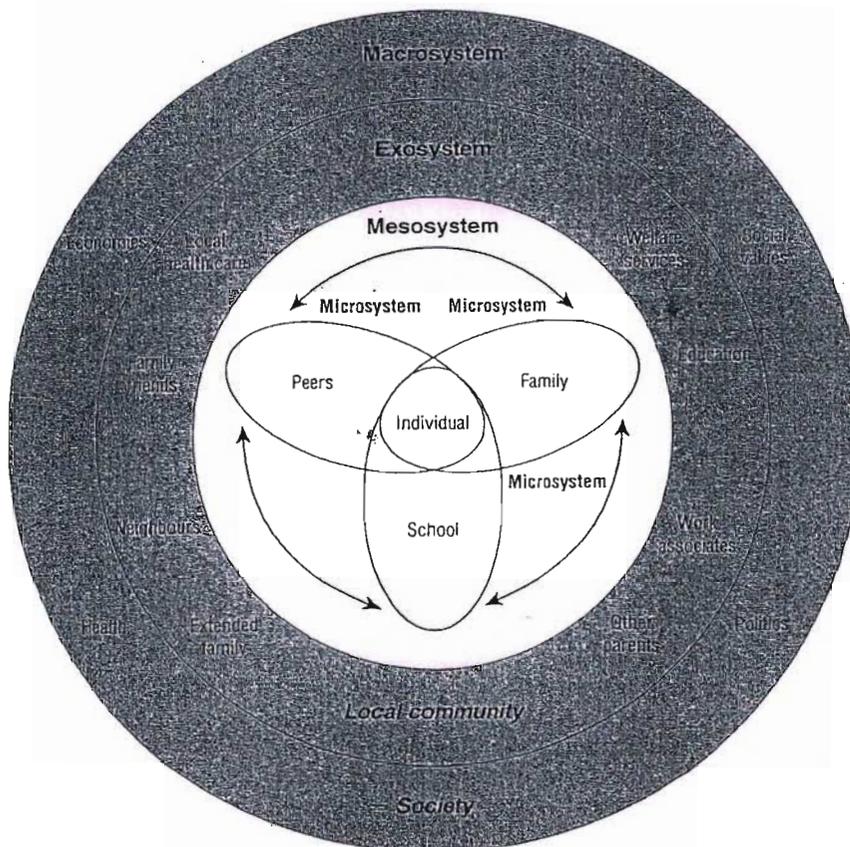


FIGURE 1 ECOSYSTEMIC MODEL LAYOUT [Swart and Pettipher, 2005]

The challenge of the education system is to understand the complexity of the influences, interactions and interrelationships between the individual learner and multiple other systems that are connected to the learner from an ecological systems

perspective (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). An example of these systems that influence an individual learner include the peers, family, school, healthcare, welfare, neighbours and social values. Inclusion is possible when paying attention to developing relationships between the different systems, for instance, school-family partnerships.

The framework of the ecological systems theory is based on Bronfenbrenner's multidimensional model of human development and is important with regard to inclusion (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998). Such models suggest that there are layers of interacting systems resulting in change, growth and development, such as physical, biological, psychological, social and cultural. What happens in one system affects and is affected by other systems. These models are also useful in describing complex processes involved in many other kinds of change. Examples of such transforming changes include changing from a traditional to an outcomes-based education curriculum or from a segregated to an inclusive education system (Swart and Pettipher, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner's model of development is relevant to inclusion, as it emphasises the interaction between an individual's development and the systems within the social context. Thus, we are reminded that general challenges of development cannot be separated from specific challenges of addressing social issues and barriers to learning, as they are all connected with each other. Subsequently, understanding the origins, maintenance and solutions to barriers to learning cannot be separated from the broader social context and the systems within it, including the individual.

This model is also useful in understanding classrooms, schools and families by viewing them as systems in themselves and in interaction with the broader social environment (Frederickson and Cline, 2002). This holistic model explains the direct and indirect influences on a child's life by referring to the many layers of environment or contexts that influence a person's development (Lewis, 1998; Swart and Pettipher, 2005). However, children are also active participants in their own development and the environment therefore does not simply impact on the child (Lewis, 1998). Children's perceptions of their context are central to understanding how they interact with their environments. The way they perceive their circumstances influences the way they respond to their human and physical contexts.

Given the historical paradigm shifts from medical to social rights to inclusion perspectives, the ecological system's theory highlights the complexity of the interaction and interdependence of multiple perspectives that impact on learning. On a practical level, this implies that when a learner experiences difficulty, an educator never debates whether the cause or solution is situated in one single system, but considers the interdependence between all the systems. Each system therefore, possesses contributing factors and no causes. In this way, while one works with an individual learner, one never loses sight of the entire system (the whole picture) in which the individual functions (Engelbrecht, 1999). Simply stated, efforts are directed at helping the system work better for the individual (Christenson and Sheridan, 2001). In essence, an educator has to consider all barriers to learning as contributing factors leading to learning breakdown.

The significance of the ecological systems model for inclusion lies in its potential to explain the dynamics of implementing a large scale change process such as inclusion. Everybody in society is affected by this complex change and therefore ecological sensitivity is necessary (Dawes and Donald, 2000). Furthermore, understanding both the human and physical aspects of the context or environment is essential for understanding inclusion in the South African context (Swart and Pettipher, 2005).

2.2.5 AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION PRIOR TO INCLUSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.2.5.1 Special needs education prior to inclusion in South Africa

An historical glimpse into previous educational dispensations and practices helps to deepen our understanding of present educational practices in South Africa.

International movements discussed earlier directly influenced inclusive education in South Africa, and continues to influence educational policies and practices in this country (Du Toit, 1996; Engelbrecht, 1999; Naicker, 1999b; Swart and Pettipher, 2005). Broadly speaking the development of specialised education in South Africa was similar to that in most other countries. It began with the initiatives of religious organisations, increased involvement of the state, new types of schools being added as more disabilities were diagnosed and finally the growing awareness that learners with

disabilities should not be isolated, but included in mainstream schooling (Du Toit, 1996; Naicker, 1999b). However, a distinguishing aspect in the history of South African specialised education was the extent of political and philosophical influence of apartheid (Du Toit, 1996; Naicker, 1999b; Swart and Pettipher, 2005).

Prior to 1994, the history of specialised education reflected massive deprivation and lack of provision for the majority of learners (Naicker, 1999b). The inequities in specialised education can be attributed to social, economic and political factors that characterised South African society during apartheid. These factors resulted in strong discrimination, unequal distribution of resources and limited educational opportunities for special learners. The period of apartheid saw legislation being passed that contributed to separate education between white and black learners, and separate education between learners with disabilities and mainstream learners (Du Toit, 1996).

Special schools officially became the responsibility of the education department when the Vocational Education and Special Education Act was passed in 1928 (Du Toit, 1996). In 1937 the Special Schools Amendment Act was passed, where parents were obliged by law to enrol their children at specific special schools and hostels either in their province or elsewhere in the country. This Act legally authorised the removal of special learners from mainstream schooling to specialised placement. These Acts saw isolated special schools being established for specific disabilities and separated on racial differences. For example, compulsory state run schools for white blind or deaf disabled learners were established, while churches and private organisations established schools for disabled learners of other race groups. The implication of the legislation was that the majority of black learners and more especially African learners with disabilities were deprived of basic education (Peters, 1993; DoE, 1997). In addition, these children were not expected to attend school and many stayed at home. Consequently, specialised education became fragmented, inefficient and accommodated a limited number of learners (Du Toit, 1996).

The system of separate education for learners with special needs in South Africa can be characterised as a large-scale adherence to the medical model, particularly after 1948 with the National Party's policy on separate development (Du Toit, 1996; Swart and Pettipher, 2005). This model contributed to negative stereotyping, marginalising

and isolating of learners with disabilities, as it saw them as helpless and in need of assistance. There is a strong belief that the medical model has contributed to a disempowering attitude adopted by stakeholders in education that learners with disabilities need to be cared for. This undermines their status as productive and equal citizens of society (Office of the Deputy President, 1997). Another disabling trend of the medical model was the development and administration of intelligence tests, which started in 1920 (Naicker, 1999b). The intelligence tests were the precursor of categorisation, labelling, institutionalisation of learners with special needs and created a place for psychological services, adaptation classes and remedial education (Peters, 1993; Naicker, 1999b).

The trend in specialised education in South Africa prior to 1994 was a clear adherence to the medical model of diagnosis and treatment of learners with special needs. According to the medical model, learners with special needs were treated with intolerance, separated and removed from society as they were considered to be different from the norm (DoE, 1997). Despite significant moves away from the medical model of service delivery in education from a policy perspective especially since 1994, its dominance in defining the nature of education support services in South Africa has resulted in a lack of attention being paid to how the education system is failing to provide for the need of learners with disabilities. Regrettably, this dominance of the medical model in education, which focuses on deficits within the learner rather than on deficits within the education system (Dyson and Forlin, 1999), has contributed to exclusionary practices towards learners with special needs.

2.2.5.2 From exclusion to inclusion in South Africa

Today, a new way of thinking about specialised education has led to the policy of inclusion. The shift from special needs education to inclusive education signals a dramatic philosophical change (Du Toit, 1996). This paradigm shift from a medical perspective of disability to a socio-critical perspective is based on the premise that society must change to accommodate the diverse needs of people (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). This paradigm shift was elaborated on in the report by the NCSNET and NCESS in 1997. The report realised that a range of needs exists among learners and within the education system and other systems in the environment. These needs should be addressed for optimum learning and requires the education system to

accommodate the diversity of learner and system needs. These special needs were conceptualised as barriers to learning and development which are defined as, “ those factors which lead to the inability of the system to accommodate diversity, which lead to learning breakdown or which prevent learners from accessing educational provision” (DoE, 1997: 12).

From an ecological systems approach, factors that can create barriers may be located within the learner, within the school, within the educational system and /or within the social, economic and political context (Naicker 1999b; Swart and Pettipher, 2005). Factors resulting in barriers to learning range from internal to external systems factors. Internal factors are those factors or systems situated within the individual as a system and can be organic in nature, for example, a visual impairment. External factors are factors within systems that are in the environment and outside or external to the individual, for example, inappropriate or inflexible teaching practices. In South Africa, however, a large number of barriers to learning arise from the interaction of factors within internal and external systems. Therefore, in an inclusive education system, education structures and teaching practices need to be enabled, and attitudes, teaching and learning methodologies, and the curriculum changed to reflect inclusive values.

In summary, White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) states that classroom educators are the primary resource for achieving the goal of inclusive education. The implications are that educators will need to refine their knowledge and skills and develop new ones if necessary. Thus, educators will require support in developing flexible and adaptable approaches to teaching and learning. Rather than requiring that special learners adapt to the classroom, the classroom environment is reorganised to fit the learning needs of all learners (Engelbrecht, 1999). In other words, teaching practices need to be reorganised to fit the learner. This calls for new attitudes and beliefs in both educators and learners that every person has the inherent right to participate meaningfully in society. It implies acceptance of differences and making room for persons who would otherwise be excluded. The practice of educating learners who have disabilities together with their non-disabled peers means creating learning communities or systems that appreciate and respond to the diverse needs of all learners (Du Toit, 1996). Hence, the focus of the study is to gain knowledge about

the everyday classroom practices of special needs educators, so as to understand their teaching philosophy, experiences, visions, attitude, instructional and technical skills when working with the needs of diverse learners, which could be of benefit to mainstream educators. The next chapter will present the methodology employed in the present study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the rationale for adopting a qualitative rather than a quantitative methodology for the study. The qualitative evaluation shares similar features with the case study approach, which is the strategy that was utilised in this study. Further, since a small pool of participants was studied, this strategy was adopted with the aim of gaining some valuable in-depth insights into each case. The research design, sampling plan, fieldwork, data collection methods, data analysis and presentation, protection and anonymity of research participants and a possible limitation of the study will be discussed.

3.1 From quantitative to qualitative research

The present research is based on an interest in exploring the teaching practices involved in special education settings. The study paints a picture of how special needs educators are teaching in classrooms. It focuses on educators' philosophy of teaching, attitude, teaching approach, curriculum implementation, classroom organisation, learning materials and equipment, teaching methods, assessment and feedback. The issues are complex and need to be considered from various perspectives. This necessitates a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative approach.

Traditionally, research in special education has been influenced by theories derived from psychology and biology (Ainscow, 1999). This was consistent with the idea of special education being seen as a search for effective methods to solve a technical problem (Iano, 1986). As a result, the aim was to establish through experiments, the existence of generalised laws that educators could use to inform the development of their practice and that would apply in the classrooms of other educators. Such experimental quantitative investigations assume that variables could be applied across different contexts, times and people. The problem with this is that classrooms are complex places, involving many social encounters, the significance of which comes to be understood separately by each participant (Ainscow, 1999). Hence, the idea of seeking to establish laws of cause and effect to make generalisations about classroom life is always subject to doubt.

It appears that progress in the field of specialised education, needs to be reformulated so as to pay attention to the uniqueness of contexts or systems and encounters. Thus the focus is on children's interactions with particular people, at a particular time and in a particular situation, looking, specifically at barriers to their participation and how these can be overcome (Ainscow, 1999). A deeper understanding of the nature and outcomes of individual educational situations is needed. In this sense reality is assumed to be something that is created in the minds of those involved in the situation, rather than something that can be defined objectively, observed systematically and measured accurately. This change in orientation is indicative of a shift from a positivist paradigm which employs a quantitative research design to an interpretive/constructivist paradigm associated with qualitative research designs and is described as contextual, experiential, involved, socially relevant, and inclusive of emotions and events as experienced (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004).

3.2 Interpretive/constructivist paradigm

This paradigm frames disability from the perspective of a social, cultural minority group such that disability is defined as a dimension of human difference and not a defect (Gill, 1999 in Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). Disability is recognised as being socially constructed so that its meaning is derived from society's response to individuals who deviate from cultural standards. In addition, disability is viewed as one dimension of human difference. While the medical, deficit model emphasised getting the child ready for school, this paradigm emphasises getting the school ready to serve increasingly diverse children. Thus, the goal for persons with disabilities is not to eradicate their sickness, but to celebrate their distinctness, pursue their equal place in society, and acknowledge that their differentness is not defective but valuable (Gill, 1999 in Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). Simultaneously, a transformative /emancipatory paradigm has emerged in parallel with the sociocultural view of disability. The transformative paradigm holds that knowledge is not neutral but is influenced by human interests, all knowledge reflects the power and social relationships within society, and an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help people improve society (Banks, 1995).

3.3 Philosophical assumptions and methodological implications of interpretive/constructivist and transformative/emancipatory paradigms

The assumptions associated with the interpretive/constructivist and transformative/emancipatory paradigms are explained as follows. First, the interpretive/constructivist paradigm holds that reality is created as a result of a process of social construction; that is, there is no one reality that is waiting to be discovered, as is believed in the positivist paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). For instance, the concept of disability is a socially constructed phenomenon that means different things to different people. The methodological implication of having multiple realities is that the research questions cannot be definitively established before the study begins; rather, they will evolve and change as the study progresses. In special education research, the concept of multiple realities and social construction of reality also means that the perceptions of a variety of types of persons must be sought (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). For example, the present study used extensive interviews to explore multiple perspectives of teaching practices that improve the learning of students in specialised settings.

In the transformative/emancipatory paradigm, the assumption is also that reality is socially constructed. However, there is a greater emphasis on the impact of historical, social, and cultural determinants of the definitions. The focus rests on ways to identify the constructions from the viewpoints of those with a disability within a larger cultural context. In addition, issues of discrimination and oppression must be addressed. It is suggested that disability in itself is not an issue, but institutionalised racism and classism in schools and society should be questioned. Therefore, research needs to examine the complicated relationships and intersections of disability and race, gender, class, culture and language (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004).

Second, the interpretive/constructivist paradigm assumes that the inquirer and inquired-into are interlocked, each affecting the other through the process of their mutual interaction (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). Thus, the qualitative researcher rejects the notion of objectivity that is espoused by the positivist paradigm and opts for a more interactive, personally involved style of data collection. For example, in the study the researcher held a focused group interview with three-foundation phase mainstream educators to collect preliminary information about possible concerns in

teaching special needs learners. The researcher then used these concerns to structure the interview schedule for the one-to-one interviews of special needs educators. In the transformative/emancipatory paradigm, there again is agreement as to the importance of an interactive relationship between the researcher and the participants. In addition, there is also a critical examination of issues of power and control of the research process and the interpretation of the results from the viewpoint of the participants. (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004).

Third, the interpretive/constructivist paradigm believes that facts are products of social construction; therefore, the values surrounding any statement of 'facts' must be explored and made explicit (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004:100). In the transformative/emancipatory paradigm, much emphasis is placed on ways to legitimately involve persons with disabilities in the research process. Similarly, three educators with disabilities were interviewed for the study, for example, an educator with post polio, one who is blind and one who is hard of hearing. Hence, the present study involves a qualitative exploration of teaching practices, of the uniqueness of particular educational occurrences and contexts, of social organisations such as classrooms, to be understood from the perspectives of different participants, and of encouraging educators to see themselves as 'reflective practitioners' so as to investigate their own environments and practices with a view to bringing about improvements (Ainscow, 1999:37).

3.4 Research design

For the purposes of the present study, it was decided that a qualitative approach would be most appropriate. The qualitative evaluation shares similar features with the case study approach, which is the strategy that was utilised in this study. According to Mertens and McLaughlin (2004), a case study uses qualitative methods to obtain an extensive description of a single unit or bounded system, such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention (for instance, teaching practices) or community. The case study is one type of ethnographic approach that involves intensive and detailed study of one individual or of a group as an entity, for example, a group of special needs foundation phase educators. Ethnography can be defined as a 'research method designed to describe and analyse practices and beliefs of cultures and communities' (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004: 97). The case study approach was

adopted, since a small pool of participants was studied, with the aim of gaining some valuable in-depth insights into each case. In this regard, the use of the qualitative method of case study analysis seemed most appropriate as it dealt with a small sample size, whilst yielding comprehensive and in-depth information pertinent to the research questions (Neumann, 1997).

Taking into consideration that the aim of the study was to research the teaching practices of special educators *in situ*, the qualitative method again proved a more attractive option as it tends to provide a more realistic view of the world, because people are researched in their natural settings, in this case, specialised settings. The case studies, which formed the basis of this research, were situations that already existed naturally, and were not artificially generated for the purposes of the study (Denscombe, 1998). Moreover, one had to consider the exploratory, descriptive characteristics of the research, and that some of the issues raised during the study were of a sensitive nature, involving living, feeling people. Hence, it was decided that qualitative case study research would be a better option, because it lent itself to a more flexible, but comprehensive and humane approach to obtaining the necessary information (Sarantakos, 1993; Neumann, 1997).

3.5 Sampling plan

Qualitative studies usually employ a form of non-probability sampling, such as accidental or purposive sampling, as well as snowball and theoretical sampling (Sarantakos, 1993). Since the researcher, in this study, had opted for a qualitative case study approach, a non-probability sampling plan seemed best as it was less restrictive and made no claim to representativeness (Sarantakos, 1993).

Within the scope of non-probability sampling, the researcher adopted the purposive or judgmental sampling strategy for the study. This seemed the most appropriate method, because it allowed the researcher to use her judgment in identifying the participants. Special needs educators, some with and some without disabilities, were selected to form the sample group. This method of non-probability sampling was also deemed most suitable, since it enabled the researcher to select unique cases that were especially informative for the research questions as the cases provided a rich or thick 'contextualised' picture of the educational phenomenon (teaching practices) under

study (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004:96). It also facilitated the identification of particular cases for in-depth investigation; in this regard, the researcher needed special educators with a disability, who could discuss in-depth, their philosophy and attitude towards, as well as experiences of, teaching practices (Sarantakos, 1993; Neumann, 1997).

3.6 Criteria for selection of participants

Educators who were selected to form the sample group, had to meet the following criteria:

1. They must be special needs foundation phase educators teaching either Grade R, 1, 2 or 3;
2. They must be qualified special needs educators;
3. The special needs educators must have special needs teaching experience and must be currently teaching in specialised settings within KwaZulu-Natal;
4. Half the sample of special needs educators must be able-bodied and half must be special needs educators with disabilities.

The rationale behind selecting special needs foundation phase educators was the recognition of the importance of early educational intervention. According to Comfort (1992:6), some children with variant learning styles are already beginning to 'fail' kindergarten or Grade 0, because they cannot meet the challenges that schools require of them. In addition, some children may manifest symptoms of disabilities in the preschool or Grade R years, but noteworthy characteristics may not be observed until first or second grade. With early identification of 'unconventional children' or children with 'learning differences' by the classroom educator, the learner is able to receive early remedial intervention which is to their advantage (Comfort, 1992).

The rationale behind selecting qualified special needs educators was the importance of having acquired relevant knowledge pertaining to early childhood development. Educators at any grade level who have little or no understanding of early childhood development are at a disadvantage in their classrooms. Knowledge of the various stages of growth and development, some appreciation of Piaget's or other scholars constructs of a child's ability to acquire and utilise information, and an awareness of

the psychosocial involvement of children's emotional behaviours are basic to providing appropriate educational instruction (Comfort, 1992).

The rationale behind selecting special needs educators who had teaching experience in specialised settings was the immeasurable value that experience plays in any work environment. In the study, four of the educators were teaching at a school for the physically disabled, the fifth was teaching at a school for the blind and visually impaired and the sixth was teaching at a school for the deaf and hard of hearing. It is experience that helps educators learn how to teach learners, not lessons, so that the task of helping individual children to construct knowledge becomes less intimidating (Comfort, 1992). Since curricula, regular classrooms, and mainstreaming, in and of themselves, cannot serve to enhance academic learning, social interactions, or appropriate behaviour, it is up to experienced educators to plan for, model and provide various teaching and learning opportunities for their learners (Comfort, 1992).

The significance of including special needs educators with disabilities lies within the transformative/emancipatory paradigm, which places central focus on the lives and experiences of marginalized groups, for instance, persons with disabilities. In the process, the researcher links the results of the inquiry to wider questions of social inequity and social justice. While acknowledging issues of advocacy and objectivity, transformative research has the potential to contribute to the enhanced ability to assert rigor in the sense that ignored or misrepresented views are included (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). Thus, the voices of both able-bodied persons and persons with disabilities should be included in the research process when investigating special education populations.

3.7 Characteristics of participants

Six female special needs educators participated in the study (Appendix D, page 89). Three of the educators had a disability: post polio, blindness and hard of hearing. All participants have a teaching qualification and are registered educators with the Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal. Their ages ranged between twenty-three and fifty-nine years. Four educators spoke English as their first language, while the other two educators spoke Zulu and Afrikaans. One of the educator's was currently completing Bachelor of Education (Honours). Four educators attended professional

development courses, while two did not attend any professional development courses. Teaching experience in special schools ranged from one and a half to twenty-two years.

3.8 Fieldwork

The main body of the fieldwork, interviewing and data gathering, was conducted from April to June of 2005. The principal of each school was contacted telephonically to obtain permission to gain access to the schools and to facilitate research. However, the researcher, being a special needs teacher at one of the research sites, that is, the school for physically disabled learners, directly approached her principal. Each principal was given a general idea of the aims and nature of the study. Subsequently, a letter (Appendix A, page 84) providing more precise details of the study and the actual procedures was sent to the schools. Arrangements were made for the selection of interviewees at each school and an interview schedule was negotiated. It was arranged that interviews would be conducted on an individual basis at a time convenient to the participants. The interviews were conducted on school premises and completed within two to three hours. Interviews were tape-recorded for later transcription and analysis.

3.9 Information sources and instrumentation

The primary form of data collection employed in the study was semi-structured, one-to-one interviews (Appendix B, page 85). Photographs (Appendix E and F, pages 91 and 92) were also taken to supplement the data obtained from interviews.

Interviewing is a form of questioning characterised by the fact that it employs verbal questioning as its principal technique of data collection (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). The decision to use an interview to obtain primary, salient data in this research study stems from the need for an in-depth probe into the teaching practices of special needs educators. In this regard, interviews were preferable to the use of questionnaires, so that the emotions, experiences and feelings of the participants could be adequately explored and captured, rather than just being reported in a word or two (Denscombe, 1998). In addition, interviewing in this study was controlled by the researcher to avoid bias as far as possible and could be tailored to answer the research questions posed (Sarantakos, 1993).

It was anticipated that the interviews would yield sensitive information, and that during the course of obtaining the data from the participants, they might become uncomfortable when revealing personal information. Hence, during the interview, the researcher was more able to incorporate careful handling and even some detailed examination to encourage openness and honesty, whilst maintaining a relaxed, non-stressful atmosphere. In addition, more useful data was obtained during a one-on-one discussion with the educators. The interviewer had certain issues that had to be addressed but was able to be flexible in terms of the order in which questions were considered, and more importantly, was able to let the participant develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised (Denscombe, 1998). In this way, the interview is useful as it gives a detailed picture of a participant's attitude, beliefs, perceptions or accounts of the topic (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont, 2002).

In the study, semi-structured one-to-one interviews were employed, with a leaning to the structured end of the spectrum, in that the interview was conducted according to a formulated set of questions, rather than formulating the questions during the progress of the interview. Thus, it allows the researcher 'control' over the line of questioning as the interview is guided by an interview schedule (Creswell, 1994). However, as the questions were open-ended, they invited the discussion of experiences, opinions, ideas, suggestions and comments on the part of participants (Sarantakos, 1993). The questions in the one-to-one interview were grouped into nine sections that informed teaching practices, namely: teaching philosophy; attitude; teaching methodology; curriculum; class organisation; learning materials and equipment; assessment; feedback and reporting.

Having secured the agreement of the educators to the conditions in the consent form (Appendix C, page 88), the interviews were conducted. The questions and responses to the questions were tape-recorded for later analysis. The recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed into a written format, and were analysed, details of which will be dealt with in chapter 4.

Biographical questionnaires (Appendix D, page 89) were quickly and easily completed to gauge some demographic information and insight about the participants in a non-threatening way (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). Aspects such as age,

gender, language, being disabled, teaching experience and qualifications were ascertained. The purpose of collecting personal information is to learn something about the research participants, particularly if the researcher plans to make claims about why particular results were observed (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). The biographical questionnaires provided a simple descriptive approach for the purpose of describing the characteristics of the participants in the sample.

3.10 Data analysis and presentation

Qualitative research is based on the theoretical and methodological principles of interpretive science (De Vos et al., 2002). As a result, qualitative analysis contains a minimum of quantitative measurement, standardisation and mathematical techniques (Sarantakos, 1993). In this study, one of the first steps in analysing the vast quantities of information obtained during the data collection phase, entailed transcribing the taped interviews so that the data could be approached in an objective, unbiased manner on the part of the researcher, so that specific meanings and themes could be picked out (Hycner, 1985).

This data was then summarised, coded and categorised to reduce the bulk into smaller units of relevant information that could be more easily understood (Sarantakos, 1993; Kvale, 1996). In this study, Kvale's (1996) 'meaning categorisation' approach was employed. The interview was coded into categories. Long statements were reduced to simple categories such as '+' or '-', indicating occurrence or non-occurrence of a phenomenon; or to a single number along a scale of numbers, for example, 1 to 5, to indicate the strength of a phenomenon. In this manner, the large bulk of information was reduced, whilst still maintaining the important aspects of the data (Kvale, 1996). Data were then organised around central themes and points, categorised in more specific terms and the results are presented in the form of written text (Neumann, 1997; Sarantakos, 1993). Data was interpreted by making it understandable, with reference to the point of view of the participant (Neumann, 1997).

3.11 Protection of the research participant

An interpretive researcher is guided by a code of ethics, but the choice is ultimately up to the individual regarding the application of these ethics and researchers have a moral and a professional obligation to behave ethically (Cohen and Manion, 2000).

With regards to the application of ethical research practices in this study, the researcher undertook to ensure that the participants were in a safe environment when answering questions. Furthermore, in accordance with ethical principles of research, none of the participants were forced to participate, nor were they coerced with the promise of some benefit upon agreement. They were made aware of the researcher's identity, the nature of the research and the motivation behind it. Their right to agree to or to decline participation without victimization as well as the option to terminate their interview at their discretion was also made clear at the outset. The educators were also assured that their identities would be withheld from public knowledge, and that their names would not be used in the research. The information revealed would only be used within the parameters outlined in the research project, and not for public consumption or commercial gain.

3.12 Anonymity

The names of the participants were withheld and not used in the final analysis, and the linkage of personal information for understanding responses in each case study, was effected such that an association between such information and a specific individual would not be made. Although the researcher taped each interview, participants were assured that the data would remain with the researcher, data would be used only for the purposes of this study and for publication and that their anonymity would be preserved. This information was also included in the detailed consent agreement, which contained all relevant points (Appendix C, page 88).

3.13 Possible limitation of the study

A possible limitation in the study was that the researcher is a working colleague of four of the participants. Four educators who formed the sample group were familiar with and had a working relationship with the researcher. This relationship could have biased the educators' responses. However, the researcher attempted to minimise this limitation by emphasising that the research was intended to inform and develop the teaching practices of mainstream educators, who may have special needs learners in their classrooms or who may need to prepare to receive special learners as the inclusion movement gains ground. Here true and objective responses will keep informing teaching practices and the educators will benefit from the study through information dissemination in the form of guidelines presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will present the primary results of the study that were obtained from the interviews of six special needs educators who participated in the research study.

4.1 ONE TO ONE INTERVIEWS: TEACHING PRACTICES OF SIX FOUNDATION PHASE SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATORS

The data obtained from the nine sections of the interview schedule yielded insightful themes and factors that influence or inform the teaching practices of the special needs participants. The sections were teaching philosophy, attitude, teaching methodology, curriculum, class organisation, learning materials and equipment, assessment, feedback and reporting.

4.1.1 TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Questions that facilitated discussions on the participants' philosophy of teaching focused on their reflection and understanding of teaching, and how their philosophy of teaching influences their decision-making when preparing for and teaching special needs learners.

There was general consensus among the participants that all learners have a right to education and the belief that all children can learn. The latter belief indicates powerful support for the social rights model and human rights perspective that recognises that people with disabilities are equal citizens and should therefore enjoy equal rights and responsibilities (Office of the Deputy President, 1997). This means that learners with disabilities have the right to normal home and school circumstances, normal respect from others, normal economic and environmental standards (Du Toit, 1996). The participants stressed that in order for children to learn, the educator should adapt the learning environment to develop the full potential of the child. The latter statement is in keeping with inclusion that emphasises reorganising or adapting the classroom environment to fit the learning needs of all learners (Engelbrecht, 1999). The educator has to be patient, spontaneous, flexible and adjust herself to facilitate learning. Of significance was the idea that not only should the educator encourage the learner to do his best, but the educator also has to do her best and put in

extra effort. An educator can make a difference in a child's life, through acting as a role model and helping him to mature.

The participants emphasised the importance of considering the individual needs of the child. It was stated that each child is a special individual with his or her own particular needs. Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), also acknowledges that all people learn differently and have individual learning needs that are equally valued. Participants emphasised that educators should consider the individual needs of each child and try to understand the diverse cultural background and behaviour of the child through observations and discussions. The latter statement is in keeping with the ecological systems model as it emphasises the interaction and connection between an individual's development and the cultural systems within the social context (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). What happens in one system affects and is affected by other systems. In the participants' opinion, educators need to be aware, sensitive, vigilant and alert to individual learner's diverse needs to provide appropriate support. Likewise, Putnam (1998) is of the opinion that learners who experience diverse needs will require some degree of individual learning support. However, despite the many needs of learners, participants suggested drawing less attention to the needs or disability and emphasised focusing on strengths to develop the unique potential of each learner.

Participants responded strongly that perseverance and innovative reflecting are essential when teaching special needs learners. To impart knowledge to learners, the educator must go the extra mile to ensure understanding. An educator cannot decide that a child cannot learn; there has to be ways that a child can learn, so one cannot give up. An educator should constantly think about different ways to reach different learners, that is, an educator should adopt a 'stand on your head' or 'think out of the box' philosophy. Likewise, Ainscow (1999) encourages educators to reflect on their teaching practices with a view to bringing about improvements. This may involve reformulating a learning activity, paying attention to the uniqueness of contexts and encounters and looking at how barriers to learning and participation can be overcome. For example, an educator should prepare activities keeping each child in mind with their specific needs, for instance, a learner with a visual impairment should have

enlarged print on worksheets and a learner with cerebral palsy (who tires easily) should have all the sums written out while he fills in the answers.

The participants also shared the ecosystemic viewpoint, that the learners are part of society and should be encouraged to try to be one of the crowd; they should fit in and be prepared to live within a social context (Du Toit, 1996). Donald et al. (1997) used the ecosystemic perspective to explain individual people in relation to their social context, with each person reciprocally influencing the other. Hence, educators should prepare each child to be a functioning member of society. According to the participants, learners should be groomed to be contributing and productive members of society. Thus the goal of teaching special learners is to prepare them for the future to live in society, moving from the known (world of schooling) to the unknown wide world. This belief encourages independent living in society for special learners, which is a major theme of the social rights discourse (Fulcher, 1989).

4.1.2 ATTITUDE

Questions that facilitated discussions on the educators' attitude focused on the educators' feelings towards special needs learners and towards adapting and responding to the learners' unique disabilities.

4.1.2.1 Feelings toward special needs learners

Nearly all of the participants responded positively that they loved and enjoyed teaching the learners. However, one participant stated that she felt sorry for the learners, but did not let her feelings influence her teaching. Other comments were having a passion and a 'knack' for communicating with special learners. A compassionate and empathic attitude towards learners condition (disability) as well as treating the learners as 'normal' children were alluded to. Participants strongly emphasised focusing on learner's capabilities rather than their limitations. Pijl and Meier (1997) maintain that inclusive education can only be successful if teachers elicit an attitude of acceptance towards all learners. The educator's attitude plays a vital role in providing the most beneficial social-emotional and educational experience for *all learners*. The following quote exemplifies the latter statement:

“Young children need adults who accept the authority that is theirs by virtue of their greater knowledge, experience, and wisdom... (Children) thrive best when they feel loved by someone they can look up to” (Comfort, 1992: 35).

4.1.2.2 Attitude towards adapting to unique disabilities

The participants' response towards adapting to the unique disabilities of learners indicated that adaptation occurs all the time and that it is part and parcel of teaching special learners. Most of the educators stated that it was challenging, sometimes difficult, time-consuming and involved advanced planning and thinking. One participant said that she was happy to adapt, while another said it was fairly easy to adapt but experienced lots of difficulty in adapting activities specifically for blind learners as she lacked experience, training and knowledge. The latter statement indicates a pressing need for adequate training and professional development for all educators as regards teaching learners with different types and degrees of severity of disability. In addition, Uys (2005) suggests that educators should be trained on how to select and adapt the demands of activities that match the abilities and needs of individual learners.

The participant who was blind stated that adaptation was continuous due to the degeneration and deterioration of some medical conditions (disabilities) for instance; a child may be partially sighted and over time may become permanently blind. With respect to the latter, a child may initially use enlarged worksheets but over time the child may have to learn Braille, as should the educator. The educator with a hearing impairment commented that adaptation as well as learning Sign Language to communicate with deaf learners involved lots of hard work. To accommodate all learners, Dednam (2005) writes that educators should make adaptations in their management of the classroom, learning materials and teaching methodology in order to support learning difficulties.

4.1.3 TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The questions and discussions around different teaching approaches, teaching methods and activities, opportunities to improve teaching skills, flexible teaching and benefits of observation when teaching special needs learners yielded positive responses from the participants, with some challenging factors.

4.1.3.1 Teaching methodology adopted by special needs educators

All of the participants stated that they adopted a multisensory, interactive and learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. Participants strongly emphasised that learners should be feeling, moving, acting, listening, talking, and thinking-using all their senses to grasp concepts. According to Musselwhite (1986), one principle for improvement of attention is multisensory input, as this will keep the learner attentive and interested in the learning process. Participants also described their teaching approach as ‘hands on’ and very practically based. It was suggested that educators should structure theme-based lessons so that children engage with the learning material, for instance using play as a medium for learning. In this way children are learning academic concepts through a fun activity, without realising it. According to Bagley and Klass (1998) when educators organise activities around a theme, learners are encouraged to engage in more complex levels of play. In addition, more social interaction is observed among learners in activities that have a relatively high structure compared to activities with a low structure.

A particular challenge noted by the participant with a hearing impairment was that deaf learners should be taught through the medium of their first language, which is Sign Language. This viewpoint is supported by Pantshwa (2000:12) who writes that, “Sign language is the first language of the majority of aurally impaired adolescents”. This challenge would involve educators learning Sign Language as a communication tool in order to teach learners with hearing impairments. A second challenge for educators in teaching learners with visual impairments is learning how to teach Braille typing of numbers, alphabets and correct finger placement on the Braille machine and learning how to read Braille numbers, alphabets, contractions and word signs. The latter comments have implications for encouraging dynamic educators who embrace an open and flexible attitude towards acquiring new skills, such as learning Braille and Sign Language, in order to teach a diversity of learners in an inclusive education system (Landsberg, 2005a).

4.1.3.2 Teaching methods and activities

All of the participants used a combination of teaching methods and a variety of activities to transfer academic concepts to their learners. Participants taught through

stories, songs, music, videos, pictures, games, demonstrations, concrete objects, explanations, descriptions, live models, discussions, listening, real life examples, charts, worksheets, tests, flash cards, board work, rote learning, excursions, arts and crafts, peer tutoring, group work, Braille and Sign Language. Using a variety of teaching methods and activities are most important to facilitate a child's eagerness to explore and learn, to want to find out for themselves and to facilitate their own problem-solving in coping with life issues (Alant and Harty, 2005). A particular teaching method stressed by all the participants involved breaking concepts down into smaller steps or following a step-by-step approach in order to maximise a child's understanding. Other comments included trying to understand each child's needs (their strengths and shortcomings) to match the learning outcome and method to enable the learner to succeed. For example, if a learner cannot form alphabets on a page, then allow him to type on a computer or if a child cannot draw then simplify and suggest a sticking activity by instructing him to stick 5 dots rather than draw 5 flowers.

One participant stated that the focus should be on the process of understanding rather than the end product. She felt that the process of understanding should be developed first, as the foundation phase learner still has twelve years to refine the product. Likewise, Alant and Harty (2005) write that focusing on the end result (outcome) can distract educators from the process- which is where much of the learning takes place. All the participants stated that all children can learn, but the educator needs to identify their particular learning style for them to achieve. The latter statement is supported by White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) and Outcomes-Based Education with its premise that "all students can learn and succeed, but not on the same day in the same way" (Spady, 1994: 9).

Another useful teaching method mentioned by the participants involved starting from big to small or simple to complex. For example, a child with fine motor coordination problems would need to write the alphabets on a large sheet first and then gradually move to a medium sized sheet to eventually write between the small blue lines on a page. In addition, participants commented on providing a variety of different activities but with fewer distractions and choices. For example, instruct a child to thread only eight red blocks rather than three blue blocks, two yellow circles, two

pink triangles and one blue rectangle. Other methods asserted by all the participants included constant repetition, revision, and reinforcing of academic concepts and also constant monitoring to prevent the development of poor work habits. Other forms of monitoring involved checking for instruction clarification by asking questions before learners commenced with written work. Finally, all the participants stressed the importance of daily homework, so that concepts could be practiced and consolidated over time. Dednam (2005) writes that accommodations made to teaching methods, activities and learning materials allows learners to experience success that motivates them to try harder and achieve optimally within their abilities.

4.1.3.3 Opportunities to develop and improve teaching skills

All the participants stated that opportunities to develop and improve their teaching skills arose while teaching special learners. It was stated that each individual child presented with specific needs. The participants stated that through exposure and experience in working with special learners, they begin to empathise and understand how the learner feels, accepting their strengths and limitations and what they are capable of producing. This implies that opportunities to develop mainstream educators teaching skills may arise when they begin working with learners with disabilities.

Over time, the participants stated that they learn from the children and have a clearer understanding of their needs that triggers new ideas to implement. They then bounce ideas; always asking others for feedback with one idea acting as a catalyst for another. Furthermore, participants commented that there are opportunities to discuss problems with peers, be informed about new developments and to look for alternate strategies to overcome difficulties. Such collaboration between professionals is based on consistent communication, a shared philosophy about education and inclusion, and a shared responsibility for the learners with impairments in the context (McCormick, Noonan and Heck, 1998). In addition, participants stated that there are opportunities to improve planning skills and to set realistic outcomes for each child. In their opinion, working with special learners keeps them on their toes, and encourages innovative thinking to develop different methods and activities to make the lesson interesting and meaningful.

4.1.3.4 Flexibility during teaching

A significant comment made by all the participants was the continuous evaluation of a child's understanding during teaching and learning, which acts as a catalyst for being flexible and accommodating. According to the participants, being flexible means following the child's lead if they are learning in a certain way. Likewise, Uys (2005) writes that learners each have their own distinct way of learning and we should not work towards making them conform to a specific learning style, but rather help them to be successful in their unique way. Being flexible, suggested the participants, also involves thinking on your feet and problem solving to improve the child's abilities. In essence, if learners do not understand or something unexpected is needed, change the lesson or routine to accommodate the learner. For example, a hyperactive learner may not be able to sit still on the carpet during story time, then provide beads for him to thread. Hence, the same outcome of listening is achieved through using a different activity.

Participants stated that if the lesson is not proceeding according to plan, then try a different activity or approach, which means adapting and changing to the child's needs. For example, a child that is struggling to learn Braille as a result of the late onset of blindness would appreciate taped books in the interim as he adjusts to his new disability. Furthermore, participants emphasised that an educator's behaviour may also need to be flexible. For instance, one may adopt a serious and firm approach with a particular learner, while with another learner one may adopt an informal, relaxed approach. The educator's behaviour towards the learner influences the learner's performance. Thus, the educator should show real concern towards the learner's interests and accomplishments (Uys, 2005). Participants stressed being flexible in allowing for extra time in completing worksheets, tests, copying from the board and other activities, particularly with learners who have cerebral palsy. Similarly, Kruger and Groenewald (2004) stress accommodations such as extra time, encouraging the learner to work accurately rather than quickly and reducing the volume of work.

4.1.3.5 Benefits of observation during teaching

Participants emphasised that careful observation during teaching was a useful technique in alerting them to a child who was daydreaming and who was then

requested to explain instructions to ensure understanding. Other benefits of observation included noting a bruise on a learner who was diagnosed with haemophilia (deficiency of clotting factors) and reporting the bruise to the school nurse or the child might bleed to death. Kunneke and Orr (2005) support the latter statement by writing that blood disorders lead to either an increased risk of infection, chronic fatigue or a high tendency to bleed. In this instance, the strength of the medical model is evident, as the learner needs to receive immediate medical attention for a potentially life-threatening illness (Bailey, 1998). Furthermore, participants stressed the importance of watching learners who suddenly became withdrawn or reserved or demonstrated a sudden drop in school marks that alerted them to some form of abuse that had to be reported. Participants indicated that constant self-observation encouraged them to modify their own behaviour towards learners by being more loving and sensitive. Educators who observe children reflect on what they see which helps them to adapt and change activities in the environment to foster growth (Alant and Harty, 2005).

4.1.4 CURRICULUM

The questions and discussions around understanding Curriculum 2005, the value of goal setting and the challenges of curriculum implementation in specialised settings, yielded mostly positive responses from the participants, with a few limiting factors.

All the participants stated that they had a satisfactory understanding of Curriculum 2005[C2005]. According to them, C2005 refers to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and incorporates Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), learning outcomes and assessment criteria. All the participants implemented C2005, except for the participant with a hearing impairment. She stated that the curriculum was too advanced, too complex and covered too much content which was time consuming and thus unsuitable for a hard of hearing learner's language level and understanding. She stated that learners with hearing impairment lack the sensory language input from birth and struggled with the academic content. Similarly, Storbeck (2005) writes that deafness prevents the incidental learning of language and new concepts resulting in the deaf learner having a limited vocabulary that negatively influences reading comprehension.

There was general understanding among the participants that they should try to complete most of the outcomes for a particular grade. However, they stated that they were unable to complete the curriculum as the learners were too slow in understanding concepts or they worked too slowly in completing tasks. Participants indicated that the learners' process of understanding was developmentally delayed or that due to a medical condition they were physically slower than others in completing activities. Hence, the pace of most lessons was slow or variable depending on the child's ability or the complexity of the academic concept being introduced. Likewise, Uys (2005) writes that learners with disabilities need more time to process and organise incoming information. Furthermore, extra time for practicing should be included in the planning of the lesson and more complex activities should be presented earlier in the day (Uys, 2005). Other positive comments by the participants about C2005 was that it was not prescriptive or limiting and was open to interpretation. It also allowed for cross-curricular integration that enabled the participants to make learning relevant and meaningful to the child. The latter perspectives are in line with inclusive education as the educator is regarded as a facilitator and the curriculum is regarded as a guideline that permits educators to develop innovative and creative learning programmes (Landsberg, 2005b).

4.1.4.1 Goal Setting

Of significance to the participants, was the value of goal setting, especially more so for the special needs learner as they tend to be slow in understanding. Participants stressed the importance of setting goals for individual learners as it helped them to decide what adaptations they need to introduce in order for the child to experience success. It was also stated that goal setting provides structure and acts as a guided plan to facilitate teaching and learning. For instance, setting a goal to improve a child's level of self-confidence could be achieved through praising the learner's efforts in all activities. Similarly, Moss (1995) writes to keep goals simple initially and to acknowledge every attempt a learner makes to improve his performance. Furthermore, participants stated that goal setting acts as a benchmark to demonstrate that a child has understood and can use the knowledge in his environment.

A major goal emphasised by all participants was the encouragement of independent living for special learners. The latter comment is in keeping with the social rights

discourse that embraces themes of self-reliance, independence and equality of citizenship for all persons (Fulcher, 1989). Participants warned that they sometimes allowed special learners to become passive and complacent; then they expect others to do for them. Likewise, Zigler (1982) writes that some learners with disabilities become over dependent on adults in the immediate environment. Participants emphasised that they have a role to play in restricting (weaning) the amount of help they provide and to also self-motivate special learners in believing that they are capable of doing more for themselves. Participants stated that when setting goals, be realistic and determined to persevere and encourage learners to achieve as much as possible, but not in the shortest time. Motivating learners continuously, allocating enough time to complete tasks and encouraging learners to appreciate and use their abilities to minimise and overcome barriers to learning are part of building an inclusive education system.

4.1.4.2 Challenges in implementing C2005 for special learners

All the participants stated that it was a challenge to try and complete the curriculum for the academic year. However, they overcame the challenge through adapting the curriculum and fitting the curriculum to the child's level of understanding. The latter perspective is in keeping with the ecological systems model that emphasises adapting the classroom environment or in this case the curriculum, to fit the learning needs of children (Du Toit, 1996). The participants responded that they streamlined the curriculum and concentrated on key concepts and learning outcomes that were applicable to special learners, that is, a greater focus on quality over quantity. For example, a child in a wheelchair cannot kick a ball, but he can transfer his weight onto a slide and slide down independently or a child learning to use a walking frame are both achieving the physical education outcome of movement and exercise.

In addition, participants stated that the learners are taught the essence of the academic content of C2005, while activities and concepts are simplified, the complexity of work is built up step-by-step and the volume of work, tests, and homework is reduced for the child to experience success. Similarly, Wolpert (2001) states that effective curriculum implementation for learners with disabilities include analysing tasks carefully to ensure that the steps are logical and small enough to comprehend, and regulating the quantity, novelty and difficulty levels of the learning material according

to the needs of the learner. A constant frustration mentioned by the participants was trying to find different ways of explaining a concept for it to be understood.

The participant, who was blind, stated that C2005 had not been brailled, and that she had to consult sighted colleagues for assistance. If C2005 itself is inaccessible to educators with visual impairments, then how can it be successfully implemented? Thus, C2005 excludes educators and learners with visual impairments that have particular negative implications for developing an inclusive education system. She added that the curriculum emphasised lots of visual literacy (pictures) that was unnecessary for the blind. At the same time, learners with visual impairment sometimes find it more difficult to become motivated to learn because the learning material fails to stimulate them visually (Landsberg, 2005b).

Another concern mentioned by the participant was the necessity of research that many learners found difficult and time consuming because of the lack of material in accessible electronic formats, an ill-equipped library and lack of brailled textbooks and source material. It appears that she was collecting the information, having it brailled and then teaching learners how to do research-a time consuming process. For the participant who was blind, group work was an immense challenge as it was exhausting to monitor the learners and ensure that they were on task. The latter point may be valid, as teachers have to take on the role of the learner's eyes, which does not apply to the blind participant, in order to provide learners with information, to take them to objects to touch, to explain to them, to elicit questions and to make sure that they understand (Landsberg, 2005b).

Another criticism of C2005 was that too much emphasis was placed on geographical concepts that were too sophisticated for foundation phase learners. In addition, participants referred to a lack of ideas on theme or thematic teaching within C2005. Downing (2002) writes that thematic teaching centres on a specific theme, is presented in different content areas, corresponds to the way learners naturally learn, allows for greater continuity in the curriculum and ensures generalisation between different contexts. This is important for learners with disabilities as they have difficulty generalising to other environments.

4.1.4.3 Language challenges

All the participants stated that English was a second language for most of the learners and presented a great challenge in transferring understanding and knowledge. The latter perspective is supported by Nel (2005), who states that in South African schools many learners are taught through the medium of English, which is not their home language, and who are limited in their English proficiency. Furthermore, Rost (2001) states that English Second Language (ESL) learners find it difficult to listen to English because the phonological system, phonotactic rules as well as tone melodies may differ from the first language. This also influences their speaking and reading. The participant who was blind stated that it was extremely difficult to teach the Braille six-dot cell system to a second language English speaker. She stressed that the Braille alphabet is taught in English not Zulu or another language. Hence, the same struggles one would experience when teaching the English alphabet to ESL learners would also occur when teaching Braille reading and typing to ESL learners. Unfortunately, because vision plays an important part in cognitive and language development, it stands to reason that children who are visually impaired will be behind other children of the same age in their cognitive and language development (Landsberg, 2005b).

The participant who was hard of hearing clearly asserted that for learners with hearing impairments, Sign Language was the first language, while spoken English and Zulu were the second languages. Deaf people experience communication difficulties, primarily because Sign Language and spoken English have different grammatical structures (Storbeck, 2005). She emphasised that learners with hearing impairments verbally express themselves through Sign Language or Total Communication (a combination of Sign Language and speaking), while written English is expressed through supported English (an accessible grammatical form of English). She was concerned that the medium of instruction in most schools was not Sign Language and that learners with hearing impairments would have to learn their subjects through a “foreign” language, for instance English. Being unable to access Sign Language as the medium of teaching and learning not only places these learners at a disadvantage, but it also leads to linguistic difficulties which contribute to learning breakdown (DoE, 1997). On a positive note, all the participants stated that code switching was used effectively to translate either for the teacher or the learner.

4.1.5 CLASSROOM ORGANISATION

The questions and discussions around classroom organisation considered the importance of creating a smooth functioning learning environment that would positively support teaching and learning in the classroom.

First, there was general consensus amongst the participants that they organised the classroom environment keeping in mind the goal of encouraging independence in their learners. Thus, children must independently be able to reach all learning material without any assistance. The latter perspective is in line with the social rights discourse of equal rights, self-reliance and taking control of one's destiny (Dyson and Forlin, 1999). Second, participants stated that they considered the type and degree of disability of a learner to assist them in seating arrangements, planning and organising of activities in the classroom. For example, a child with myopia (nearsightedness) needs to be seated close to the board, whereas the child with albinism (lack of pigmentation resulting in eyes being extremely sensitive to light with refraction and nystagmus) prefers the dark, while learners with other types of visual impairment prefer strong light. Another example is that a child with epilepsy must have constant lighting and not flashing lights that stimulate epileptic seizures. Third, participants emphasised strongly that they must be organised and that lesson plans, learning material and equipment must be planned well in advance. Advance planning also involved innovative thinking about how knowledge will be transferred and about what learning materials need to be prepared to assist in transferring concepts. The latter statements are supported by Dednam (2005), who states that learning material should be structured thoroughly beforehand and that all material should be ready and available when commencing the lesson.

Fourth, participants mentioned accessibility of materials to the learners in the classroom. For example, learners' files and lockers must be placed close and convenient to ensure easy access to learning materials such as books. Learners' lockers, library shelves and cupboards must be lower down and at eyelevel for easy access for wheelchair users. In addition, learners need access to the blackboard; they must be seated so as not to disturb others when they approach the board to read. Participants commented that it helps to keep partially sighted learners close to the

board with their raised desk top lid, while; Braille users who type on the Perkins Braille machine can be seated at the back of the class. The library corner should also be placed at the back of the class to ensure easy access. Alant and Harty (2005), write that accessibility is a phenomenon that varies according to the needs of each individual child. Reasonable accommodations need to be made to ensure that materials and facilities are available and accessible to learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Fifth, participants stated that they considered appropriate placement or positioning of learners or equipment in the class in order to maintain class discipline and a smooth functioning learning environment. For instance, disruptive learners need to be seated close to the educator or far apart from each other in the class. Likewise, Kruger and Groenewald (2004) state that the learner should sit near the educator and preferably sit with their backs to the other learners to avoid being distracted. One participant suggested that it might be necessary to isolate a child who is disruptive to the point where he may injure others. In addition, pairing a verbal learner with a non-verbal learner or a learner with poor concentration with a learner with good concentration helps them learn positive attributes from each other. Another participant stated that a highly disruptive learner might be taught to belt himself to the chair to learn to stay seated and concentrate on his work and unbelt himself when going for break time or toileting.

Participants felt that desks for visually impaired learners must be kept in the same position so that the learners do not bump into them and are able to move smoothly in, out or around the classroom. Furthermore, a high wheelchair user should be placed at the back of the class to avoid blocking the board. All the participants stated that a clutter free and distraction free environment was essential. All learning items (books, toys, puzzles) must be neatly kept away so learners do not stumble and injure themselves or become distracted. Similarly, Dednam (2005) states that orderly classroom management and reasonable classroom accommodations to avoid disturbances and distractions are especially valuable for learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Sixth, participants stressed the necessity for space in the classroom. Wheelchair users require sufficient space to manoeuvre between tables in the classroom, as do learners using walking frames and space needs to be available for learners to place their crutches. Some learners, particularly those with cerebral palsy, may use a computer placed close to an electrical plug point and hence space for technological equipment needs to be taken into account. The latter statements have particular implications for the number of learners with disabilities included in an inclusive classroom. Carta, Sainato and Greenwood (1988) have discovered that the size of space for activities may affect learners' participation. When density increases by adding learners to a fixed amount of space, learners are more likely to maintain their distance from peers and become more aggressive.

4.1.6 LEARNING MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

The questions and discussions centered on the participants' preparation of teaching aids and learning and teaching support materials for particular disabilities, as well as the need for specialised equipment.

Participants emphasised strongly that to create learning materials one should consider the abilities and shortcomings of the learner as well as the goals identified to achieve for each child, with independence being the primary goal. Learning materials should be created to increase the learner's independence during classroom activities. The latter statement has significant implications for developing independence in learners, because if they are never required to help themselves then the phenomenon of learned helplessness will prevent them from becoming independent and self-reliant (Uys, 2005). It was suggested that educators should identify where the child struggles and find solutions through consulting with specialists (therapists), parents, or through research. In some instances, participants commented that they made their own writing, reading and numeracy books for particular learners to accommodate their unique learning style. Participants stated that learning aids should be creative, interesting, incorporate bright colours and should be large and simple to stimulate learning. For instance, making a large teaching aid such as a walking size number line (Appendix E, page 91) and then moving to a small number line on a page facilitates a learners' understanding of numbers.

Participants stated that learners who are blind lack early visual stimulation from birth and subsequently have limited vocabulary knowledge and a poor understanding of the world around them. Thus, participants stressed that a multisensory approach to creating learning aids should be considered for all learners, as both able-bodied and disabled learners simultaneously benefit. Multisensory learning aids should incorporate sound, touch, smell and movement. However, Musselwhite (1986) cautions that while multisensory input may improve attention in one learner, it may cause over-stimulation resulting in withdrawal in another learner. Hence, what works for one learner does not necessarily assist another.

Participants suggested that teaching aids can be made from household items, such as pasta, beans, shells, bottle tops and other items. There was general consensus among the participants that learning aids are time-consuming to make, but can be used repeatedly if made durable and are of immense benefit to learners. Participants recommended making or buying the following tactile aids for visually impaired learners: tactile writing pattern board (Appendix F, page 92) for tracing, pictures outlined with string for colouring, Braille alphabet blocks (Appendix F, page 92), polystyrene shapes, concrete models such as a toy elephant, tactile flash cards made from felt, household items such as a fork to facilitate tactile understanding. In a similar vein, Landsberg (2005b) states that the use of concrete material in formal teaching is of the utmost importance and should be available for sighted learners, as they will also benefit.

Participants also recommended the following daily considerations for visually impaired learners:

- Textbooks or readers brailled in advance (Appendix E, page 91)
- Tests and worksheets brailled in advance, then scribed, marked and filed
- Low vision aids such as magnifying glasses
- Big and bold black writing on charts with highlighting of specific concepts
- Clear printing and enlarged worksheets or tests (Appendix E, page 91)
- Use of white or yellow chalk on blackboards
- Lines drawn on blackboards
- Work trays to avoid losing items

- Industrial sized paper clips or prestic to secure all movable items

The participant with a hearing impairment stated that for learners who have a hearing impairment the following considerations are necessary. She emphasised the need to maintain eye contact, to face the learner when speaking and to avoid blocking facial expressions. She added that, as with other classrooms, there should be lots have clearly displayed visual pictures and concrete objects. Similarly, Storbeck (2005) states that the educator's face and mouth should be clearly visible, the educator should stop talking when writing on the chalkboard, and given that the deaf learner is a visual learner, effective use of gestures, visual aids and concrete objects are essential.

The participant also mentioned that on occasion she used two computer software programmes: Widget and Link and Create. Widget uses words with symbols, for example when the word carpet is typed; a picture of a carpet will be displayed. However, the educator must still supervise and monitor the learner to ensure that the child stays with the programme. Another programme is Link and Create, where learners perform a drama while the teacher videotapes. This drama or 'movie' is downloaded into the computer and then the teacher types in the words that the learners were signing during the play. In the end you have a Sign Language movie with subtitles! According to Bornman (2005), high-technology systems have the advantage that the output can be either printed or oral, thus providing a learner with the power of having a voice to communicate with. However, the biggest disadvantage is that it is relatively expensive in terms of the device itself, the cost of training the learner and communication partners, and maintenance, insurance and repairs.

Participants also recommended the following daily considerations for learners with physical or medical challenges:

- Chairs and tables of the correct height are needed for learners with dwarfism
- A posture chair (Appendix F, page 92) for learners who lack lower motor control that prevents the learner from sliding off
- A high desk with adjustable legs for a wheelchair to fit under
- A portable desk top for a wheelchair that can be removed for toileting

- A variety of pencil grips (Appendix F, page 92) for learners who hyperextend their fingers
- Pegs or prestic to secure pictures to the desk for learners with one arm
- Stick lower case letters on top of upper case letters on the computer keyboard to teach the alphabet to a learner with cerebral palsy
- Cushions for wheelchair learners to sit on or placed behind the back for comfort and posture support
- Hand splint (Appendix F, page 92) to secure pencil as child's hands are paddle shaped
- Ramps and wheelchair friendly classrooms, toilets, libraries and offices

Learners with physical impairments have unique needs and problems, which differ according to the particular nature of the physical impairment. These needs and problems must be accommodated (as discussed above) to prevent barriers to learning and development (Smith and Kruger, 2005).

4.1.6.1 Specialised / specific equipment

Participants stated that visually impaired learners might also use binoculars to enlarge the print and need a clip on reading lamp to focus more light on worksheets. They stressed the importance of using a Perkins Braille machine (Appendix F, page 92) with special brailleing paper for teaching learners how to type. A scanner and Braille photocopying machine is also required for quick copying of tests and worksheets. The use of computer technology by people who are blind has opened up many opportunities, including vocationally (Landsberg, 2005b). However, the main drawback of electronic devices is that they are extremely expensive.

Participants suggested that learners with visual impairments might also use the computer software package called JAWS. JAWS is a voice installed software system that reads out what has been typed. It also reads the icons on the computer screen. The participant who was blind, however, emphasised strongly that foundation phase learners must learn the Braille alphabet and numbers (Appendix E, page 91) and may later move to sophisticated technology such as JAWS, if cost-effective. The latter concern is shared by Landsberg (2005b) who states that Braille is still the basic and unique reading and writing medium of communication and learning for learners who

are blind. Therefore, they must learn to read and write Braille at the same time as sighted learners begin to read and write. Participants also recommended tape recorders as useful tools in the class to record lessons, to reinforce learning at home and for listening to taped stories to improve language development.

The participant with a hearing impairment strongly emphasised that a relatively quiet environment was needed so that learners could hear the educator through their hearing aids and the FM system or induction loop. The latter statement has implications for the number of learners with and without impairments included in an inclusive classroom, as Storbeck (2005) asserts that learners with hearing impairments require all auditory disruptions to be minimised (for example, air-conditioning, lawnmowers, noisy learners) and auditory support to be maximised (for example, FM systems and hearing aids). Furthermore, the participant with a hearing impairment stated that when learners talk together it sounds like a continuous buzzing noise that reduces speech discrimination and thus compromises communication. Hence, signing should also involve teaching learners turn taking in order to facilitate effective communication. According to the participant with the hearing impairment, the FM system involves a clip inserted into the hearing aid of the learner, with wires attached to a body aid. The wires pick up sounds and voices from the educator's microphone and body aid. The child will hear the educator's voice directly through the hearing aid. She stated that some learners including herself do not always benefit from a hearing aid, as the sound picked up by the hearing aid produces a nerve tingling feeling that makes a person feel uncomfortable, dizzy and wanting to scratch.

There was general consensus among the participants that many factors such as type and degree of disability, adequate space, accessibility, available resources, specialised equipment, number of learners, quiet environment, positioning of learners and other factors need to be considered for the child to be effective in his work so as not to disrupt the learning of others and thereby facilitate the smooth functioning of the classroom. In essence, all learning materials and aids should be created with the idea of sustaining learners' attention and encouraging independence.

4.1.7 ASSESSMENT

Questions that facilitated discussions on assessment focused on the different forms of assessment, adaptations to consider during assessment and the challenges of assessment. Participants indicated that assessment should be geared towards the child's level of ability and their level of disability that is, consider both their strengths and limitations. It has to be specific to the child's needs. Participants felt that assessment provided them with a measure of how the child was progressing, the skills they have acquired, their way of understanding and thinking and greater insight into their nature or personality. Assessment helped them to plan appropriate discipline, set realistic goals and learn how to work with or adjust to each child's abilities. They stated that this can be achieved through specific observation of the child that guides them to know how to assist the child, how to set realistic expectations and how to find areas in which the child can excel. The latter perspective is in keeping with inclusive education, as the educator's assessment practices are reorganised to accommodate or fit the learning needs of the learner (Engelbrecht, 1999). This implies acceptance of difference and creating assessment practices that appreciate and respond to the diverse need of all learners (Du Toit, 1996).

Participants reiterated the importance of careful observation of the child that governed their actions, assessment and setting of appropriate goals. They emphasised that each child functions at a different ability level and that assessment should consider the individual nature of each child. For example, if a child struggles with writing, in particular cerebral palsy learners, then providing a computer or doing an oral assessment should be considered. Furthermore, although the learner's standard of written work may be untidy because of poor fine motor control, his understanding however, may be intact. Thus, participants considered the learner's amount of effort, number of attempts and process of understanding rather than only the end product. One participant mentioned that observing the types of books learners take out from the library also acted as a guide to their general reading level.

Participants emphasised a greater focus on verbal or oral assessment versus written assessment, particularly for learners who were struggling with writing. Participants assessed a learner's understanding through demonstration. For example, asking

learners, 'Point out 5 objects that begin with the letter D' or giving instructions, 'count out 10 sweets' or asking questions. Of significance in oral assessment was the clear and simple use of vocabulary in questions or instructions. The participant with a hearing impairment stressed the importance of Sign Language (visual-gestural) assessment for learners with hearing impairments. She indicated that their understanding was assessed through object or picture identification and through questioning and descriptions, for example, 'tell me about this pen'. She commented that learners with hearing impairments lack early infant language stimulation and that she had to simplify questions, provide clues and prompts to aid understanding when assessing through Sign Language. Other assessment considerations for learners with hearing impairments include using Sign Language interpreters, video recordings and allowing additional time to complete tasks or tests (Department of Education, 2002a).

Participants indicated a strong preference for one to one or individual assessment. They referred to the need to consider the individual nature and different ability level of each child. For instance, listening to each child reading flash cards and books enables individual assessment of the use of phonics. The participants stated that some foundation phase learners were too young and immature to engage in group assessment, however, peer and self assessment were used on occasion. Self-assessment is beneficial as it allows learners to experience success by assessing their own work on an ongoing basis and makes them aware of their progress (Dednam, 2005). Participants stressed that assessment was continuous with learners' books, tests and homework being marked daily and corrections completed immediately to monitor understanding of concepts. They indicated that answers to tests may be oral, written, typed, signed by means of Sign Language or brailled and then transcribed for marking. The participant who was blind stated that all tests and worksheets should be brailled for learners with visual impairments or if the learner was new to Braille he was sent to the facilitator for the blind or an amanuensis (a person who reads the question paper and scribes the answers). An important assessment consideration for learners with visual impairments include allowing additional time to complete tasks, tests and examinations, because Braille reading is much slower than sighted reading (Landsberg, 2005b).

Additional assessment considerations noted by the participants included giving extra time for learners who work at a slower pace because of poor motor control. Other learners require extra time because they are cognitively slower at processing and understanding of concepts and questions. These learners should be given a reduced volume of work to do, for instance giving 5 sums rather than 10 during assessment. In a similar vein, Kruger and Groenewald (2004) advocate allowing additional time and reducing the volume of work to be assessed. Participants reiterated that they assessed understanding rather than the speed of working. However, participants stressed that the level of complexity be maintained with a balance of simple, moderate and complex questions. It was also suggested that a learner's understanding should be assessed step by step. One participant indicated that she assessed one entire step before assessing the second step. If she assessed everything at once, the special needs learner became overwhelmed and overloaded, leading to learning breakdown. She emphasised that all learning, including assessment must be divided into small steps to ensure success. Likewise, Dednam (2005) suggests dividing the assessment tasks into small steps that the learners understand and are able to accommodate.

All the participants emphasised that the learners in the class have to be patient during assessment to listen to a learner who presents with slurred, unintelligible speech and to be patient while the educator repeats the response. The participant with a hearing impairment suggested using drama and plays for assessing learners with hearing impairments in order for them to demonstrate their understanding and abilities. The participant who was blind stated that she had to be constantly aware, as partially sighted learners tried to cheat during assessment by bending down to peep rather than to feel the Braille words as they read. It is significant to note that the participants' forms of assessment are in line with the influential assessment guideline document published by the Department of Education (2002a).

4.1.7.1 Assessment challenges

First, participants indicated that a language barrier was evident with learners whose first language was not English. To compensate, two of the participants stated that they used code switching in the class by asking questions in the child's first language, for example Zulu, while the other participants stated that they allowed other learners to translate the question after ensuring accurate understanding of the question. In

addition, participants emphasised being sensitive to cultural responses by accommodating culturally relevant yet different responses from learners. The latter statement is supported by Nel (2005), who writes that the educator should not have differentiated stereotypical expectations based on ethnicity, but rather be sensitive to the individual differences that are associated with linguistic and cultural diversity. Second, participants stated that it was a challenge assessing learners who had not received a sufficient number of years of schooling. Third, it was a challenge assessing learners who severely lacked adequate early infant environmental stimulation and exposure. It was stressed that such learners presented with enormous learning gaps that had to be continually accommodated for in all learning, teaching and assessment activities. In support of the latter statements, Jooste and Jooste (2005) write that children living in poverty often do not have access to schools. They will then not develop the kind of cognitive skills required in a technologically sophisticated society.

Fourth, it was a challenge accepting that learners with the same disabilities are different from each other and should be assessed and treated as unique persons. The latter statement is supported by Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) who question the myth of homogeneity, that is, that all members of a minority group share the same characteristics. The authors add that diversity within the disabled population encompasses race, gender, language, severity and type of disability, functional limitations and use of assistive devices. Fifth, participants indicated that it was a challenge recognising that some disabilities are hidden while others are obvious, for instance, learning impairment is a hidden disability. Sixth, participants identified that it was challenging to accommodate secondary concerns of learners (besides their primary disability) such as emotional issues that negatively impact on learners' assessment and subsequent academic performance. Similarly, Dednam (2005) states that besides learning difficulties, some learners often experience emotional and social problems that cause disinhibition and problems with interrelationships.

It has been emphasised that one of the key principles of outcomes based education and C2005 is that all learners can learn albeit at a different pace and along different pathways (Spady, 1994). In support of the latter perspective, all the participants suggested many practical ways in which they adapted their assessment activities or

provided alternative forms of assessment. In this way the participants provided multiple assessment opportunities in order to give the learners a chance to improve their work and to achieve optimally.

4.1.8 FEEDBACK

The questions and discussions on feedback concentrated on how special needs educators provide feedback and the importance of feedback to learners. Participants stated that they provided feedback to indicate a job well done, to motivate learners to improve or when they displayed an act of kindness towards others. According to the participants, feedback towards learners was predominantly oral and face to face, for instance, 'I think you can do better', 'fantastic job', 'I'm so proud of you'. Other forms of feedback mentioned to motivate learners included giving stickers, sweets, using a star chart, allowing a longer break, playing with the class pet, appropriate touching and hugging and assisting the child to hold a pencil or suggesting alternatives if the child was struggling. Participants commented that learners received feedback for positive behaviour, good academic work, and caring or helpful social interaction. Participants emphasised strongly the importance of written feedback, such as marking books, tests, worksheets and homework. It was suggested that all work should be reviewed and explained to correct misunderstandings. There was general consensus among the participants that individual feedback with a child regarding his performance was crucial to identify strengths and shortcomings in his work. In this way a child's self-awareness develops which leads to the ability to self-monitor his mistakes and self-correct.

Participants indicated that feedback was important as it developed independence in the learner. Consistent feedback builds a child's confidence that encourages greater independence. Participants emphasised that constant feedback and attention was critical to help the child know right from wrong and to feel secure and to keep motivated in spite of challenges. Every effort needs to be praised to build self-motivation within the learner. Similarly, Dednam (2005) states that the learner should be praised immediately and repeatedly for any success. It was suggested that honest positive and negative feedback were essential. Positive feedback was earned when work was well done, while a child should be chastised when misbehaving. Participants stated that providing honest feedback when a child was doing good work

helps them understand when they are performing well and when they make mistakes. In this way they learn from their mistakes and realise that making mistakes are part and parcel of learning. Uys (2005) emphasises that learners need unambiguous feedback from the educator and the activity and that feedback should be viewed as a learning opportunity.

Participants emphasised strongly that mistakes must be corrected to ensure a solid foundation for learning. They stressed correcting mistakes immediately otherwise it becomes a recurring habit that eventually requires remedial intervention. Hence, it was important to nip a mistake in the beginning to prevent a problem. One participant commented that learning was a continuous process of building solid knowledge and addressing gaps in knowledge. Learning was like climbing a ladder one step at a time and a child must take that step properly, which can be ensured through consistent feedback from educators.

Of significance was the presence of an empathic form of counselling feedback among the special needs educators. The latter perspective refers to special needs educators being deeply sensitive to and compassionately understanding of special learners limitations, while still encouraging learners to focus on their abilities and not to use their disability as an excuse or crutch to be unsuccessful. Likewise, Dednam (2005) writes that concentrating on learners' strengths instead of what they cannot do will increase their chances of success. The feeling of success will enhance their attention span and improve their attitude towards school. Participants emphatically stated that special needs learners could sometimes be very manipulative! Hence, learners are encouraged to work hard and to read daily to progress to the next grade. Participants emphasised that special needs learners are reminded through honest and positive feedback that both the educator and learner are together in the game of learning. It is the development of a caring working relationship between the educator and the child that encourages the child to be receptive to feedback from the educator.

4.1.9 REPORTING

The questions and discussions on reporting concentrated on how academic concerns of learners are reported to caregivers as well as the importance of reporting concerns and maintaining collaborative working relationships with multidisciplinary team

members, volunteers and facilitators. Participants emphasised that their relationship with caregivers was essential to reinforce learning at home. This reporting relationship was based on openness, honesty and transparency. Participants suggested that parents should be encouraged to ask questions, list their concerns from the outset, and suggest areas of extra attention. It was stressed that it was necessary to inform parents early during the first term that a child was struggling and not coping. Participants stated that early identification and reporting of concerns enabled them and the parents to collaborate and work together as a unified team to address concerns. In this way the learner develops an understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour or academic outcomes as it is reinforced in both the school and home environment. In a similar vein, Alant and Harty (2005) state that every effort must be invested to identify children at risk at an earlier stage, to prevent the development of more extensive developmental problems in children and to ensure more long-term success.

Participants stated that a communication book was used to report any concerns, to note any reminders or for positive comments about a learner. For example, ' Please supervise Sam when completing homework as he needs guidance'. Participants also stated that parents are informed about a child's progress through formal school reports and through parent/educator evening meetings. However, if a learner has performed very poorly academically or is very disruptive in class, then a letter is mailed home scheduling an urgent meeting. If possible, the deputy principal, principal or head of department [HOD] should always be involved in meetings with the parents and educator.

In addition, participants mentioned attending weekly foundation phase meetings in their respective schools that serve as a platform for them to share concerns and problem-solve to alleviate concerns. However, participants emphasised that if there was a serious concern about a learner then a multidisciplinary team meeting with written reports from all the members would be arranged which included the educator, HOD, psychologist, nurse, mobility instructor, therapists [occupational, physiotherapist, speech therapist] and deputy principal or principal. Multidisciplinary recommendations are discussed in the meeting and the educator would be the person to implement the recommendation. It was stressed that all written reports about the

learners were treated confidentially and only discussed in meetings. However, on occasion certain medical conditions warranted that learners are instructed not to play roughly with a learner, for instance a learner with haemophilia, where a bruise may result in internal bleeding. Participants indicated that therapists provide 30 minutes individual therapy sessions or 45 minutes group therapy once or twice a week for specific disabilities. They stated that multidisciplinary team members act as a useful resource and are full of ideas and keen to help. Uys (2005) supports the multidisciplinary or trans-disciplinary team approach as it was indicated to be an effective method of managing learners with disabilities and their families. According to this approach all team members will view the learner holistically and regard the family as equal partners in the intervention team. The different professionals are all involved in the assessment of the learner and make recommendations to be implemented in the classroom context (Uys, 2005).

Participants stressed that volunteers and paid facilitators play a vital role in special settings and are valued and deserving of respect. Accordingly, Uys (2005) writes that the use of paraprofessionals is becoming popular in schools. A paraprofessional or facilitator is a person who enjoys working with learners with disabilities and functions as an aide to the educator in the classroom to assist with all the learners. They serve as an extra pair of hands for wheeling learners, providing one-to-one reading or math assistance or helping with visually impaired learners. For instance, when an educator works with one learner, the volunteer or paraprofessional sees to the others, so the educator has undivided attention to assist the learner. All participants indicated that two volunteers for 15 learners would be adequate. Participants emphasised that volunteers need training, clearly outlining their areas of responsibility and specific duties thus maintaining clear professional boundaries. Volunteers need to be trained to be firm yet gentle or are easily manipulated by the apparent 'helplessness' of learners, especially as independence is the major goal of teaching special needs learners and is in keeping with the social rights theme of self-reliance (Fulcher, 1989).

In summary, the success of any teaching practice depends largely on the personality of the educator. Educators may have the most brilliant qualifications and the best teaching aids at their disposal, but in the final analysis it is the personal relationship between learners and educator that counts. What is required is an educator who

grasps the fact that the special needs learner is capable and that through adapting teaching methods, curriculum and assessment to meet the needs of the learner, they can motivate learners to develop to their full potential. The next chapter will present the implications for future practice, recommendations to consider and conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The dominant themes and challenges emerging from the quality in-depth information obtained from special needs educators on their teaching practice have particular implications for the teaching practices of mainstream educators and the shift to inclusive education.

5.1 Holistic theoretical balance

The medical model has historically dominated special needs education, with its associated discourse of impairment and loss, where the goal of education was to alleviate the deficiency from within the child (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). However, the social rights and ecological systems models have been competing for influence in the special education field, in terms of the principle that all children have a right to normal education (Du Toit, 1996) and that all children can learn (Spady, 1994). The ecological systems model explains the multiple influences on a child's life by referring to the many layers of environment or contexts that influence a child's development (Lewis, 1998). On a practical level, this implies that when a learner experiences difficulty, an educator considers the interdependence between all the systems and identifies contributing factors. In other words, a child's difficulties may stem from a combination of medical, social and environmental concerns.

Therefore, in light of the current research results, it is apparent that special needs educators have embraced a holistic and balanced theoretical approach to teaching special needs learners. They have equally embraced the medical model, the social rights and the ecological systems perspectives as guiding theoretical influences in their teaching practice. Special needs educators have emphasised that special learners have both abilities and disabilities or limitations. They have stressed building on a child's abilities, that is, enhancing what a child can do while simultaneously problem-solving or brainstorming ideas on how to accommodate or minimise a child's limitations. For instance, providing extra time on tests for learners who have poor fine motor control or who cognitively process learning content at a slower pace. Thus, special needs educators equally value all three perspectives: medical, social rights and ecosystemic perspectives and try to maintain a holistic balance by

considering contributing factors from all three theoretical perspectives that either improve or hinder a learner's development. Likewise, mainstream educators should also be encouraged to embrace a holistic understanding of special learners through considering medical, social and contextual or environmental concerns when teaching learners who experience barriers to learning.

5.2 Encouraging independence

Special needs educators have vehemently emphasised the importance of encouraging independence in special needs learners. The goal of developing independence in the learners is in keeping with the social right discourse. The themes of the rights discourse are self-reliance, independence and equality of citizenship (Fulcher, 1989). The driving force behind the pursuit of independence for special learners was the special needs educators embracing of the ecosystemic and social rights perspective that emphasises that all persons are contributing members of society (Florian et al., 1998). Special needs learners do not exist in isolation; they are part of a community and eventually have to leave the safety of the school environment to enter the working environment. Therefore, the special needs educators' teaching philosophy, attitude, teaching approach and methods, approach to the curriculum, class organisation, creation of learning materials, assessment methods, forms of feedback and reporting were all adapted to encourage independence in their learners. Similarly, mainstream educators should also be encouraged to develop independence in their learners and to motivate learners to explore their strengths and overcome their limitations so as to function effectively as contributing members of society.

5.3 Adaptation within the context of inclusive education

In an inclusive education system, education structures need to be enabled, the attitudes, teaching and learning methodologies of educators need to be widened and become more flexible, and the curriculum needs to be changed and adapted to reflect inclusive values (Swart and Pettipher, 2005). Inclusive values embrace school reform and educational change. Thus, special needs educators are in keeping with the philosophy of inclusive education as they continually change and adapt their teaching practice to accommodate learners. It is the special needs educator who reorganises herself to take into account the characteristics and needs of learners with disabilities (Tomlinson, 1995). In mainstreaming however, the classroom and the school remain

unchanged and so the setting never has to prove its readiness to accommodate a child (Dyson and Forlin, 1999). Hence, the research results indicate that in specialised settings, the classroom organisation and the educators teaching practice changes and in this way the setting and the educator prove their readiness to accommodate the child. Similarly, mainstream educators can also make a difference when they adapt their methods of teaching and learning in order to provide a responsive and sensitive educational experience for learners with disabilities.

5.4 Challenges experienced by special needs educators

Although special needs educators adapted their teaching practice to accommodate their learners' limitations, they all emphasised the challenges and hard work involved. The research results indicate that special needs educators were unable to complete the curriculum as the learners took time in understanding concepts or worked too slowly. However, if specific training is provided for all educators on how to adapt the curriculum and learning outcomes are set according to the learner's level of development then the curriculum may be completed. Another challenge noted by the participants was the frustration involved in trying to find different ways of explaining a concept so that it is understood. According to Uys (2005) however, learners with disabilities do have the potential to learn, but this may not follow the same time span as typically developing learners, and these learners may never reach the same level as their peers. However, through adapting teaching strategies they can be encouraged to reach their optimal potential.

Learning Sign Language to accommodate learners with a hearing impairment as well as learning Braille to accommodate learners with visual impairments was an obvious challenge. Special needs educators indicated that they lacked training and knowledge and this would be an area of great concern, as they felt inexperienced to teach learners who were blind or deaf. The latter concern is supported by Landsberg (2005:344) who states that, "Braille must be taught by a trained person". With regard to educating learners who are deaf, Storbeck (2005) writes that Sign Language should be taught as a first language and that deaf culture should be an additional part of the curriculum. Furthermore, teaching strategies and visual pedagogy that ensure effective and successful education experiences for deaf and hard of hearing learners are part of the training of the qualified educator of the deaf. Implicit in the latter point

is the need for both special and mainstream educators to be adequately trained to teach learners with visual and hearing impairments. The greater the severity and nature of disability then the greater the need for more training.

A major concern stressed by all the participants was the use of English as a second language for most learners and thus presented as a great challenge in transferring understanding and knowledge. The latter concern was emphasised as the language of learning and teaching in these special schools was English, which greatly disadvantaged learners whose first language was not English. According to Prinsloo (2005), it is unavoidable that there will be certain learners who will not receive mother-tongue instruction throughout their school careers. However, educators should be aware of this and compensate by using code switching or interpreters, if necessary. Other challenges indicated by the participants involved making durable learning aids and materials that was time-consuming and also obtaining expensive specialised equipment and assistive devices such as Braille machines, computers, typewriters, soft ware packages, FM systems and other assistive devices.

The above-mentioned challenges indicates a pressing need for support and collaboration, adopting a flexible attitude, accessing resources and the need for personal and professional development of educators in all schools to set the wheels rolling for a shift to inclusive education and inclusive teaching practices.

5.5 Recommendations

Inclusive teaching practices can only gain ground if schools and educators within schools welcomes and celebrates diversity and recognises individual needs. Inclusion requires changing the culture and organisation of a school so as to create sustainable systems that develop and support flexible and adaptable approaches to learning. One of the key levers to promote change lies with the educator in the classroom.

According to the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), classroom educators are the primary resource for establishing inclusive teaching practices. However, in order to provide a meaningful and relevant learning experience for both able-bodied and disabled learners, educators need support and collaboration, a flexible attitude, access to resources and personal and professional training and development.

Support is the cornerstone of successful inclusive education. Supportive and caring communities foster a sense that everyone belongs, is accepted, supports and is supported by others. This implies that no educator, learner, parent, support professional or volunteer should have to handle significant challenges alone. Collaboration is an important strategy of support for inclusive teaching practices. According to Swart and Pettipher (2005), collaboration involves interaction between parties to share decisions and ideas, while working towards a common goal such as encouraging independence in a learner. Collaboration is difficult but rewarding. Thus, the present study arose as a result of the lack of collaboration between special settings and mainstream settings. The present study therefore serves as a communication link between these two settings, through sharing and disseminating information about the teaching practices of special needs educators.

The inclusion of all learners becomes an issue related to people's beliefs and attitudes about diversity, collaboration and change. Attitudes are directly translated into actions and teaching practices, that informs decision-making. Attitudes about diversity and change can be both a barrier to as well as a positive force in implementing inclusive teaching practices. The attitudes of everybody need to be explored, shared, challenged and rethought when working in inclusive settings. Research has shown that educators attitude change towards disability when they begin working with disabilities on a daily basis (Guskey in Shaffner and Buswell, 1996). Educators may gain a better understanding of learners' abilities rather than their limitations through exposure and experience in the classroom environment. Similarly, the results indicate that special educators have adopted a warm loving and empathic attitude towards learners who experience barriers to learning, which was acquired only through direct exposure and experience when working with learners. Likewise, mainstream educators attitude towards disability will only be revealed through direct exposure when working with special needs learners in the classroom.

The results indicate that learning materials, equipment and resources serve as an essential component of inclusive teaching practices and that every effort should be made to secure resources for effective learning and teaching in the classroom. Hence, accessing resources should be an essential activity of mainstream schools. Schools need to identify how existing resources will be best utilised and how additional

resources may be increased to accommodate the needs of learners with disabilities. However, resources do not only exist within schools, and thus schools should take the initiative in developing relationships between the school and the wider business community and universities to access resources.

For educators to learn inclusive teaching practices, they need to acquire through pre-service and in-service workshops, instructional and technical skills to work with the needs of diverse learners. Professional development must prepare educators for collaboration and support and assist them in understanding their roles and responsibilities in embracing change through adapting teaching practices and adopting flexible attitudes. Ainscow (1999), states that staff development is more powerful in encouraging improved teaching practices when it is set within the school context and addresses daily concerns of educators. The ability to transfer knowledge into everyday classroom practice requires planned application and on the job support. This necessitates that time be set-aside for educators to work in teams and support one another.

Those working in schools are there because they believe in encouraging and developing the potential in everyone they meet. This includes ensuring that difficulties are recognised early so that remedial measures can be taken (Phipson, 1982). What is achieved in the classroom is fundamentally dependent on the nature of the educators' relationship with the class (Dunbar, 1982). The total responsibility for the management of the class and of its learning is solely the educator's. The educator is seen as the primary resource or engine that keeps the classroom running. Thus, we are reminded that nobody can easily control from outside what lies at the school's centre (heart). Therefore, we should approach the change to inclusive education sensitively and patiently empower educators to adapt their teaching practice in order to meet the challenges of our diverse learner population.

5.6 Conclusion

The present study arose as a response to policies affecting education, namely Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). Educators have tended to focus on barriers to learning at the level of the learner, while ignoring systemic barriers, for example, barriers within the curriculum and barriers at the level of the educator. White Paper 6

(DoE, 2001) has redirected our attention towards identifying systemic barriers. It was established that the educator's inappropriate teaching practice could create a barrier to learning (DoE, 2001). In this democratic era where diversity is celebrated and inclusivity is valued, educators need to create teaching practices that would ensure the full participation of every learner. A change in focus is required within education practice if educators are to strive towards the motto of 'Unity in Diversity'. Thus, educators need to make adaptations and adjustments in their teaching practices in order to ensure the full participation of all learners.

From this study one may draw the following conclusions. Special needs educators are embracing the principles of inclusive education. They are adapting their teaching practices and providing alternatives to meet the needs of their learners, while acknowledging the numerous challenges. Special needs educators and their teaching practices represent a microcosm of what an inclusive school should look like. However, the teaching practices of special needs educators as discussed in the present study are only a starting point for providing guidelines to mainstream schools on how to begin to address meeting the needs of learners. I wish to conclude by stating that:

Every educator has to begin the essential process of change if we wish to be the kind of educator envisaged within C2005, namely lifelong learners, researchers, mediators of learning and "key contributors to the transformation of education in South Africa" (DoE, 2002b: 9). Only then can we aspire to the motto of 'Unity in Diversity'.

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APPENDIX A

The Principal
Dear Sir / Madam

RE: Consent to conduct research at the following schools:

Title of Research Dissertation: An exploration of teaching practices of special needs educators in the context of building an inclusive education system

Dear Madam or Sir

I am studying for a Master's in Education (M Ed.) and have chosen to research how teaching practices can provide a quality and relevant learning experience for learners who experience barriers to learning. I have chosen teaching practices as an area of study, as it is the area that continually undergoes change. For example, the Department of Education (DoE) has transformed the education system from traditional to Curriculum 2005 incorporating Outcomes Based Education. Implicit in this transformation, is the simultaneous changes in teaching practice that have also taken place. Thus, this study aims to explore teaching practices and how these practices could provide support and guidelines to mainstream educators, as suggested by the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001).

The research will involve biographical questionnaires, interviewing educators, literature reviews and photographs. During the research, I plan to have report-back sessions to inform interested participants of progress and preliminary findings. The educators' participation is voluntary and they will be assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

I am doing this research in my capacity as a higher degree student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, as well as an educator in the employ of the DoE, and as a lifelong learner; and I would gratefully appreciate your consent to conduct research at _____ School, _____ School, _____ School and _____ School in Durban. I am sure that the knowledge and understanding gained during the research will be of use to many stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Primmithi Naidoo(Educator)

Dr Martin Combrinck(Supervisor)

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

1. What is your philosophy of teaching?
2. What is your philosophy of teaching special needs learners?
3. How does your philosophy of teaching influence your thinking about teaching special needs learners?
4. How does your philosophy (own beliefs and ideas) of teaching and learning influence your decision-making when preparing for and teaching special needs learners?
5. The ability to reflect is inherent in the ability to teach. How does reflection on teaching special needs learners add to your understanding of all your teaching actions?

ATTITUDE

1. What are your feelings toward special needs learners?
2. How do you feel about adapting and responding to the unique disabilities of learners' e.g. blind learners, wheelchair-bound learners etc?

TEACHING METHODOLOGY / APPROACH

1. What teaching approach do you prefer when teaching special needs learners?
2. What are the opportunities that teaching special needs learners provide for developing your teaching skills?
3. In what ways can you show flexibility in teaching your special needs class?

CURRICULUM

1. What do you understand by Curriculum 2005 [C2005]?
2. What are some of the challenges you face in teaching C2005 for special needs learners?
3. How do you adapt the curriculum when teaching special needs learners?
4. Do you think C2005 can be implemented in a special needs class?
5. How does goal setting help clarify your thinking about teaching special needs learners?

6. How are special needs learners affected by being taught through the medium of their second language?
7. Do you use code switching in your teaching?
8. Can you complete the learning programme [Curriculum 2005] for Grade 1, 2, or 3 in an academic year?
9. What percentage of the curriculum are you able to complete during an academic year?
10. What percentage of time is needed to ensure understanding of subject content when teaching special needs learners?
11. How would you describe the pace of most of your lessons?

CLASS ORGANISATION

1. What factors do you need to consider in order to create a smooth-functioning learning environment in your classroom?
2. How could special needs children be affected by the physical organization of the setting?

LEARNING MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

1. How do you identify the adaptations you need to make when preparing teaching aids?
2. How do you prepare teaching aids and materials for particular special needs learners, e.g. blind learners, visually impaired, hard of hearing etc?
3. What special equipment could you require when teaching physically challenged learners?

TEACHING METHODS / TECHNIQUES

1. What teaching methods do you use in class?
2. How do you use your theory /thinking of teaching special needs learners to enhance practical teaching methods and actions?
3. What strategies do you adopt to ensure outcomes in a mixed ability class?
4. What requirements must you keep in mind when preparing and organising activities and experiences that challenge special needs children's learning and thinking?

ASSESSMENT

1. What forms of assessment do you use with special needs learners?
2. What adaptations do you make in assessing special needs learners?
3. What are some of the challenges you face in assessing learners with special needs?
4. What significant observations have you made when getting to know special needs learners?
5. How are these observations of special needs learners useful in guiding your teaching practice?

FEEDBACK and REPORTING

1. How do you provide feedback to learners with special needs?
2. How important is feedback to learners with special needs?
3. How do you report academic concerns of learners with special needs to caregivers/significant others?
4. How do you develop and maintain collaborative working relationships with:
 - a) families,
 - b) colleagues,
 - c) other professionals, and
 - d) volunteers associated with special needs learners?
5. How do you ensure that confidentiality about special needs children and their families is maintained?
6. What procedures are used in your school to report academic concerns of learners with special needs to significant others?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.

(Teaching practice: A guide for early childhood students, Perry, 1997)

APPENDIX C

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I, the participant, of my free will, enter into participation in this research study with the understanding of the following:

The Nature of the Research

- The educator, Ms Primmithi Naidoo, from _____ School, Durban is conducting the research.
- The research forms part of the requirement for Ms Naidoo's Master's degree.
- The research centers around the teaching practices of special needs educators; their beliefs, attitudes and experiences of teaching special needs learners.

My Rights as a Participant

- I have not been forced, coerced or deceived into participation in this study in any manner whatsoever.
- I have the right to decline participation in this study.
- I have the right to terminate my participation in this study at any point in the research process.
- I have the right to decline to answer any question(s) I am not comfortable with.
- I will remain anonymous and my name and identity will be kept from public knowledge.
- Any information I reveal during the course of this study shall remain confidential, and shall only be used for the purposes of this research and for publication in Ms Naidoo's dissertation, and relevant or appropriate publications.
- I grant permission for any photographs or information I reveal during the interview process to be used, with the understanding that the data contained therein, will remain in the possession of the interviewer, Ms Naidoo, and will not be released for public consumption.

I, the participant, agree/ decline to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Interviewer

Signature of Supervisor

Primmithi Naidoo

Dr Martin Combrinck

APPENDIX D

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE: CONFIDENTIAL

Instructions:

Please will you fill in the following questionnaire?

Please record your response by placing a tick and response in the appropriate space.

1. Please indicate your **age**:
- | | | |
|--|---------------------|-----|
| | between 23-29 years | [] |
| | 30-39 | [] |
| | 40-49 | [] |
| | 50-59 | [] |
| | over 60 | [] |
2. Please indicate your **gender**:
- | | | |
|--|--------|-----|
| | Female | [] |
| | Male | [] |
3. Please indicate **mother-tongue language**:
- | | | |
|--|--------------------|-----|
| | English | [] |
| | Afrikaans | [] |
| | Zulu | [] |
| | Other (name) _____ | |
4. Teaching **experience** in years:
- | | | Number of years | |
|--|---------|------------------------|-------------------|
| General Education and Training (GET): | | Special | Mainstream |
| Foundation Phase | Grade R | _____ | _____ |
| | Grade 1 | _____ | _____ |
| | Grade 2 | _____ | _____ |
| | Grade 3 | _____ | _____ |
| Intermediate Phase | Grade 4 | _____ | _____ |
| | Grade 5 | _____ | _____ |
| | Grade 6 | _____ | _____ |
| Senior Phase | Grade 7 | _____ | _____ |
| | Grade 8 | _____ | _____ |
| | Grade 9 | _____ | _____ |

Further Education and Training (FET):	Special	Mainstream
Grade 10	_____	_____
Grade 11	_____	_____
Grade 12	_____	_____
Other (name) _____	_____	_____
TOTAL	_____	_____

5. Please list all teaching **qualifications**: For e.g. Bachelor of Education (Honours)

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

6. Please list **current studies**:

a) _____

7. Please list completed **professional development courses**: For e.g. APEK /union courses

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

8. Please add any other information that you perceive as important.

a) _____

b) _____

9. Please indicate if you are a person with a disability and please **name** the disability.

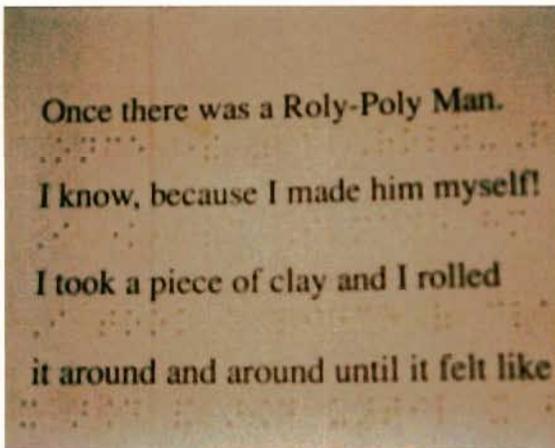
THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION



Braille alphabet



Braille numbers



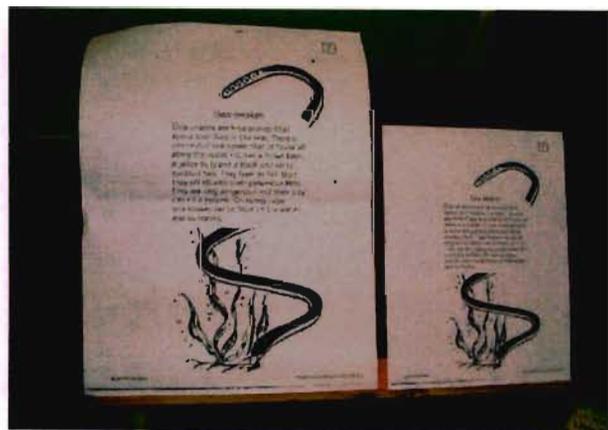
Braille reading book



Work tray



Walking number line



Enlarged worksheet



Tactile writing board



Hand splint



Braille alphabet blocks



Pencil grips



Perkins Braille machine



Posture chair and adjustable desk top

APPENDIX G**SEMI-STRUCTURED GROUP INTERVIEW [MAINSTREAM EDUCATORS]**

1. What is your understanding of inclusive education?
2. What is your understanding of learners with special needs?
3. What is your understanding of special education?
4. What are your feelings toward disability?
5. How do you feel about changing to inclusive education?
6. What should an inclusive classroom look like?
7. What concerns do you have about the social environment of the inclusive classroom?
8. What concerns do you have about the physical organization of the inclusive classroom?
9. What are your concerns about the practical organization of learning materials in an inclusive classroom?
10. What are your concerns regarding implementing Curriculum 2005 or OBE in an inclusive classroom?
11. Do you think Outcomes-Based Education is compatible with inclusive education?
12. What teaching approaches or methodologies would you use in an inclusive classroom?
13. What are your fears regarding teaching numeracy, literacy, or life skills in an inclusive classroom?
14. What are your fears/concerns regarding assessment in an inclusive classroom?
15. What kinds of classroom support would you need in an inclusive classroom?
16. What are some of the positive aspects or strengths of inclusive education?
17. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your fears and concerns about inclusive education?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

(Inclusive education in action in South Africa, Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker, Engelbrecht, 1999)

GROUP INTERVIEW: THREE FEMALE FOUNDATION PHASE MAINSTREAM EDUCATORS

In analysing the data through the approach of meaning categorisation, there were three themes arising from the semi-structured questions presented to the participants, namely, profile of special needs learners, personality of special teachers and support systems and resources to facilitate a move towards inclusive education. It is important to note that most of the information obtained and analysed was based on the mainstream participants limited or non-existent exposure and experience in teaching special needs learners. The information analysed was based on their fears and concerns about the move to inclusive education.

Profile of special needs learners and special needs education

The mainstream participants limited understanding of special needs learners indicated a primary adherence to the medical model perspective of disabled children as having a deficit or having some need, that is, they share a reductionist view of special education that locates disability within individual pathology (Lewis, 1998; Slee, 1998). The participants stated that special needs learners have both a visible disability (defect) or handicap that is restrictive and that they are unable to cope with the level of academic work, that is, they have a low IQ. Thus, the mainstream teachers believe that something is wrong with the child, as they emphasise learners' shortcomings and liabilities and tend to ignore their assets and strengths (Pijl and Van den Bos, 1998).

They also indicated that the special learner needs more special and individual supervision and attention, that they cannot keep up with the pace of the lesson, that they need extra time and care and are very slow at finishing things, for example, only completing 1 or 2 sentences. In addition, the participants stated that special learners need repetition of topics, need double the teaching and learning time, that it is hard for them to understand or grasp academic concepts, that they have a limited frame of reference because of the lack of environmental stimulation, for example a blind child cannot see facial expressions or body language and a deaf child cannot hear an expressive voice-thus it would be a challenge to pass on knowledge or communicate. This implies that 'needs' can be understood simply in terms of the characteristics of individual learners and can be determined on the basis of disability per se (Stangvik,

1998). The participants fail to realise, however, that needs arise within a social context which itself plays an active part in what will be regarded as constituting a 'need' and which needs will be regarded as 'special' (Clark et al., 1998). In this sense, special needs are not so much objectively 'real' as socially produced, with the result that in changed social circumstances (for example different schools or social structures), they might disappear.

The participants stated that a mentally disabled child could have temper outbursts, be erratic, out of control and could harm other learners; thus there is a need to think of the safety of other learners. There is concern that the rights of the mainstream child and the rights of educators have not been so clearly defined and may be ignored (Dyson and Forlin, 1999). There was general consensus among the participants that special learners may become tense and overanxious to meet class standards or may withdraw into their shells and may become introverted and afraid. In this way, social interaction among learners would be difficult. As a result of mainstream teachers adopting a medical perspective to understanding special learners, inadequate social interactions and deficient education systems are easily overlooked because the 'blame' is placed on the individual as victim (Stangvik, 1998).

One participant stated that one special needs learner takes the space of 8 mainstream learners as they have many more needs than a 'normal' child, such as, physical disabilities, mental disabilities, learning disabilities, dyslexia, hyperactivity. This application of medical labels and categorisation has been called the 'clinical perspective' on handicap, which reduces a learner to a particular syndrome (for example Down's Syndrome) and is used to define a person instead of a condition (Stangvik, 1998). Another participant stated that special education is other than what you would call 'normal healthy people', that is, if you are not blind, deaf or dumb. The participants' responses emphasise the persuasive influence of the medical perspective, which locates disability in the pathological impairments or deficiencies of individuals (Slee, 1998). Proponents of the medical perspective are responding to practical problems presented by the individual differences of children. This perspective aims to minimise difference within the framework of normalisation (Nirje, 1970).

Words used to indicate difference:

- 'to be with children like **that**'
- 'if **they** are not able to cope'
- 'it would be harder for **them** to understand'
- 'how to cope with children **like this**'
- 'normal class'
- 'we've never taught **them**'
- 'I don't want **them** to feel it's their fault'
- 'normal children in our class or **those** that don't have a disability'
- 'have a different set of assessment standards for **those** children'
- 'we would all love to incorporate **those** children'

However, although there was a primary adherence to the medical deficit model, on occasion there was support of the social rights model. For instance, one participant said, "they are still part of an entire community," another stated, "it depends on what they're able to do as well," and the other "we've all got disabilities; some of us came from a one-parent family, while some disabilities are not just visible". The participants understanding that disability, single parent homes, race or gender are all part of understanding 'difference,' indicates empathy with the minority rights perspective (Starkey, 1991).

Personality of special needs educators

There was general consensus among the participants that there existed a specific kind or particular type of person that had the correct special needs 'make-up' or 'genetic predisposition', to teach special learners. The latter perception emphasises a strong adherence to the medical model of special educators having a specific type of personality. For instance, one participant stated, "There are definitely people who can work with disabled children and those who can't," and another stated, " They are specially inclined in that way". Participants suggested that there were particular personality attributes of special needs educators which include being: sensitive to peoples needs, positive, motivational, bubbly, strong, encouraging, persevering, hopeful, patient and committed. Other attributes include keeping your temper and not hitting a child or seeing them as different or being overly sensitive with tearful eyes and feeling sad and sorry for learners with disability.

In addition, participants indicated an aura of ‘awe’ surrounding special educators. For instance, they heard incredible ‘wow’ stories from special educators that paled in comparison to their puny little stories, where mainstream educators alluded to feeling inadequate, somewhat lacking and intimidated by the knowledge of special needs professionals. The latter viewpoint relates to the myth, professionalisation and consequent mystification of special education for mainstream educators, where they are led to believe that it is beyond their level of expertise to teach learners who are classed as disabled (Naicker, 1999a). This theme of professionalising disability pervades the medical discourse and its politics that ‘doctor knows best’ or in this case, the special needs educator knows best (Fulcher, 1989).

Support systems, resources and training to facilitate a move towards inclusive education.

Mainstream participants identified two areas of support: physical resource support and professional development support.

Physical resource support

All the participants recognised the need for supplementing available school resources and special facilities to run smoothly. For example providing ramps and railings for the physically disabled, wheelchair-friendly toilets, broad and adjustable desks for wheelchairs, adequate space for wheelchair learners to manoeuvre in the classroom, thus necessitating a smaller number of learners per class. Few obstructions, tactile teaching aids, cassettes, earphones, tape recorders and railings need to be provided for blind learners; while, sound systems or hearing mechanisms need to be provided for learners with a hearing impairment.

Professional development support

Participants indicated a strong need to be educated, trained or even retrained as special needs ‘specialists’ in this ‘almost new subject’. They need training to learn Sign Language and Braille. There was also a need for training and education to learn how to balance teaching both disabled and able-bodied learners, not to the detriment or cost of the gifted learner. One participant stated, “It’s really hard. It’s so difficult

to cater for each individual without neglecting the others". The latter response emphasises that although within inclusion, the rights of all learners for quality educational provision should be considered (Swart and Pettipher, 2005), the rights of the mainstream child and the rights of educators, however, have not been so clearly defined (Dyson and Forlin, 1999). Furthermore, participants indicated a need to be trained on how to modify their teaching methodology and teaching methods, how to adapt the curriculum, how to assess, how to think outside of the box, how to be innovative and take the personal initiative to problem-solve.

One participant also referred to the need for desensitisation training or counselling to learn how to be strong and not to feel sorry when teaching special learners. Other forms of support alluded to include professional intervention support through psychology, medical practitioners, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech therapy, motivational support from parents, families, and the community (ecosystemic approach) to encourage independence in their disabled child and to teach acceptance of disability to able-bodied children. In addition, mainstream able-bodied learners need to learn how to interact with special learners, how to be sensitive and taught not to laugh or mock when they struggle academically. This reflects a change in values to accommodate and respect 'difference'. Participants reiterated their support for the ecological systems perspective that not only educators but also parents, communities and society need to teach children to care for others. Accessing resources and support from communities is an essential activity of inclusive schools (Muthukrishna, 2001).

In summary, the overwhelming response of the mainstream participants to inclusive education was negative. Although the participants supported the special needs learner's right to education on the basis of equal opportunity and the development to their fullest potential, they were uncertain if this development had to take place in a mainstream setting, especially considering the lack of resources, support, experience and training. According to Dyson and Forlin (1999), it is not clear whether a move towards inclusion will improve equal access to education for all learners. For instance, many of the reforms in the 1980's from international education systems, regarding the placement of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms have led to a reported decline in the morale of teachers, together with a reduced willingness and capacity to cope with the associated additional demands (Leadbetter and Leadbetter,

1993). It appears that the rights of the regular class child and the rights of educators have not been so clearly defined. Educators have raised many concerns regarding such a significant change in education pedagogy (Forlin, 1998). The role of inclusion to support a child's educational right may be affected by the inequitable implementation of policy, the changing role of educators, and the educators concerns and beliefs about the underlying philosophy of such a paradigm shift.