

Teachers' experiences of teaching learners with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the mainstream classroom

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to learners with Autism

DECLARATION

I declare that this research is my own work and that all sources I have used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Date

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ABSTRACT

In 2001, South African education policy adopted the approach of inclusive education. Inclusive education as defined by the White Paper 6 is a system that acknowledges that all children can learn and that support and enabling education structures are needed in order to meet the needs of all learners (Department of Education, 2001). According to the White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), barriers to learning are inclusive of both learning difficulties and contextual difficulties that arise out of the historical constraints on education in South Africa. The research is interested in how an inclusive education system currently provides for learners with barriers to learning, in the context of South Africa. Specifically, this study will look at the accommodation of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the mainstream classrooms of independent schools in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

The research made use of the ecosystemic perspective to provide a framework in which to answer the following research question, “What are the experiences of teachers who are accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom of independent schools?”. The study uses a qualitative research design as it aims to obtain an individual, in-depth, thick description of the experiences and attitudes of the participants. It focuses on five participants from various independent mainstream schools in the greater eThekweni area, whose perceptions and experiences are explored through individual interviews, classroom observations and field notes. Through thematic analysis the researcher was able to explore the experiences of the participants of this study. The findings of this study are then discussed and presented in light of recent literature on the topic of inclusive education and the accommodation of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom. The findings of this study show that despite their exclusion from inclusive education policy in South Africa Independent schools had aligned themselves with the policy and were creating supportive environments for learning for learners with ASD. The findings highlight the importance placed on the role of the facilitator in the accommodation of learners with ASD, showing that the facilitator played an essential role, providing assistance with individual teaching methods and providing the necessary structure and guidance to the learner with ASD. Furthermore the findings reveal the challenges faced, including challenging behaviours, feelings of despair and poor academic performance.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

In 2001, South African education policy adopted the approach of inclusive education, as depicted in the White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training system (Department of Education, 2001). Inclusive education as defined by the White Paper 6 is a system that acknowledges that all children can learn and that support and enabling education structures are needed in order to meet the needs of all learners (Department of Education, 2001). This system attempts to place children in the least restrictive setting as possible. This study focussed on how an inclusive education system currently provides for learners with barriers to learning, in the context of South Africa.

According to the White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), barriers to learning are inclusive of both learning difficulties and contextual difficulties that arise out of the historical constraints on education in South Africa. This study looked specifically at the accommodation of learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the mainstream classrooms of independent schools in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It focused on five participants from various independent mainstream schools in the greater eThekweni area, whose perceptions and experiences were explored through individual interviews, classroom observations and field notes.

1.1. Rationale

The White Paper 6 promotes an inclusive education system and criticises specialised education for creating a sense of isolation and separation from others. The policy therefore aims to create an inclusive education system which requires responsiveness to varying intelligences and differences in learners, and the adaptation of the curriculum to meet learners of all needs (Naicker, 2002). Twelve years after the implementation of inclusive education policy in this country it is pertinent that we gain insight into how this policy is being actualised especially as it pertains to the

learner with ASD in the mainstream setting. According to the Salamanca document (UNESCO, 1994) research in inclusive education practices is an essential component in the implementation of inclusive education in developing countries and can provide valuable insight.

This study limited itself to an understanding of the inclusion of learners with ASD in the independent school sector in the context of South Africa post-1994. According to the South African constitution, independent schools have the right to exist in South Africa provided they do not discriminate on the basis of race, are registered with the state and maintain standards that are not inferior to the comparable public educational institutions (Republic of South Africa, 1996, section 29 (3)). Therefore, we know that independent schools in South Africa have a right to exist, but how do they fit into the policy of inclusion compared to government schools? According to the Salamanca document (UNESCO, 1994, p.13): “Educational planning by governments should concentrate on education for all persons, in all regions of a country and in all economic conditions, through both public and private schools”. Therefore, according to the Salamanca document, private schools cannot be ignored, where they form a significant part of the education system in South Africa. Rather, both private and public schools need to be addressed in terms of inclusive education development.

Despite this, the White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) makes no reference to the role of independent schools in South Africa nor does it address inclusion in independent schools. This raises significant questions with reference to inclusive education in South Africa: 1) Are independent schools in line with national education practices of inclusion; 2) To what extent are independent schools accommodating learners with barriers to learning; and 3) What are the experiences of teachers in independent schools in South Africa in the accommodation of learners with barriers to learning? Recent research has attempted to provide some insight into the extent to which independent schools are accommodating learners with barriers to learning, as well as the role of education managers in the implantation of inclusive education in independent schools (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller, 2009). However, a gap in the research remains where an understanding specific to the accommodation of ASD learners in independent schools and the experiences of teaching staff in the development of inclusive practices in the mainstream classroom have not yet been

addressed.

The research therefore has relevance, where the success of an inclusive education system in South Africa is questioned, alongside an increase in the prevalence of cases of children diagnosed with ASD. As a teacher of learners with ASD, based in what would have previously been termed a ‘special needs school’ but is now termed as ‘full-service school’, I have a personal interest in this study. The Autistic unit in which I am employed forms part of a larger school that accommodates children with diverse special educational needs and require a high level of support. As a full-service school we should be admitting those learners with ASD who require a high level of support and those who do not should, according to the White Paper 6, be accommodated in the mainstream classroom. However, the reality is that the majority of learners with ASD is not being accommodated in mainstream schools and is therefore being accommodated in full-services schools such as ours. This suggests that in many cases the mainstream teacher, or the school as a whole, does not feel equipped to accommodate learners with ASD and that the goals of the White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) are not yet being realized. Furthermore, in my own experience, it seems that independent schools are attempting to bridge the gap between special needs education and public mainstream education by accommodating learners with ASD, offering the support and services not available to them in the public mainstream school, albeit at a cost.

1.2. Focus and Purpose

The purpose of the research was to understand how teachers accommodate learners with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms, with particular focus on the accommodation of learners with ASD. The research aimed to uncover the possible challenges faced, as well as identify the support systems available to such teachers.

1.3. Research Questions

The research attempts to answer the following questions.

Primary research question:

- What are the experiences of teachers who are accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classrooms of independent schools?

Secondary questions:

- How do mainstream teachers accommodate learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom?
- What challenges do teachers face accommodating a learner with ASD in the mainstream classroom?
- What support services are available to these mainstream teachers in teaching learners with special educational needs?

1.4. Significance of the study

The research is relevant to the transformation of the education system in South Africa and can be used to facilitate the development of support services in mainstream schools, to better accommodate learners with ASD. Furthermore, this study will provide valuable insight into how successfully learners with ASD have been included into the independent mainstream classroom and can therefore provide a framework for parents and teachers who are facing the issue of school placement for the learner with ASD.

1.5. Project overview

The research made use of the ecosystemic perspective to provide a framework in which to answer the following research questions:

Primary research question:

- What are the experiences of teachers who are accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom of independent schools?

Secondary questions:

- How do mainstream teachers accommodate learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom?
- What challenges do teachers face accommodating a learner with ASD in the mainstream classroom?

- What support services are available to these mainstream teachers in teaching learners with special educational needs?

Chapter three discusses the theoretical framework of the study. The research situates itself within an ecosystemic perspective. In understanding how teachers are accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom it was necessary to look at it from a framework that recognised that the accommodation of a learner with ASD is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The ecosystemic perspective provides a way of understanding the levels of systems related to the education process, and to recognise the systemic factors that influence children's access to education.

In chapter four the methodological approach of the study is discussed. As the research aimed to achieve an in depth understanding of the subjective world of its participants it situated itself within the interpretive research paradigm. The research therefore used a qualitative research design, allowing the researcher to remain close to the data and interpret the data in a way that is true to the participant's experiences. The research used the purposive selection of participants. The participants for this study consisted of five teachers in independent schools in the greater Durban area currently accommodating learners with ASD in their mainstream classrooms. For data collection the study made use of a semi-structured interview guide, classroom observations and field notes, allowing for triangulation.

Chapter five is a presentation and analysis of the research data. The research used interpretive analysis to explore the experiences of teachers of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom in a private school. A number of themes and codes emerged and were developed. The themes that emerged were related to the type of school accommodating such learners, support systems available, teaching strategies and challenges faced by teachers. In addition teachers also spoke about general perceptions regarding Inclusive Education and the learner with ASD.

A conclusion is presented in Chapter six which provides a summary of the research findings, limitations of the study as well as recommendations.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to the research. The rationale behind the study was discussed in detail and the focus and purpose of the study were presented. The research questions were clearly outlined and the significance of the study was discussed. Finally, this chapter provided an overview of the research project. In the next chapter I will explore the literature around inclusive education both globally and nationally and later narrow its focus to the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the accommodation of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND BARRIERS TO LEARNING WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO LEARNERS WITH AUTISM

Introduction

Alongside an increase in the prevalence of children diagnosed with Autism worldwide, comes an increased concern on how best to provide such children with appropriate educational support. As we have moved away from the discrimination and segregation that defined South Africa prior to 1994, we have seen a shift towards an inclusive education system that aims to provide for children with various barriers to learning. Such a system aims to include rather than segregate all learners in a unified education system.

In this chapter the literature will explore the definition of inclusive education in the context of South Africa and the concept of ‘barriers to learning’, as defined by the Education White Paper 6. It is against this backdrop that the chapter will narrow its focus to learners with Autism, providing an understanding of the nature of the disorder and exploring relevant research around the education of such learners. The chapter will then highlight some of the conflicting opinions in the debate around mainstream versus special school placement for learners with special educational needs.

2.1 Education and the policy of inclusion

2.1.1 Inclusive Education: A global perspective

Inclusive education comes out of a broader call for the recognition of human rights and social justice worldwide. In 1994 the Salamanca document was put forward. The Salamanca document argued for the inclusion of all learners in one, unified education system and called on all governments to commit to the improvement of their education systems to make this possible (UNESCO, 1994).

The founding principles of this document were as follows. Firstly, it was a call to all governments to improve their education systems so as to accommodate children of varying abilities; secondly, to adopt the policy of inclusive education, and thirdly, to liaise with countries who have experience in inclusive education systems. The fourth principle put forward in the Salamanca statement was to develop “decentralised” and “participatory mechanisms” for planning, monitoring and evaluating the educational provision available in one’s country. The fifth principal was to involve the families and communities of children with varying disabilities in planning for an education system that can accommodate all. Finally, emphasis was given to the importance of early identification and intervention and finally the recognition of the need for systemic change (UNESCO, 1994).

According to the Inclusion International (2009) there was little progress or commitment made to the global call for inclusive education. In 2000, the Dakar Framework for Action For Education For All was adopted and committed governments to achieving quality education for all. However, the focus of education for those with disability that was the focus of the Salamanca Statement in 1994 was ignored. Therefore, UNESCO established the EFA Flagship: “The Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities: Towards Inclusion”, as an instrument for achieving education for all. More recently in 2006, the right to inclusive education became international law, this was stated by the United Nations General Assembly in the CRPD, and a framework for achieving an inclusive education system was provided (Inclusion International, 2009).

2.1.2 Inclusive education in South Africa

To understand the education system of a particular time, one needs to consider it within the social, historical and political context in which it occurs (Engelbrecht, 2006). To a large extent it is these values and beliefs, which underlie the context of a particular time, that influence the way in which the education system is structured. This will be illustrated as we discuss, firstly, the education system pre-1994, and then look more closely at the ideological and policy pressures exerted within the project of educating for social justice and inclusion.

Pre-1994 the education system in place was defined by the ideological dispensation of the time, resulting in a system that was based on ideas of segregation according to both race and disability. Policies and legislation under the apartheid government were based on the ideology of racial superiority. The apartheid system impacted on the education system and characterised and classified education along racial lines, producing inequality between the education of blacks and whites. From the 1970's schools became resourced according to the race group they educated. Therefore, white schools were well resourced with buildings, facilities and teachers, leaving black schools poorly resourced (Akhurst, 1999). Specialised, expensive and limited resources available for special education were limited to white learners. The concept of differing education for blacks and whites was introduced as early as 1948 and remained until 1994. This education system was highly controlled and aimed to prepare black students for subordinate positions in the workplace, providing them with a minimal education and few skills (Akhurst, 1999).

Provision for children with special needs was also determined by race, with better provision for children with special learning needs in white sectors of the population. Black children with severe disabilities were either educated in large severely under resourced special schools, a mainstream school with almost no assistance or alternatively dropped out of school (Gwalla-Ogisi, Nkabinde & Rodriguez, 1998). Therefore, special education under the apartheid system is criticised for the labelling of learners, and the placement of children to special schools as influenced by issues of race, class, gender and socio-economic status (Ntshangase, n.d). As Porteus (2003) summarises, historically the economic and political goals of education served the interest of capitalism and apartheid.

A call for educating for social justice and inclusion emerged in the move from apartheid into a democratic society based on human dignity, freedom and equality. It is the wider notion of inclusion in society as a whole that has shaped the movement towards inclusive education in South Africa (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker & Engelbrecht, 1998). Therefore, there were three important shifts away from the deficit model of education that existed under the Apartheid System. The ideologies on which such perspectives were based gave rise to the concept of normalisation and integration, the integration of children with varying abilities, race and socio-economic

statuses into the mainstream classroom. The first was a shift in the policy to embrace notions of diversity as opposed to that of disability. The second was the shift to an understanding that diversity encompasses barriers to learning that include social, economic and language barriers. The third important shift recognised by Porteus (2003) was that barriers to learning could no longer only be attributed to those of individual deficits but should include failures of the system and the society in which learning takes place. Through this comes the recognition that children with 'barriers to learning' should be given the opportunity to live within a normal social context and that teaching children with learning difficulties is based on good teaching strategies.

2.1.3 The White Paper 6

In South Africa the policy paper that has been put forward to lead the way in Inclusive Education, is the Education White Paper 6. In the context of South Africa, the Education White Paper 6 provides a framework for the establishment of an inclusive education and training system (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2005).

The White Paper 6 attempts to remove the discriminatory elements from the education system, and provide for an educational system that allows for the education of all children, regardless of disabilities (Department of Education, 2001). In addressing the aims and implementation of the White Paper 6 one needs to understand the principles which underpin such legislation and policies. The first principle is related to human rights and social adequacy for all learners, all learners have the right to quality education, equal opportunities and human dignity. The second principle is participation and social integration, all learners should be allowed to participate and be integrated into all social and educational opportunities. The third principle is equal access to a single inclusive system, and access to the curriculum. The fourth principle is the redressing of past imbalances and inequalities of the past in terms of educational opportunities and access. Fifth, inclusive education is based on community responsiveness. The final principle which underpins inclusive education is an implementable, sustainable and affordable system (Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2000).

The Education White Paper 6 clearly locates the problem as systemic and acknowledges a diversity of learning needs that arise from both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. It suggests a model that acknowledges that all youth can learn and need the necessary support to do so, an education system which respects differences in learners' age, class, language, disability and disease and shapes education structures, systems, methods, environment, curricula and attitudes to meet the needs of all learners. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002), in order to understand learning and development in children, and the barriers to learning they might have, it is necessary to have an understanding of the dynamic interaction between these contextual factors. Therefore, in attempting to improve the quality of education for all, it is necessary to understand that a range of needs exist among learners and that these must be addressed in order to provide effective learning for all.

2.1.4 Barriers to learning and special needs education

According to the report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services (Department of Education, 1997), 'special needs' in education refers to the needs of individuals or systems that need to be met in order to facilitate effective learning. These needs arise as a result of barriers within the curriculum, systems of education and in the broader context of society. In the context of South Africa, those needs which have historically been labelled as special educational needs have now become recognised as 'barriers to learning' (Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2000). The South African context is complicated in that many of the barriers to learning that are faced by children today are a result of systemic difficulties, such as, poor schooling, their particular socio-economic context and poor educational opportunities (Department of Education, 1997).

The first of barriers to learning as defined by the Education White Paper 6 is the socio-economic barrier to learning, where it is recognised that learning is essentially influenced by the availability of educational resources to meet the needs of any society. Concerns central to this barrier to learning include a lack of access to basic services, poverty and underdevelopment and other factors which place learners at risk. A second barrier to be addressed is that of attitudes, which recognises the influence of

discriminatory attitudes which result in the prejudice against people of different class, race, religion, gender, culture, ability and disability. Furthermore, other barriers to learning include inflexible curricula, barriers of language and communication, inaccessible and unsafe physical learning environment, a lack of enabling and protective legislation and policy, a lack of parental recognition and involvement, and finally, the barrier of disability. Disability as a barrier to learning is the main focus of the literature review, and it is important to recognise it as a barrier, where learners with disabilities face exclusion and where the learning needs of children with disabilities cannot be met due to barriers in their learning environment and broader society, that prevent effective learning (Department of Education, 1997). Children with Autism fall in this category of learners with barriers to learning.

Therefore, barriers to learning are inclusive of both learning difficulties and contextual difficulties which arise out of the historical constraints on education in South Africa. Barriers to learning need to be addressed in terms of the wider context in which they exist, and cannot be addressed by looking only on the individual level, they need to be addressed with the recognition that there is a dynamic relationship between the learner, the centre of learning, the broader educational system and the social, political and economic context that embody them (Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2000).

2.1.5 The structure of the inclusive education system in South Africa

Inclusive education is based on the notion that a mainstream classroom is the most appropriate environment to provide support to children with 'barriers to learning' (Schwartz, 2007). Instead of specialised schools, or classes the Education White Paper 6 suggests district based support teams, support services which provide the necessary expertise of more specialised education to local communities, the conversion of special schools into resource centres, and finally a move away from the processes of identifying, assessing and enrolling learners in specialised schools and separate classes (Department of Education, 2001). Full-services schools will be those that provide only for learners considered to have severe barriers to learning and therefore require special educational support which cannot be accessed in the mainstream classroom even with the support of the resource centres. An inclusive

education system will involve changes in mainstream education so as to identify and accommodate those children with barriers to learning, and will invoke those learners with mild to moderate barriers to learning to be included into mainstream schools (Department of Education, 2001).

2.1.6 Conflicting views on Inclusive Education in South Africa

Although the idea of quality education for all in South Africa, regardless of race, language, socioeconomic context, ability and special needs, is one that is desirable in the context of South Africa, it is not realistic (Engelbrecht, Kriegler & Booysen, 1996). “South Africa faces formidable barriers as it works to transform the country and reverse a system and culture that has been deeply segregated and oppressive to segments of its population, and which has sacrificed its future, namely its children” (Gwalla-Ogisi, Nkabinde & Rodriguez, 1998, p.77). While the policy changes aim to provide new curricula and strive for the provision of equal opportunities in education, the problems faced in the educational context in contemporary South Africa remain extensive, as a result of the influences of its past (Akhurst, 1999).

The debate of inclusive education in South Africa is on-going with a number of concerns about the readiness of the country, and the education system to provide for children of varying abilities.

This chapter will now take an in-depth look at learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder as a barrier to learning, before looking at teachers’ experiences of accommodating learners with barriers to learning in the mainstream classroom. According to the White Paper 6, Autism Spectrum Disorder would be defined as a barrier of disability. An understanding of this disorder will be provided below.

2.2 Understanding Autism

2.2.1 Defining and understanding Autism

The term "Autism" was coined by Leo Kanner in 1943 (Davidson, Neale & Kring, 2004). Kanner identified a pattern of behaviours in eleven children who appeared

withdrawn from social interaction. However, the diagnostic category of the disorder was only accepted in 1980 (Davidson, Neale & Kring, 2004). Autism is now considered to be a pervasive developmental disorder that affects one's social, communicative and behavioral development. This is often referred to as the Triad of impairment. According to Lord (2011), the distinguishing features of Autism are related to social and communicative difficulties including, eye contact, tone of voice and appropriate facial expressions. Sicile-Kira (2003) lists some of the common characteristics in individuals with Autism as being a lack of spontaneous interaction with others, a detachment from the emotions of others, deficits in speech development, echolalia, loss of speech, obsessive, odd play with objects and repetitive motor movement. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental disorders- IV (DSM-IV-TR) (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000), provides the diagnostic criteria by which we can better understand this disorder.

The DSM-IV-TR is a listing of psychiatric disorders and their corresponding diagnostic codes that provides the criteria by which clinicians define and diagnose various psychiatric and developmental conditions. According to the DSM-IV-TR Autism falls under the umbrella term known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders. This term encompasses the following disorders, Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD). The four disorders classified as PDD in the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000) have distinct diagnostic criteria specific to each disorder. The diagnostic criteria for the disorders relevant to this research will be described below.

According to the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000, p.69), in order for a diagnosis of Autism to be made two items from the section related to impairment in social interaction must be present:

- Impairment in non-verbal communication, for example eye contact, facial expressions and gestures.
- Unable to develop appropriate peer relationships
- Difficulty in shared interest, for example, pointing or showing.
- Inability to cope socially and understand or represent emotions appropriately.

At least one of the following items must be present with regard to impairment in communication for a diagnosis of Autism to be made:

- Speech delay or no speech with no or little attempt to communicate by other non-verbal means.
- Impairment in conversation skills to the point where the individual is unable to start or maintain a conversation.
- Use of language that is stereotyped and repetitive
- Unable or shows difficulty in make-believe or social play, often chooses to play alone.

According to the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000), at least one item must be present with regards to restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests, and activities:

- Abnormal, restrictive patterns of interest
- The presence of non-functional routines and rituals
- Repetitive motor actions such as flapping, spinning, stimming
- Preoccupation with parts of an object as opposed to the object itself

For diagnosis to be made, a significant delay in either social interaction, social communication and symbolic or imaginative play must have been present before 3 years of age. Furthermore, the possibility of a diagnosis of Rett's disorder and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder must first be eliminated before diagnosis of Autism can be made (APA, 2000).

According to the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000) for a diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder to be made the criteria for impairment in language communication, social interaction and the presence of restricted repetitive patterns of behavior are the same as for Autism. However, in the diagnosis of Asperger's there is no significant delay in language in early development or in cognitive functioning, but other important areas of functioning are significantly impaired, such as social interactions.

The DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000) is currently being revised with the anticipated publication of the DSM-V, which has proposed the amalgamation of the various subtypes of PDD into the omnibus diagnostic category of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). DSM-V-TR proposes that these conditions have such similar symptoms that they do not belong in separate categories and instead fall on the same continuum, ranging from mild to severe. Therefore, it is proposed that individuals will no longer be diagnosed with having one of the subtypes, such as Autism or Asperger's but will instead have a diagnosis of ASD (Level 1, 2, 3 depending on the required support). For the purpose of this study, the term ASD is used.

According to Whitaker (2001, p. 12), "Between half and two thirds of all people with ASD have a significant degree of learning difficulty". ASD and learning difficulty is a somewhat complex area to address. The difficulty lies in the question of how one separates the impact of autism on learning and the effect of a specific learning difficulty. According to Peeters (1997) people with ASD process information differently and have different cognitive styles to neuro-typical people. This therefore results in difficulties with interpretation and understanding the meaning of things, a lack of social intuition and ability to move beyond literal meanings. In an educational setting this means that ASD learners require a predictable, well-organised and structured environment in which to learn (Peeter, 1997). Furthermore, the majority of learners with ASD will require educational support in the form of individualized teaching methods, and in many cases occupational therapy, speech therapy and psychological interventions.

Autism is often associated with modulating sensory input. People with ASD can be both hypo- and hypersensitive to a variety of senses including touch, taste, sight, smell and noise. These are all factors to be considered in the development of an ideal learning environment for a learner with ASD.

As ASD manifests with difficulties in social, communicative and behavioural development (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000), alongside the sensory difficulties mentioned above, children with autism often display what can be interpreted as challenging behavior. Whitaker (2001, p.3) explains, "Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders may be more likely than other children to develop

challenging behaviours”. What he then explains so well is that this term ‘challenging behaviour’ is not one that is cut and dry but instead is behavior that challenges, “whether it is a challenge to our understanding, our own well-being, or our child’s, or else to our ability to carry out our responsibility as parents or professionals” (Whitaker, 2001, p.4). Whitaker (2001) explains that as parents, teachers or other professionals working with learners with ASD we need to understand challenging behavior, “by making sense of its significance and meaning” (p.12), for a particular individual with ASD in a particular environment. Understanding challenging behavior therefore becomes the key to changing it.

2.2.2. Educating learners with ASD

The ASD learner requires a structured, supportive environment in which to learn and develop, that which is without distraction and clutter. De Clerq (2006) provides some key guidelines on which an educational program specific for learners with ASD should be based. The first is that learners with ASD require or work best off a structured routine. “Consistency is key, as autistic children quickly develop fixed routines. Secondly, predictability, the learner with ASD needs to be able to anticipate and have a certain amount of control. Therefore, learners with Autism usually work best off a set daily schedule with little or no variance. Third, learners with ASD are visual learners and require visual aids to structure their day and assist them in learning. According to De Clerq (2006, p.293), visual aids have the following advantage to the learner with ASD:

- Moves from the abstract to the concrete
- Reduces confusion and ensures predictability
- Reduces stress
- Develops independence (for example the use of a visual schedule in the classroom for each learner).

Popular approaches in the education of learners with ASD include Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and the Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication disorders in Childhood. (TEACCH Method). ABA was developed by Lovaar in 1965 for use with adults, and later children with ASD (Zager, Wehmeyer and Simpson, 2012). Lovaar based his approach on the work of behaviourist Skinner,

essentially rewarding adaptive behaviors and punishing those behaviours that were maladaptive. The program encouraged intense weekly sessions of ABA therapy. According to Zager, Wehmeyer and Simpson (2012) this approach quickly became controversial. Today ABA and adaptations of this form of therapy remains widely used in the treatment of individuals with ASD.

The TEACCH approach to ASD was developed by Mesibov, Shea and Schopler from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and extended over a thirty year period of research and treatment of individuals with ASD (TEACCH Autism Program, 2013). The TEACCH approach prescribes the use of individual and group schedules and visual sequences. The use of independent visual schedules allows for structure to the classroom routine and stimulates communication even for non-verbal learners (Mesibov, Shea & Schopler, 2004). Structure is the TEACCH form of behaviour management, where appropriate behaviours are taught and then generalised through visual systems. According to the TEACCH approach the classroom layout should represent the teaching approach, for example, the use of independent workstations, physically divided working areas and group table work (Mesibov, Shea & Schopler, 2004). According to Mesibov and Howley (2003), although the TEACCH approach was not developed to be implemented in the inclusion setting it may be used as a tool from which the accommodation of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom is made possible.

Due to communication being such a central difficulty in learners with ASD and concentered with the fact that learners with ASD favour visual over verbal stimulation many professionals and families working with ASD incorporate hand gestures and even signs in their communication with individuals with ASD. Makaton was a bridge to communication developed by Margaret Walker in 1972 (Golding, n.d, retrieved from course work package Vera Intensive Training for Teaching Learners with Autism). According to Golding (n.d,) Makaton is a multi-modal communication program for individuals with severe communication and learning disabilities and is therefore a valuable tool for learners with ASD who lack communicative intent. Makaton is a flexible program that can be successfully implemented alongside other approaches to teaching learners with ASD such as TEACCH and ABA.

2.2.3 The prevalence of Autism

In recent years there has been an increase in the prevalence of children diagnosed with Autism worldwide. The most recent statistics from the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) show that ASD affects one in every eighty-eight children, with diagnoses of autism being five times more prevalent in males than in females. It also shows that cases are reported in all ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Alongside this increased prevalence comes an increase in research around the etiology of the disorder, issues of diagnosis, treatment and educational support.

2.3. Experiences of teachers in the accommodation of learner with barriers to learning, specifically ASD, in the mainstream setting

Regardless of the teaching context (mainstream or special needs education) teaching is a highly stressful profession with recent educational changes within the South African context placing an even higher demand on teachers. The majority of research uncovered around the topic of teachers' experiences of the mainstream classroom in the context of inclusive education in South Africa focused on the challenges faced. There is little research that is specific to the accommodation of learners with ASD into the mainstream classroom. The reality in the context of South Africa is that most learners with disability remain in special needs schools where they have access to the support and resources that they require. This is the case for most learners with ASD.

2.3.1. Teacher development and training

In a report by the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services in South Africa (Department of Education, 1997), ten barriers to learning were identified, one of these barriers to learning was a lack of skills among teachers or others who are supposed to contribute to learning and teaching. Ntombela (2006) explains that historically the majority of teachers in South Africa have been trained according to the old system of special and regular education, this system being based on the medical model, where the barrier to learning is placed within the child. Ntombela (2006, p.18) argues that

teachers have therefore not been trained to accommodate children with different “cognitive, psychological, emotional and physical development”.

In a study by Engelbrecht, Oswald and Forlin (2006), it was found that teachers reported a lack of personal development and a need to know how to understand and address different barriers to learning in the classroom. According to DeNysschen (2008), in order for teachers to accommodate the individual needs of a learner with ASD they need to constantly improve the skills and knowledge that will assist them in the development of such children’s strengths and competencies as well as in dealing with the behavioural, sensory, emotional, communicative and social balances. De Nysschen (2008) further argues that this therefore places stress and further responsibilities on the teacher.

In the United States the Autism Spectrum Disorder Inclusion Collaboration Model was established to support teachers in the inclusion of learners with ASD in the mainstream setting. According to this model a key component of the successful accommodation of a learner with ASD in the mainstream classroom is effective training and access to best practice methods and support services. According to Simpson, de Boer-Ott and Smith-Myles (2003), teacher training and development results in positive learner performance and teacher attitudes.

2.3.2. Dissemination of the White Paper 6

A major challenge faced by teachers stems from their ignorance towards the policies underpinning inclusive education in South Africa, such as the White Paper 6.

Engelbrecht et al. (2006, p.126) found that teachers “were not acquainted with the initiatives of White Paper 6 or with inclusive education as envisaged for South African schools”. It should be the responsibility of the school to ensure that all stakeholders in the school are aware of, and educated with reference to inclusive education. Without such an initiative it is impossible for a school to adopt a philosophy of inclusion.

This challenge may be due to the lack of motivation from principals and senior management teams to disseminate and effectively make available the information that was provided by the department of education. In a study by Engelbrecht et al. (2006)

it was found that in some cases principals had not taken the initiative to ensure policy documents are available to their staff. “During an initial interview, one of the school principals admitted that White Paper 6 was gathering dust in his cabinet and has never been discussed with his staff” (Engelbrecht, Oswald & Forlin 2006, p.126). In other cases, the problem lies in that not all schools in South Africa even received policies and some schools were not introduced to the White Paper 6 at all.

In a recent study which looked at the extent to which learners who experience barriers to learning are being accommodated in independent schools in South Africa, Walton, Nel, Hugo and Muller (2009), found that the majority of independent schools in South Africa were accommodating learners with diverse intrinsic barriers to learning. Such barriers included AD(H)D, learning disability, ASD, physical challenges, such as motor difficulties, blindness and deafness, with ADHD and learning disability reported as the most common intrinsic barrier to learning accommodated and blindness, deafness and wheel chair learners reported as the least common accommodated (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller, 2009). The results of this study therefore showed a willingness of independent schools in South Africa to include learners with a diverse range of educational needs and an acceptance and familiarity with the White Paper 6.

2.3.3. Class size and lack of support in the classroom

One view of inclusive education is that the current reality of the mainstream classroom in South Africa is that it is overcrowded, with children of varying abilities, and is a place in which children with learning difficulties will be lost, receive poor attention, receive poor assistance and make poor progress, due to both the class size, individual differences, and the teacher’s inability to cope (Venter, 2007). According to Simpson, de Boer-Ott and Smith-Myles (2003, p.120), “Reduced class size facilitates increased student success, particularly for children and youth with disabilities”. Therefore, they plea for reduced class sizes in general education classes in the United States, as it allows for more individualised teaching methods and a diversity of instructional approaches so as to accommodate a variety of educational needs, including those of ASD learners. In the recent study of independent schools in South Africa, at a class level, it was found that class size was managed, showing a

low learner to educator ratio (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller, 2009). It is argued that, in the context of South Africa, unless the government provides funding to allow for smaller classes and for the introduction of teacher aids in public mainstream schools, inclusive education in South Africa will most likely fail (Venter, 2007).

The plea for teachers' assistants in the classroom develops out of the reality of class sizes and learner diversity. There is essentially a lack of support in the classroom, teachers require trained assistants to assist with a variety of aspects in the accommodation of diverse learners. Moran and Abbott (2002, p.162) argue that, "The most critical strategy for creating successful learning experiences for all children, regardless of disability, is teamwork", and that "teaching assistants should be part of a working team". In the United States assistants to learners with special educational needs are known as paraeducators and according to Simpson, de Boer-Ott and Smith-Myles (2003), paraeducators are an essential component to the accommodation of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom. According to Moran and Abbott (2002, p.162), the responsibility of such assistants should include, "Tasks which make education accessible and available for a variety of children". Takala (2007, p.50) reiterates that, "The main goal is to assist the learner with special educational needs in the learning process". Within the context of inclusive education in the United Kingdom the teaching assistant is seen as most effective when "creating more independent learning opportunities for the pupil" (Moran & Abbott, 2002, p.163). Therefore, it is argued that the effective implementation of inclusive education in South Africa relies on such forms of teacher support in the classroom.

2.3.4. The curriculum as a challenge to educators

Curriculum 2005 was developed in 1996, and was revised in 2002 (Revised National Curriculum Statement). This curriculum was described as a "curriculum that was learner paced, learner based and of an inclusive nature" (Naicker, 2006, p.4). The success of inclusive education in South Africa is largely dependent on the curriculum (Naicker, 2006).

The challenge educators face is an inability to recognise and respond to individual differences. According to Naicker (2006, p.4) inclusive education requires educators

to be “dynamic, creative and reflective”. However, educators have not been given the tools to teach in such a way. Such teaching strategies require a whole new way of understanding teaching and learning. Therefore, Ntombela (2010) argues that this will require that teachers learn new ways of teaching, including “team teaching” and “collaboration” with other educators. This supports the arguments made by Engelbrecht et al. (2006, p.127) who also highlights the importance of collaboration between educators.

Walton, Nel, Hugo and Muller (2009) looked at the inclusive practice adopted at a school level, classroom level and individual level in independent schools in South Africa and found that at a school level, training in inclusive education practices was a priority at each of the schools in the sample. Support teachers and specialists found on site included, remedial teachers, special needs teachers, occupational therapists, speech therapists and psychologists. This is evidence of the collaboration between teachers and other specialist staff made available in these schools. Furthermore, the schools in the study adopted cooperative learning and teaching methods so as to accommodate various learning styles (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller, 2009).

Conclusion

The literature review presented an in-depth view of inclusive education, initially on an international level and later narrowing its view to the South African context. ASD as a barrier of disability to learning was discussed as the focus of this project.

Since 1994, when the Salamanca document was put forward there has been a call for the adoption of inclusive education policy worldwide. In the context of South Africa it was the broader ideological changes, as the country moved forward from Apartheid and into a democratic society, which opened the doors to the idea of quality education for all. The White Paper 6 formed the framework in South Africa as the policy of Inclusive Education, adopting a model that recognized all youth can learn and that a range of educational needs exist and must be accommodated under a unified education system. Through inclusive education policy the term “barriers to learning” was conceptualized. Examples of such barriers were put forward and strategies addressed. The second part of the literature review focused on ASD, providing an

understanding of ASD and understanding the disorder as a barrier to learning. Within this discussion focus was made on the teachers' experiences and strategies in the education of such learners.

The literature aimed to provide a critical summary of the current research relevant to the research question in an attempt to highlight the gap in the research. There is little research that is specific to the accommodation of learners with ASD into the mainstream classroom. As learners require a very specific method of teaching it is pertinent that there is a better understanding of how mainstream teachers are currently providing for such learners. Therefore, the study made use of a qualitative research approach and aimed to study teachers' experiences of the accommodation of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom of independent schools, in the context of KwaZulu-Natal. The next chapter will look at the theoretical framework in which the research is situated.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The previous chapter reviewed the literature around the topic of inclusive education and the accommodation of learners with barriers to learning such as ASD in the mainstream classroom. This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that informs this study.

The study adopted an ecosystemic perspective to provide the framework in which to study how learners with ASD are being accommodated in the mainstream classroom over a decade since inclusive education was implemented in South Africa. The ecosystemic perspective illustrates how individuals and groups at different levels of the social context are linked in a dynamic, interdependent, and interacting relationship (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). This perspective emerged through the systems theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development, these two models will be discussed briefly to provide an understanding of an ecosystemic perspective.

Systems theory is based in the notion that different levels of the social context are systems, and the functioning of the whole is dependent on the interaction between all parts. "A school, for instance, is a system with different parts, consisting of its staff, its students, its curriculum, and its administration" (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p. 51). The Bronfenbrenner ecological model defines four ecological structures to describe the environment in which the individual lives. The first of these is the microsystem which most directly influences the individual as it is that which the individual is contained in. Second, the mesosystem is the interrelations between two or more settings, in which the individual is an active agent. The mesosystem therefore include interrelations between school, teachers, peers and family. The third ecological structure is the exosystem. The exosystem is the setting which does not directly involve the individual, but may affect or be affected by the individual. Finally the macrosystem is the defined as the consistency observed within a culture of subculture, or the belief system or ideology which underlies the consistencies. It is therefore the

overarching culture or subculture in which the other cultures are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Pre-1994 the education system in place was defined by the ideological dispensation of the time, resulting in a system that was based on ideas of segregation according to both race and disability. According to Ntshangase (n.d) special education in South Africa pre-1994 was based in three discourses. The first of these is the medical discourse, the underlying assumption of the medical discourse was that impairment is linked with disability, and those with disability should be excluded from mainstream schooling and are perceived by the wider society as inadequate and unable to fit into a normal social context. The thought was that such children would slow down the learning process in the classroom and children with learning impairments required specialised education. The second discourse is the charity discourse, which viewed children in need of special education as objects of pity and as eternally dependent on others, and as people in need of institutional care (Ntshangase, n.d). The third discourse is the lay discourse and is based in the notion of the isolation of those individuals who deviate from the norm, this discourse relates to prejudice, fear, hate and ignorance, towards such learners (Ntshangase, n.d). The previous education system was therefore based in the notion that barriers to learning emerge out of difficulties within the child, however, it is important to recognise the systematic factors which influence access to education.

The South African context is complicated in that many of the barriers to learning that are faced by children today are a result of systemic difficulties, such as, poor schooling, socio-economic context and poor educational opportunities (Department of Education, 1997). Therefore, in order to understand learning and development in children, it is necessary to have an understanding of the dynamic interaction between the contextual factors (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). The ecosystemic perspective provides a means for understanding the levels of system related to the education process, and to recognise the systematic factors that influence children's access to education. These factors are both internal factors, internal to the individual student and the local community and external factors, factors in the wider community and the whole social system, and develop over time (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). According to the report of the National Commission on Special Needs in

Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services (Department of Education, 1997), 'special needs' in education refers to the needs of individuals or systems that need to be met in order to facilitate effective learning. These needs arise as a result of barriers within the curriculum, systems of education and in the broader context of society. Therefore, in the development of inclusive learning environments that promote quality education for all it is necessary to recognise the systemic factors which influence a child's education process (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002).

It was against this theoretical framework that the study aimed to explore the experiences of teachers of children with ASD in the mainstream classroom of independent schools in South Africa. Chapter four presents the methodology adopted for this research.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In the previous chapter the theoretical framework in which the study was situated was discussed. The study situated itself in an interpretivist paradigm, this chapter outlines the research design and methodology used in collecting data for this study. The chapter begins with a brief description of the key characteristics of the qualitative research approach and justifies the use of such an approach for this particular study. The chapter then moves on to discuss the criteria considered in the selection of participants for the study. In-depth interviews, classroom observations and field notes were used in the collection of qualitative data for this study and are discussed, as well as an explanation of the procedure followed at the data collection stage. Following this, an explanation of how the data were sorted and analysed is presented. Finally the chapter concludes with a discussion of the qualitative validity and ethical considerations of the study.

4.1 Research Design

The methodology of a study is informed by the wider paradigm in which it is situated. This study situated itself in an interpretivist paradigm and made use of a qualitative research approach in order to obtain an individual, in-depth, thick description of the experiences and attitudes of the participants. The interpretivist or hermeneutic approach in qualitative research involves the interpretation of meaning. This approach involves clarifying the process of interpreting data and analysing what the subjects say in order to understand and describe their meanings. Kvale (1996, p.51) explains, “Hermeneutical research in the humanities is guided by an interest in obtaining a possible consensus of understanding among actors within the frame of reference of self-understanding as mediated within the culture”. Therefore as one can see this approach is in line with what qualitative research provides, in the sense that it allows for an understanding of people’s knowledge and truth. The approach understands that actors within their particular cultures and social settings perceive their world

differently from one another, the aim is therefore to provide an understanding of individual truths (Kvale, 1996).

Therefore, qualitative research methods allow for an understanding of truths and assumptions of how things are known, as it takes its basis from the insider's point of view, through describing and understanding as opposed to simply explaining. Qualitative researchers are aware that they are studying people who are born into particular social contexts, and recognise that this needs to be taken into cognisance when providing an understanding and explanation for individual truths (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). One of the main epistemological reasons for doing qualitative research is because it attempts to understand actions in terms of the participant's own beliefs, contexts and histories. It is the aim of qualitative research to provide thick descriptions of psychological phenomena. Furthermore qualitative research can be inductive as opposed to quantitative research methods where data is collected in order to satisfy an existing hypothesis (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to remain close to the participants' natural setting by collecting data in the school setting through the teacher interviews and classroom observations. Furthermore, the qualitative design allowed the researcher to remain close to the data during the analysis process and interpret the data as close to the truth as possible.

4.2 The purposive selection of participants

The study adopted qualitative research methods and required a small sample size to allow for a more in-depth analysis. In conducting a brief, semi-structured interview, to gain knowledge of people's experiences and attitudes it was necessary to look at a range of experiences across a number of participants, however, the sample needed to be large enough to cover the range of experiences likely to be encountered within the population (Kelly, 2006). The researcher purposively selected participants by obtaining responses from those individuals who were available and willing to take part. The sample consisted of six teachers from independent mainstream schools that are currently accommodating a learner with Autism Spectrum Disorder. One participant withdrew from the study due to the learner with ASD exiting her class before the interview and observation were to take place.

4.3 Data collection methods

The study adopted the qualitative data production technique of in-depth individual interviews. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) describe in-depth interviewing as the process of repeated face-to-face interviews between researcher and informant directed to understanding participants' perspectives of their experiences and situations, as expressed in their own words. The research therefore used a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) so as to ensure an approach that was explorative, and a means of data production that allowed for flexible and dynamic research, and that included questions that were non-directive, unstructured, non-standardised and open-ended. At the same time an interview guide allowed the researcher to make sure that key topics were explored (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

The semi-structured interview guide functioned as a means of extracting the relevant information from the participants, as well as allowed for any other subsidiary experiences to emerge, that may be relevant to the research (Kelly, 2006). The interview guide was therefore carefully constructed so as to ensure that the themes around the focus of the study could emerge and required careful planning as it informed the data analysis at a later stage (Boyatzis, 1998). The following stages were followed.

In the initial stage of the interview it was necessary for the interviewer to find a means by which participants could talk about their perspectives and experiences, it is important that this is done in a way that does not structure or define how participants should respond (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) explain that the most effective way in which to begin the interview is by asking the participant to describe the important experiences, places and people in their lives, in relation to the topic.

The following question is an example of an opening question used in the semi-structured interview guide. The question allowed the researcher to get a general overview of the teachers' experiences.

“Tell me about your experiences working with a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder”.

Therefore, the first question aimed to gain an understanding of the participants’ experiences of teaching a child with ASD, looking at how the child came to be placed in the mainstream classroom and the teachers’ motivations and concerns around the accommodation of the ASD learner in the particular mainstream classroom.

The middle section of questions aimed to gain an understanding of the ASD child’s particular special needs, in what way the participants felt that they can/cannot accommodate these needs:

“Tell me about the child with Autism Spectrum Disorders special needs”.

The final section of the interview focused on participants’ perceptions of inclusive education and specifically, their perceptions around educating children with ASD. The question therefore asked:

“How could you be better equipped to deal with children with special educational needs in the mainstream classroom?”

The research made use of triangulation by supplementing the interview data with classroom observations and field notes. In this way the research becomes more convincing. The researcher used field notes at the end of the interview, this was an important part of the data production process. As Kvale (1996) explains, field notes remind the researcher of important points that may have arisen, as well as to note the participant’s voice, facial and bodily expressions. The research also involved one observation period in each teacher’s classroom. This observation period allowed the researcher a more thorough understanding of the classroom environment and structure. The observation period was limited to one hour, no schedule was used, instead the observation was a means of corroborating the information obtained from the interview process. The researcher observed the classroom setting, any physical adaptations that have been made to accommodate the learner, as well as the teaching strategies used. The use of field notes and the observation period ensured that all

information was considered and provided valuable insight for later analysis of the transcripts.

4.4 The Procedure

A pilot study was conducted on a teacher who had previously had a child with ASD in her class. The pilot study enabled the interviewer to eliminate questions that came across as problematic or ambiguous. Furthermore, the pilot study allowed the interviewer to establish that the way the interview guide was structured and the questions were ordered allowed participants to openly express their experiences and perspectives. In the pilot study it was felt that some questions were repetitive, therefore the interview guide was adapted accordingly.

The interviews took place at the participants' homes or classrooms for their own convenience. Prior to the interview the researcher explained to participants the need for a quiet environment, after school hours in which the interview could take place. This ensured that the interview was not disturbed, that privacy was attained and that a tape recording could be done. Furthermore, participants were asked to put aside about forty-five minutes of their time for the interview. Kelly (2006) explains that these considerations are important to ensure the undivided attention of the participant during the interview.

Prior to the interview process the participants were briefed on the purpose of the interview, the researcher's interest in the interview topic, and it was established whether the participant had any questions prior to the interview. In closing the interview, the researcher highlighted important points that were made, provided the participant with feedback on the interview, and asked the participant if they felt there were any further comments to be made. According to Kvale (1996) the process of briefing and debriefing reminds the participants of the purpose of the study.

The interviews were tape-recorded to ensure that all the data were captured and available for transcription. This allowed the researcher to capture much more than would be possible relying on memory. This is particularly important where the data production technique used is an interview, as the words of the participant form the

data for analysis (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In addition to the recording of interview, field notes were also made throughout the interview process.

4.5 Data Analysis

The process of qualitative data analysis involved staying close to the data and interpreting it through an empathic understanding, providing a thick description of the area of research. The data was produced in a qualitative form through interviews and involved interpretation through the use of language to develop descriptions of the characteristics of the research as well as the processes and the context to which it related. To ensure a successful analysis it was important to develop an understanding of the data produced as well as to interpret this data.

The first stage of analysis involved the process of familiarisation, although through the processes of data production ideas and theories were developed it became necessary to create an understanding of the data produced through the interviews with teachers, and to attach meaning to the central themes by familiarising oneself with the data again (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The second step was to induce themes. This involved a bottom-up approach. By producing data through the interviews with the teachers, the researcher was able to apply principles and theories to what underlies the material. Thirdly, the data was coded, this meant categorising the data according to its relevance and its relation to other themes in data. This helped the researcher to get a better understanding of the data, and the themes and sub-themes (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Thematic analysis was used as a means of analyzing the data. Thematic analysis is a way of seeing and a means of making sense out of seemingly unrelated information. It is a means by which qualitative information, such as that obtained in this research – interview minutes, observation and field notes, can be analysed. Furthermore, it is a way of systematically observing a person (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to relate the research information to the researcher's ideas about the data.

Boyatzis (1998) provides a guideline for what a good thematic code should be and identifies five elements that a good thematic code should have. Firstly, a good thematic code should have a label; secondly a definition of what the theme concerns and, thirdly, it should describe how the researcher knows when the theme occurs. Fourth, a good thematic code should describe the qualifications or exclusion that helps to identify it and fifth, the theme should provide both positive and negative examples. Furthermore, it is important to develop a code which is meaningful to what is being studied, is clear and concise and is close to the raw information.

Fourth, through elaboration the researcher was able to explore themes and establish meaning systems in the data. This process also involved the structuring of themes until it provided a good account of the data. The final process involved interpretation and checking, this provided written accounts of what was studied, and involved establishment of thematic categories and identification of contradictions and similarities in themes. This final stage of interpretation and checking was an objective description of the data produced, describing the experiences of teachers (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The process of thematic analysis was used as a means by which one can immerse oneself in the data, remain close to the information and gain a greater understanding of the perceptions of the participants. This was integral to the research process and is central to a qualitative study.

4.6 Trustworthiness

Where quantitative research is concerned with internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity, qualitative research concerns itself with achieving credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Trochim, 2006). In order for the research to be credible it needs to have results that are believable and legitimate to the participants involved (Trochim, 2006). The study achieved credibility by providing rich descriptions of the data, and by staying close to the data from the individual interviews. Therefore, exact feelings, attitudes and concerns have been portrayed. Furthermore, the research provides confirmability by providing

results that may be confirmed and corroborated by others (Trochim, 2006), keeping in cognisance the content of this particular study.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Throughout the research process it was necessary for the researcher to consider a number of ethical issues. Such considerations included the briefing and debriefing of participants in the interview process, obtaining informed consent from the principal of the schools to conduct the research, and obtaining participants' informed consent and ensuring their confidentiality.

A letter of informed consent and an information sheet was sent out to the participants. This letter provided a clear understanding of what the research topic was about and what was required from the participants. Secondly, it required that participants fill out a consent form. The consent form stated that participation in the research was voluntary and that participants were able to withdraw themselves from the research at any time or decline participation in any part of the research (Kelly, 2006).

Through the process of briefing and debriefing, participants were informed about the purpose and procedure of the interview (Kvale, 1996). The participants signed an agreement to be interviewed and agreed to the researcher making use of a tape recorder.

In order to ensure the participants' confidentiality the interviews were administered in a quiet private room and the interview recordings and transcripts were placed in secure storage. Furthermore, to ensure that identifying information remains confidential, participants' names and details were not used in the write up of the report. Participants' anonymity was preserved.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an in-depth description of the methodology adopted in the research. The qualitative research approach was presented and the various elements of the research approach presented. The sample consisted of five teachers of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom in independent schools in KZN. The study

made use of in-depth interviews, classroom observations and field notes to produce qualitative data that could later be analysed through a process of interpretive analysis. This chapter provided an in-depth discussion of these stages of the research process. The following chapter will present the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the design and methodology of this study. As described, a qualitative research design was adopted and allowed for the in depth analysis of the experiences of teachers of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom in independent schools. This chapter will present the findings of this study.

In using thematic analysis to explore the experiences of teachers of learners with ASD in the private mainstream classroom, a number of themes and codes emerged and were developed. The themes that emerged were related to the type of school accommodating such learners, support systems available, teaching strategies and challenges. In addition teachers also spoke about general perceptions regarding Inclusive Education and the learner with ASD. These themes are discussed under the following headings:

- The accommodation of learners with ASD through the adoption of inclusive education policy
- Teacher's support of the learner with ASD
- The role of the facilitator
- The challenges of accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom
- Teacher's feelings on the success and sustainability of inclusion of learners with ASD

In presenting the results, direct quotes will be represented with italic font, the following abbreviations and grammatical representations will be used:

P1: Participant one

I: Interviewer

[...]: Words inserted in bracket are the researchers, as a way of understanding the text where it was unclear.

5.1. The accommodation of learners with ASD through the adoption of inclusive education policy

This theme was made apparent in the descriptions provided by participants. Schools had an inclusive policy in place, staff was familiar with this policy and through observation and interview data it was apparent that the schools catered for all learners and had a variety of supportive structures in place. The below quotes illustrate the diversity in the type of learners being accommodated in the independent mainstream schools that were the sample for this study.

P1: There are other children in the class who also need my support. I had some children with other developmental difficulties. I had four going for occupational therapy and one child with severe ADHD.

P3: I have 23 learners and all of mixed ability, I have some exceptionally bright children and some that are real strugglers

P5: We have always had different kinds of children at this school. Some wheelchair children, a few deaf students or others with hearing impairments and quite a few children on the Autism spectrum.

The data of this study supports a South African study by Walton, Nel, Hugo and Muller (2009), who found that most independent schools in South Africa were supporting learners with a diversity of intrinsic barriers to learning including, ASD, showing a familiarity with the national policy of inclusive education and evidence of inclusive practices.

5.1.1 Familiarity with and belief in the policy of inclusive education in their school

It was apparent in the data that all participants were familiar with the policy of inclusive education adopted in their school. Participants had a clear understanding of

the key concepts underlying this policy and were familiar with various types of barriers to learning, some of which were being accommodated for in their school.

P1: In the past, a private school like ours would only take the cream of the crop. It is not like that anymore. The school has become more inclusive in terms of learning ability.

It was apparent that participants were not only familiar with the policy of inclusion but accepted it and strived to maintain an inclusive learning environment.

P1: For any child, you want them to achieve at least the basic in an inclusive education setting.

P4: I do believe in inclusive education, most definitely.

At a school level the accommodation of learners with barriers to learning in this study is being made possible by the whole school's familiarity and belief in the inclusive education policy of South Africa. The success of the school's ability to accommodate learners with diverse educational needs may be attributed to its whole school commitment to the policy of inclusive education.

5.1.2 Class size

All teachers (in this particular sample) were teaching in a school in which there were only two classes per grade. None of the participants' classes exceeded twenty learners. The majority of participants felt that the successful inclusion of learners with diverse educational needs, such as those with ASD, might not be possible with bigger class sizes.

P2: We are lucky to only have 19 children and so it is still a manageable size. If it was a bigger class I don't know that I could have done it.

For one participant struggling to include a learner with ASD in her class, it was felt that an even smaller class would be a more appropriate environment for learning (for this particular child).

P3: This year I have struggled to include this child. Unless they are in a class of 9 or 10, or at least until they develop the coping skills to move on their own, they need more one-on-one assistance.

According to the literature, those who dispute the readiness of South Africa for the successful implementation of inclusive education argue that the reality of the mainstream classroom in the public sector is that it is overcrowded and therefore unable to provide the more individualized support, which many children with barriers to learning require (Venter, 2007; Engelbrecht, Kriegler & Booysen, 1996). It is argued that such children become lost and overlooked in the large mainstream classes in the public sector. In the study by Walton, Nel, Hugo and Muller (2009) it was shown that independent schools in South Africa are able to manage the class sizes and have a low learner to teacher ratio. Therefore, this research is in line with what was found by Walton, Nel, Hugo and Muller (2009) and it becomes clear that small classes allow for the inclusion of learners with barriers to learning, such as ASD, in the mainstream classroom.

5.1.3 On-site support

All participants described their learners as having access to a variety of support on-site on a regular basis. Most learners with ASD were receiving regular speech therapy, occupational therapy and some were receiving support from an on-site psychologist. In some instances, other autism specific therapies were provided by the school, such as play therapy, ball therapy and therapeutic horse riding.

P1: He goes for speech therapy every week.

P2: They have academic time in the morning and additional special lessons like for example today they had horse riding...With horse-riding, he takes out of academic time twice a week.

P2: We have a Special Needs Unit that forms part of the school to work with corresponding teachers to integrate learners with special educational needs into the mainstream program.

P3: He is having play therapy...he sees the school psychologist once a week. He goes to speech and occupational therapy with someone at school

P5: We have a big AEU section so we have remedial, speech and language, occupational therapy and a lady who does ball therapy so we have quite a lot available to these kids.

Access to education in an inclusive education system is dependent on factors both intrinsic and extrinsic to the learner (Department of Education, 2001). Extrinsic factors include those on a community level, school level and class level. At a school level, it was found that on-site support was available to learners with barriers to learning in this study in a variety of forms, including, occupational therapy, speech therapy, psychologists and special needs educators. This correlates with what was found by Walton, Nel, Hugo and Muller (2009) who looked at the extent to which independent schools are providing for learners with barriers to learning.

According to the literature (Engelbrecht et al, 2006; Nel, Müller, Hugo, Helldin, Bäckmann, Dwyer & Skarlind , 2011) a lack of facilities and resources is a reality of most schools in South Africa. Therefore, the majority of learners with barriers to learning, such as ASD remain in special needs education, where they can access the resources and specialist support they require. According to the White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) the inclusive education system will involve changes in mainstream education so as to identify and accommodate those children with barriers to learning. Such changes and support systems have been put in place in the independent schools, however, with lack of government funding and support it is unlikely that the majority of mainstream schools in the public sector are able to put such supportive structures in place. Therefore, it seems that in the public sector only the full-service schools or resource schools (previously known as special schools) are

able to provide the on-site support that is being provided in the independent schools in South Africa.

5.1.4 Staff training

Staff training was seen by the participants as a vital component in the successful accommodation of learners with special educational needs, such as ASD. Participants felt that Autism specific training was a useful tool in providing the learner with ASD support in the mainstream classroom. The majority of participants felt that they were supported by the school in their quest for further training and development as illustrated in the quotes below. Three of the five participants had attended Autism specific workshops.

P2: The school is very supportive. If we hear of a program or course that we think is beneficial we have the freedom to try it...When there are courses available we will go.

P4: I have not studied further but I have done lots of courses on remedial education, inclusive education and one on Asperger.

P5: I did a fishbowl course in Pretoria. It was a week course based purely on Autism. This was very useful, but also made me more nervous about accommodating a learner with such specific needs.

One participant had not attended any inclusion or autism workshops and felt that it was left up to her to learn more about the accommodation of all learners into her mainstream classroom. She took it upon herself to research and to make a classroom visit to learn from a teacher in a school for Autism.

P1: The training was up to me. I would do a lot of research, and I did have a lot of books and things to read. I also organized a classroom visit in a school for learners with Autism.

In one school training was provided to all the staff by a psychologist who specialized in the educational placement and support of learners with ASD.

*P4: **** (outside psychologist specializing in ASD) has done a course with us this term to assist us in the accommodation of our learners with ASD and to provide us with ongoing support, she works closely with the school.*

The ecosystemic perspective assists in explaining how individuals and groups at different levels of the social context are linked in a dynamic, interdependent, and interacting relationship (Donald, Lazurus & Lolwana, 2002). Therefore, the learner with ASD requires the support of the teacher, who requires the support of others from the wider social context to successfully accommodate learners with ASD in their classroom. DeNysschen (2008) found that teachers must constantly improve their skills and knowledge to successfully accommodate the individual needs of a child with ASD. In this study it was shown that those teachers who felt they had received adequate training specific to the barriers to learning they were addressing in their classroom (in this case ASD) were more confident in their ability to accommodate a learner with ASD and had a more positive outlook towards inclusive education as a whole. In all but one case participants were encouraged and supported by the school to attend a variety of training workshops made available by both public and private organisations.

5.1.5. Team work and support

Many participants attributed the successful inclusion of learners with ASD in their school to teamwork and support.

P2: The parents are amazing and will support him in every way. To the extent of even coming on school tour to Botswana with them.

P4: We have round table meetings. There are about nine of us on the team who attend, including the parents, teachers, therapists, facilitator, head of the boarding establishment and the learners outside psychologist.

P3: The school counselor works with us and liaises with the psychiatrist as well.

P2: The special needs teacher helps us to keep up to date.

P1: The headmaster had lots of meetings with me. He is very supportive. The other teachers were also very supportive.

As the ecosystemic perspective highlights the importance of looking at an individual by recognizing the systematic factors that influence it (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002), the success of inclusion in these particular schools can be attributed to the individuals and systems that are providing support to both the learner with ASD and the teacher to allow the learner access to education. The support systems in this case included both those within the school system, such as therapists, teachers, management and support staff, as well as those support systems, external to the school such as parents, psychologists, psychiatrists and communities.

5.2. Teachers support of the learner with ASD

Where the previous theme looked at inclusive education at a whole school level this theme highlights what teachers are doing to support the learner with ASD in their classroom. A number of strategies emerged through the data and will be presented under various categories.

5.2.1. Developing an ethos of accepting those that are different

The previous theme showed a general acceptance of inclusive education policy in the schools in which the data was collected and a variety of supportive structures in place that were evident to the schools' acceptance of the national policy on education. At the class level however it becomes the teacher's responsibility to develop this ethos of acceptance amongst the children themselves.

P3: The children sit and do work as a group. What I do is prepare the children at the table I am placing him and tell them why I have chosen them and give

them tools to work with. I explain to them that they have to be patient, he is sitting next to them and I know it is hard, but that they can come and tell me. They get frustrated with him.

P5: I sat the children down and told them that XXX works differently and that we have to be tolerant. I explained that sometimes he will leave the classroom to do other things and sometimes when you all have to sit he is lying down. They have been very good about it.

In the case of *Participant 3* it was found that the children took strain working in a group with the learner with ASD and it proved too difficult to expect them to cope. Eventually this participant removed the learner with ASD from the group learning and worked with him one-on-one at her own desk. Despite this case, what emerged through the data was that in the accommodation of a learner with ASD in the classroom, by giving the learners tools and coping mechanism, they displayed patience, tolerance and acceptance towards the learner with ASD.

P2: The other children adapted. I explained to them that XXX had his own space, and who the facilitator was and that he learns differently. Sometimes they would get frustrated with him and would shout at him, but I just gave them little tools on how to deal with him.

P2: What is important, and we have seen it here, is that the rest of the class has been fantastic with him. It has been such an important life lesson for them to learn how to cope with people that aren't mainstream. The class and the whole grade has been phenomenal. And I have found that everyone knows he will do things differently, but they have learnt tolerance for that and it is good for them. I know that at times some children can be intolerant, but it allows for a wonderful learning lesson.

P4: The other girls are very tolerant and have been good to her which has been great for her.

Inclusive education was born out of the wider call for the recognition of human rights and social justice worldwide. In South Africa, a call for educating for social justice and inclusion emerged in the move from apartheid into a democratic society based on human dignity, freedom and equality. It is the wider notion of inclusion in society as a whole that has shaped the movement towards inclusive education (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker & Engelbrecht, 1998). What emerges in the data is that educating the youth in this inclusive environment promotes tolerance and acceptance of diversity. This is then translated in their immediate home, their community and society. Therefore, inclusive education in turn promotes the recognition of human rights and social justice in the wider context.

Where the literature states that most teachers are ignorant to policies and practices of inclusive education in South Africa (Engelbrecht et al., 2006), the data shows that the teachers in this sample were familiar with the initiatives of the White Paper 6 and are making an effort to develop an ethos of respect and tolerance for diversity in the classroom.

5.2.2. Physical changes in the classroom

A common strategy for supporting a learner with ASD in the classroom that emerged in the data was the physical changes that were made. It is necessary to note here that four out of the five participants had facilitators working with the learner with ASD.

P1: I had a corner of the classroom that was for him. He had his schedule up there and we made it his own with his weighted blanket and things.

P2: XXX wouldn't be able to bring his own books and things to class so instead, everything is here for him [in the classroom]. At his desk space, there is space for the facilitator to sit with him, a chair and a spare desk...When he does need a quiet space to work we have a staffroom with tables he can work at and there is also a computer he likes to use there.

P3: I had him in a group like the rest of the children but I had about three emails from parents to please move their child away as they are struggling

and can't afford the disruption of having him at their group. So now I don't even risk it. He sits right here next to me.

P4: Previously, [before having the facilitator] I used to have to remove her from the class to do work so she wasn't distracted. We had a desk outside for her to work at. Now, she hardly ever needs to be there.

P5: I always put him on the outside of the row so that the facilitator can get a chair to sit next to him. Then he has an area off to the side of the classroom which is his only and no one else goes there. He also has a desk in the storeroom where he goes to work on a computer program, it makes a noise so it is distracting. So he has two desks, he works individually with the facilitator in his own area or if we are doing art or something he can participate in with the rest of the class he as got his desk to sit with us.

As one can see from the excerpts, all the participants had to make adaptations to the physical space of their classroom to accommodate the learner with ASD. Therefore, the teacher ensured that the physical space of the classroom would not be a barrier to learning for the learner with ASD and made the necessary adaptations to make the physical environment more inclusive.

In most cases the learner had a facilitator who required space to provide one-on-one support to the learner. In many cases the teacher felt it was important that the learner with ASD have a space in the classroom that they can feel is their own, a place to escape to and a place to work without distraction. This is directly linked to the literature on learners with ASD where De Clerq (2006) explains that learners with ASD require a structured space in which to work without distraction. Furthermore, it is in line with the Teaching and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) approach which states that the use of independent work stations and physically divided spaces are most effective for learners with ASD (Mesibov, Shea & Schopler, 2004).

5.2.3. Specific teaching strategies used in the accommodation of a learner with ASD

A number of specific teaching strategies used in the accommodation of the learner with ASD in the mainstream classroom emerged in the data. Many of these strategies are common in the literature (DeClerq, 2006; Peeters, 1997; Mesibov & Howley, 2003) on education practices for learners with ASD and in most cases were tools teachers learnt in their training. This is once again evidence of the importance of ASD-specific training in the accommodation of a learner with ASD. The first common strategy was the use of a visual schedule or visual prompts.

P1: We made him a visual schedule, the facilitator worked on that.

P2: He kept a schedule in his diary and would refer to it quite a bit

P3: I outline the day with the whole class on the board every morning

P4: I always integrate the work visual prompts, definitely need lots of visual, like flashcards

One participant also mentioned a tool used to direct the learner in putting pen to paper. This technique is a visual prompt for where to start on the page and where he is expected to end.

P3: Then using colours on his work page. So, start on the green dot and finish on the red dot.

The data are evidence to the training the participants have attended specific to the accommodation of learners with ASD. Training would have provided strategies that can be implemented in the classroom, such as visual schedules, visual prompting, and daily visual schedules. Such approaches were found in the literature. According to the literature learners with ASD tend to favour visual over verbal and require a structured routine in order to reduce stress and ensure predictability (De Clerq, 2006)

A further common strategy was the use of rewards. This strategy came up in several interviews and was also made apparent in classroom observations.

P4: Everything works on a reward system with her. Homework, personal hygiene, and classroom involvement. In order for her to comply we have to use a reward system.

P5: I also always integrate the work with rewards

According to the literature (Applied Behaviour Analysis) ABA, based in behaviourist theory and reward system, was one of the initial approaches developed in working with learners with ASD (Zager, Wehmeyer & Simpson, 2012). Despite the controversy which surrounds it, ABA remains embedded in many of the approaches still used with learners with ASD today. The data is evidence of this.

One teacher reported using more hand gestures while talking in an attempt to develop communication with the learner with ASD. The literature highlighted hand gestures and programs such as Makaton sign as a significant means of bridging the communication by using visual gestures and cues along side verbal.

P1: I try to use a lot more hand gestures, mainly at ring times and group discussions.

The White Paper 6 advocates changes in teaching methods so as to meet the individual needs of all learners. It is apparent in the data that these teachers placed great effort into adapting their teaching methods to accommodate the learner with ASD in their class. It was common in the data that participants felt that the learners with ASD benefitted from individual attention. Therefore, participants valued the fact that learners with ASD required more individual attention than other learners in their class.

P2: He will never answer a question in the class or participate in any class discussions. So learning to go to him and ask him what he thinks, have one-on-one discussions with him. He answers my direct questions briefly.

P3: I sit with him one-on-one and this is when I get the best out of him

P4: Then I make sure she is right in the front at lesson time so I can give her individual attention throughout the lesson.

This is directly related to class size, the availability of facilitators and teacher aids. The research argues that the success of inclusive education is directly related to class size and classroom support. Smaller classes allow learners with learning difficulties (such as ASD) more chance to access education (Simpson, de Boer-Ott & Smith-Myles, 2003).

5.3. The role of the facilitator

In this research sample four out of the five teachers of learners with ASD in the mainstream class in an independent school had a facilitator. The findings suggest that a facilitator plays a significant role in the accommodation of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom in these schools. Furthermore, the value the participants place on the role of the facilitator is explicit in the data.

P2: Each child with ASD in this school, and some other learners with specific educational needs have a facilitator. These facilitators are students who are studying to be teachers.

In some cases the school has taken on the responsibility of finding a suitable facilitator for the learner with ASD. These schools are going beyond their duty to ensure these learners are successfully included in their school and to provide support for their teachers. This is a clear example of the teamwork that is necessary for all systems supporting the learner to come together to ensure the learner can be accommodated. It became apparent in the data that in most cases the facilitator was a student studying towards a degree in education with an interest in special needs education.

P3: Let me tell you, to find the right facilitator is not easy. It costs money and these children are demanding and very exhausting you cant just choose anybody, you need someone with experience.

P3: The school has been doing interviews for a facilitator. It has been a lengthy process, as you need to find someone who is capable but willing to work for not much pay

P2: Next year he will go to _____ High School. The school has undertaken to find a suitable facilitator for him there.

5.3.1. Do teachers feel facilitators are necessary for the successful inclusion of a learner with ASD in their school?

According to the literature facilitators are an essential component to the accommodation of learners in the mainstream classroom (Simpson, de Boer-Ott & Smith-Myles, 2003). Teachers in this sample expressed value in the facilitator's role in accommodating the learners with ASD in their classroom. A participant who was trying to include a learner with ASD without the support of a facilitator felt that the learner would not be able to progress to the next grade without one.

P3: I have recommended that he doesn't go into Senior Primary without one [facilitator]. The days are very long for him and very tiring for him and the teacher. I think we could be more productive with a facilitator. I think if we could get it right with a facilitator, that that is key.

Many participants felt that the inclusion of the learner with ASD in the classroom would not have been successful without the presence of the facilitator.

P5: It was a bit daunting in the beginning and it would possibly have been too much to expect to have not had a facilitator here with him.

P2: A facilitator is something they recommend, unless they are in a class of say nine or ten. Or at least until they develop the coping skills they need to move on, on their own.

P3: He will always need an aid. He will never be able to go on his own, but maybe by Senior Phase he will be ready for a new facilitator.

P4: You know I believe in inclusive education, but this time, for it to work I needed a facilitator.

It is explicit in the data, that teachers in this sample, who are teaching in independent schools in South Africa and therefore have small classes as well as on-site support and therapists, felt that they may not have been able to successfully accommodate the learner with ASD without the support of the facilitator. Therefore, a facilitator can be recognized as a systemic agent that influences the learners with ASD access to education, the success of which is dependent on the dynamic interaction between the facilitator and other systems related to the learner, such as the school, teacher and family.

One therefore questions how successfully a learner with ASD can be successfully accommodated in public mainstream schools, which are described by Venter (2007) as overcrowded with children of varying abilities. According to Venter learners with special needs in this educational context are lost, receive poor attention, receive poor assistance and make poor progress, due to class size, individual difference and the teacher's inability to cope. Furthermore, as the literature described, and the findings have shown, learners with ASD have very specific educational needs which require space, individual attention and visual stimulus (DeClerq, 2006; Peeters, 1997). It is therefore a finding of this study that for the successful inclusion of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom a facilitator is required.

5.3.2 The role of the facilitator

The following theme focused on what the teachers felt the role of the facilitator was in the accommodation of the learner with ASD in the inclusive setting. According to

some participants it is the facilitator's role to provide the one-on-one teaching that learners with ASD require. According to Whitaker (2001), the majority of learners with ASD require educational support in the form of individualized teaching methods (Whitaker, 2001).

P2: So it's certainly the facilitators that do the bulk of the one-on-one teaching. I will oversee the whole thing but they are the ones who will actually sit and do the activity with them. They are the ones who have learnt the techniques to help him get through his work.

P1: The facilitator works with him over his shoulder.

P5: Sometimes the aid sits next to him at his desk with the rest of the children. Otherwise she takes him aside and adapts whatever we are doing. So a lot of the things she has to do flash cards for him, um, a lot on the white boards, we just find he copies more easily when she writes on his own white board.

P3: A facilitator can do so much more than I can, he can give him constant prompting. Which is what he needs.

According to the literature, a learner facilitator should strive to create independent learning opportunities for the learner and make education accessible (Takala, 2007). In the case of ASD learners it is necessary that the facilitator has an understanding of the disorder and experience working with learners with Autism. The findings of this study are in line with the literature which shows that learners with ASD require individual support and specialized teaching techniques. Walton, Nel, Hugo and Muller (2009), explained that learners with special educational needs require the adoption of cooperative learning and teaching methods in the accommodation of different learning styles. For teachers in this study the facilitator played this role, finding suitable teaching strategies to promote learning and developing techniques for the learner with ASD to access the educational content.

Another role the participants of this study felt that the facilitator played was to help structure the learner's day and guide the learner through their daily tasks.

P3: I can't leave him in the classroom unattended to finish work before he can move on to his next class. Whereas a facilitator would be able to sit and work with him for the extra time and help him to get to his next activity.

This participant felt that without a facilitator there is no one to attend to the learner with ASD consistently. She felt the learner could not be left alone to move through his her daily program. In the case of learners with facilitators, teachers felt that the facilitators' role was to direct them through their day,

P2: His facilitator will take him to his mainstream class and he will stay with him. Help direct him through his class work.

P1: The learner has his facilitator with him at all times.

P4: In the afternoon it used to be a problem. She would go to the Boarding Establishment at 2pm and she would just sit on a computer for 4hours playing games. Now we have a facilitator with her in the afternoons as well and she makes sure the afternoon is structures time. Like doing homework from 2-4pm.

As the literature showed (Peeters, 1997; DeClerq, 2006), learners with ASD require a structured and predictable routine and environment. The findings of this study support this and show how a facilitator is able to provide the learner with structure and therefore ensure inclusion into the mainstream classroom is more effective.

One participant felt that a key role of the facilitator was to facilitate home-school communication.

P4: If it wasn't for the facilitator I would be here late every afternoon, trying to help her, staying in contact with that parents of the hostel. Now the letter goes home everyday from the facilitator and the parents know exactly what has been done at school and what homework needs to be done and how she is

coping and progressing. This communication is essential but was impossible for me as the class teacher to fit into my day.

As presented in the literature (Lord, 2011; APA, 2000), learners with ASD have impairment in social development. Such behaviour was experienced by the participants. Teachers felt that the facilitator was able to play a role in the development of social skills and the facilitation of social interaction for the learner with ASD.

P4: Everyday she would just sit with her nose in a book.

P2: At play time he prefers to sit in my classroom and play games on the computer.

P1: His facilitator is very good with him, and also with integrating him into the group with others. She would tell a group of children how to play with him.

P4: the facilitator has taught her personal hygiene and basic social skills. There has been a great improvement in this area over the past year and she has even made a friend. They will sit and talk together at the hostel.

The facilitator in this case forms part of the school system in its endeavor to follow the basic principles of Inclusive Education in South Africa, in respecting differences and uncovering and minimizing barriers to learning (Department of Education, 2001). From the ecosystemic perspective the facilitator, alongside the school staff, students, curriculum and administration, form part of the school system as a whole in its endeavor to develop an inclusive environment for the learner. The effectiveness of this system relies on the interrelatedness between these parts (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002). The findings showed that teachers in the sample worked successfully with the facilitators to influence the learner's education process. Participants also reported the successful relationship between the facilitators and home, the learner's peers, as well as other school staff such as hostel mothers.

5.4 The challenges of accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom

The challenges teachers have in the accommodation of a learner with ASD in their mainstream classroom were explicit in the data. Each teacher's experience was unique and some experienced more challenging behaviours than others. The goal of inclusive education in South Africa is the acceptance that all children can learn and need the necessary support to do so. The research seeks to uncover the extent to which independent schools in South Africa are fulfilling this goal, and by what means, and in doing so looks at the possible challenges faced.

5.4.1. Difficult behavior

A number of behavioral difficulties in learners with ASD were experienced by the teachers in this sample. One participant experienced kicking, biting and hitting from the learner with ASD.

P5: A couple of times he has bitten, but it is usually when the children are pointing and he bites their finger. But it is just because he doesn't have the words. Sometimes he will slap because he doesn't know how to interact with the other children and they will get upset. He gets very upset if they cry and he will say, "don't cry, don't cry".

It is apparent that this participant did not see the learner as being "naughty" but rather recognised the difficult behavior as a communication difficulty, a major component of ASD. According to the literature one of the key components of ASD is impairment in conversation skills to the point where the individual is unable to start or maintain a conversation or express his/her needs (APA, 2000). The participant was an experienced teacher and had also had autism specific training.

Another behavior this particular teacher dealt with in her learner with ASD was licking people. In this case too, the teacher understood the behavior as the learner's way of expressing affection towards others and therefore corrected this behavior by modeling a more socially acceptable means of showing affection.

*P5: He [learner] sometimes, his way of displaying affection is licking people. So we had to train him out of that. He would come lick me and I would have to say, “***, come and hug me, don’t lick me”. This has worked, and he has learnt. He is not licking as much anymore.*

Another participant also shared her experience of a learner displaying difficult behavior such as hitting and teasing others. This teacher found it difficult to determine the cause of such behavior, and to draw a line between what was the nature of autism and what was misbehaving.

P3: The zulu teacher called him out today, I don't know what he did, and I actually chose not deal with it because I am his class teacher and I think I deal with it enough . So I got his previous teacher from last year to deal with it and I still actually haven't go to the bottom of what happened, but he comes waltzing through and she puts him outside the office and he sits there and smiles at me. And then I just think, he knows that he has got his way. They can be very manipulative. I think there is a fine line between the label that they have been given and just bad behavior. They will push boundaries and they are non-conformists and you have to put strategies in place for that you know.

This participant had not had any autism specific training and felt that she did not receive enough support to deal with this child. The frustration seen in the above quote may be a reflection of this. The participant found the learner to be easily frustrated, constantly looking for attention and extremely erratic. In the classroom observation it was noted that the learner was crawling under the desks on the floor while the teacher was teaching at the smart board.

P3: He is very frustrated, I find him cutting up his work into hundreds of pieces. He is constantly looking for his classmates attention, giggling and being silly.

In this next case the learner was having difficulty settling into his class. According to the literature learners with ASD have difficulty with changes in their environment

(DeClerq, 2006). Furthermore, individuals with ASD have complicated sensory profiles and may be sensitive to or seek certain sensory stimulation. From the observation it was seen that the classroom appeared to be a sensory overload.

P1: It is usually a fight to get him into class. We will negotiate with him and distract him with something visual... Story times were difficult, never peaceful, he would scream out and move around. ...When he was having a bad day in the mornings he would scream and hang on the doors... I think the classroom is very stimulating for him. There is music going on, lots of art and colours on the walls. The noise of all the other children playing. It is just too much

The findings of this study are supported by the literature which explains that as ASD manifests itself in social, communicative and behavioural difficulties it can often be interpreted as challenging behavior (APA, 2000). As Whitaker (2001) explains, this behavior may be experienced as challenging due to our lack of understanding of the nature of ASD. In the inclusion of learners with ASD it is therefore imperative that the teacher have a sound understanding of ASD and be provided with key tools to working with learners with ASD by those experienced professionals as a basis from which to make necessary adaptations to eliminate challenging behavior and accommodate a learner with ASD in a mainstream classroom. The research data showed evidence of factors that were both internal to the learner and in the external environment that were cause for a variety of difficult behaviours.

The findings showed those teachers who felt competent and had received adequate training and support were more readily equipped to deal with behavior such as licking and biting. As Simpson, de Boer-Ott and Smith-Myles (2003) explained, a key component of the successful accommodation of a learner with ASD in the mainstream classroom is effective training and access to best practice methods and support of experienced professionals. In the data in this study it was seen that the teachers who had received Autism specific training felt more equipped to deal with challenging behavior presented by the learner with ASD.

The White Paper 6 advocates changes in policy, curricula, teaching methods, attitudes and behavior to meet the needs of all learners (Department of Education, 2001).

However, as Ntombela (2006) points out, the reality in South Africa is that most teachers have been trained according to the old system of education and in this case that barriers to learning are placed within the child. The findings are evidence of this. According to DeNysschen (2008), in order to deal with the learner with ASD's behavioural, sensory, emotional, communicative and social balances, teachers must constantly improve their skills and knowledge through training and research.

5.4.2 Academic performance

This theme looked at the extent to which teachers felt that the learners with ASD were able to access the curriculum and progress in terms of academic performance.

P4: Academically she is doing very well. She is not performing to her IQ, but she is coping. She struggles with Afrikaans. She also can't do anything that involves an emotive response. She will leave our questions in any subject that she isn't sure of and questions have to be presented literally.

P5: He has his days, its erratic. Some days he works like a demon and other days it doesn't matter what you do you can say go jump on a trampoline or go for a walk but nothing will help him to focus.

P3: He isn't performing to be honest. He is very bright, but his tests are the weakest in the class. He is the weakest. He can't give me written output. He hasn't done enough written work in his little life to actually produce it successfully. I know he has the intelligence, he just can show it...As soon as I leave him he might do a little work on his own but it is not persistent.

P2: Things have to be put to him in the right way for him to understand and respond even with the facilitator there were many things he couldn't do. You have to be constantly trying new techniques.

It is clear that in all cases academic performance of the learner with ASD presented as a challenge to the teacher. In some cases, despite some shortfalls the teacher felt the learner was managing sufficiently. In many cases, teachers experienced learners with

ASD having erratic academic performance. Often the learner with ASD had to be given extra time to complete work that could not be completed in class.

P4: Before she had the facilitator she would stay in the library every break.

P2: The facilitator has to sit with him at breaks and after school to with work not completed... Without prompting from the facilitator he would be quite happy to sit and do nothing.

Another challenge that became evident in the data was that of communication difficulties.

P2: My difficulty is with him speaking. With orals it was a huge challenge. It took practicing on his own, then with the facilitator and then in an empty classroom. Eventually he presented the oral with everyone in it. It was a major challenge and I would never expect him to do it again.

P4: For her to do an oral is a big story. She has to be warned in advance exactly when she will present so she is well prepared.

The issue of communication difficulties and oral presentations is consistent with the literature on individuals with ASD (Peeters, 1997; DeClerq, 2006; APA, 2000), where social and communication difficulty is a major component. However, in an inclusive setting these challenges must be met with changes in curriculum (including assessment) and teaching methods. In both cases the participants put in place coping strategies for the learner with ASD. These adaptations allowed the learner access to the curriculum.

5.4.3. Feelings of despair

It became apparent in the data that all of the teachers in this sample felt despair or a sense of not coping in their experience of including the learner with ASD in the mainstream class setting.

P1: We took him in and we just had to watch him and try figure him out. This year has been very tough on me. You know you have other children, you cant just run after him all day. I felt stressed. I did feel alone sometimes, and I am an experienced teacher.

P3: I have to determine what battles I am prepared to fight. I think that is where the training comes in. I need to know more. I have some guidelines but it is not enough. I think sometimes as teachers we need more support with children like this. You know for myself, I would love more input. I feel like I am the one who needs the support.

P4: I was pulling my hair out in the beginning. I would go home stressed... I used to walk out the classroom and count to ten or go through to the heads office, saying that I didn't know what to do, it was just too much.

Inclusive education is based on the idea that the mainstream classroom is the most appropriate environment to provide support to children with barriers to learning such as ASD. The White Paper 6 states that special schools will be converted into resource centers and support services will provide the necessary expertise to support teachers in mainstream schools in the accommodation of learners with special educational needs (Department of Education, 2000). However, there is no mention in the White Paper 6 of how independent schools will be supported. Therefore, it is the onus of the independent schools themselves to adopt a policy of inclusion in line with the national call for inclusion and therefore develop and train staff accordingly. In most cases in this sample the school had endeavored to do so.

The findings of this study showed the challenges teachers in independent mainstream schools in South Africa face in their commitment to accommodate learners with special educational needs in their classrooms. Furthermore, they showed the teachers' feelings of despair when faced with challenges that are new and unfamiliar to them, such as the case of learners with ASD. In the literature Engelbrecht, Oswald and Forlin (2006) found teachers reporting a lack of personal development and a need to know, understand and address the different barriers to learning in the classroom. According to Ott and Smith-Myles (2003) positive learner performance and teacher

attitudes were directly related to teacher training and development. The findings therefore highlighted the importance of teacher training and development.

5.5. Teachers' feelings on the success and sustainability of inclusion of learners with ASD

The research sought to understand the experiences of teachers of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom. This particular theme highlighted whether teachers felt the accommodation of these particular learners with ASD was sustainable in their school.

P1: From the schools point of view it was a means of showing mom that he can not cope in a mainstream setting. Mom was hoping to get him into another private schools of some sort. She definitely didn't want him in a special needs schools. Mom wanted him in the real work. Bit I argues that he needed more tools.

P3: So this year I struggled to include this child.

Since the time of the interview this learner has been removed from the school. On follow up it was reported that the teacher felt the learner was not yet able to cope in the mainstream setting and posed a major strain on the teacher herself and the progress of the rest of the learners. The learner's parents were advised to have him assessed in an autism-specific school.

P2: He is moving into the mainstream high school next year. It seems like the will be very accommodating there and I am sure he will succeed.

P3: It is worrying me as the year comes to an end. Especially because he is suppose to move up to the senior phase and I just don't think he is ready, but I don't think they could keep him back a year either, he is too bright and he would be bored. I have recommended that he does not move without a facilitator.

P4: She has made such progress already this year. Scholastically and in areas such as personal hygiene and she is much more organized. ...We just had a superb meeting with the support team and parents. I think they [parents] were worried that we were going to ask her to leave the school, but it is fantastic how she has progressed and they are so pleased.

P5: I think he will continue to cope. He will always needs a facilitator though.

Most participants felt confident about the successful accommodation of the learner with ASD in the mainstream setting in the future. The findings therefore supported the literature which claims that with effective support systems the mainstream environment may be appropriate for some learners with ASD. However, as every individual with ASD is different one should not presume that the mainstream setting is the most appropriate educational setting for every child with ASD. ASD presents a complex dilemma in that learners with ASD occur along a spectrum and each child diagnosed with ASD is different. According to the literature ASD is diagnosed as level 1, 2, 3 according to the support the learner requires. Therefore, some learners with ASD require much more support than others. The participants felt that although they did believe in and followed the policy of inclusive education, it was not something that could be achieved for every child on the Autism Spectrum.

P1: I have taught a few children with ASD who have managed beautifully. I think this learner is just too severe to cope in this mainstream school.

P4: But I believe there is a spectrum. Some children will manage in a school like ours and others will not. But I think with any child you have to find a school that suits them.

P2: So I really do believe in inclusive education, most definitely, but as I say depending on the severity, I think one needs assistance.

Conclusion

In this chapter through qualitative interpretive analysis the researcher was able to present the experiences of teachers of learners with ASD in the private mainstream classroom. Reference was made to existing literature which in many cases concurred with the results of the data. The researcher analysed and presented the data through the lens of inclusive education policy and the ecosystemic perspective. The integrated theory provided the framework in which to view the research data. In the following chapter the research will be summarized, the findings will be formulated and the recommendations and limitations of this study presented.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter a summary of teachers' perceptions around accommodating learners with ASD in independent mainstream schools in South Africa, is provided. The brief discussion will include the conclusions drawn from the study and will be presented as the findings. Recommendations pertaining to the research will then be made.

6.1. Summary

The research sought the experiences of teachers who are accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom of independent schools. In doing so, the research aimed to uncover how teachers accommodate learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom, the challenges they face and the support systems available to them. This was explored in light of inclusive education policy introduced in South Africa in 2001 within the framework of an ecosystemic perspective. The purpose of the research was therefore to provide an in-depth understanding of how inclusive education is perceived to be providing for learners with special educational needs in the mainstream classrooms of independent schools in South Africa.

The following key questions were presented.

Primary research question:

- What are the experiences of teachers who are accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom of independent schools?

Secondary questions:

- How do mainstream teachers accommodate learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom?
- What challenges do teachers face accommodating a learner with ASD in the mainstream classroom?

- What support services are available to these mainstream teachers in teaching learners with special educational needs?

The research situated itself within an interpretivist paradigm so as to provide in-depth, thick descriptions of the experiences of its participants. The research therefore adopted a qualitative research approach, with the data collection techniques including semi-structured interviews, field notes and classroom observations. The sample of the study consisted of five teachers currently employed in independent mainstream primary schools in the KwaZulu-Natal region. At the time of the data collection process these teachers were accommodating a learner with ASD in their mainstream classroom.

The research adopted the qualitative data analysis technique of interpretive analysis. This process involved familiarisation with the data, the induction of themes, using a bottom up approach and the coding and categorising of data according to the themes. The research findings are summarised and presented below.

6.2. Findings

The following findings emerged from the research on independent mainstream teachers and their experiences in accommodating a learner with ASD. The findings revealed, despite being excluded from the Education White Paper 6, that independent schools in South Africa were the necessary means to familiarise and align themselves with inclusive education policy. The findings presented the following points as evidence of this.

- Teachers familiarity with the White Paper 6 and its key principles
- Small class sizes
- On-site specialist support for learners with special educational needs
- Training – special needs or autism specific
- Teamwork.

The findings showed that teachers themselves were supporting the learner with ASD in their classrooms in the following ways;

- Creating a supportive and tolerant environment for learning
- Physical adaptations to the classroom environment
- The use of specific teaching strategies in the inclusion of a learner with ASD.

The role of the facilitator was presented as a theme in the data. The following key points were established with reference to the use of a facilitator with the learner with ASD in the mainstream classroom.

- The facilitator played an essential role in the inclusion of a learner with ASD in the mainstream classroom.
- Assistance with individualised teaching methods
- Provision of structure and guidance for the learner with ASD.
- Provision of home-school communication

Participants faced many challenges in the accommodation of the learner with ASD. Most experienced the following;

- Difficult behaviour to manage
- Poor academic performance
- Feelings of despair
- Mixed opinions on the future for the learner with ASD in the mainstream setting.

6.3. Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study the following recommendations are made to ensure help ensure the successful accommodation of learners with ASD in any mainstream school setting. The Department of Education needs to respond to the needs of schools in their alignment with the national policy on Inclusive Education and take note of the many supportive structures that need to be in place in our schools to ensure the successful accommodation of a learner with special educational needs in

the mainstream classroom. The first need that must be addressed is the provision of training for all teachers in inclusive education practices. All teachers require on-going training to develop the skills and knowledge to cope with learners with special education needs, such as those with ASD, in the mainstream classroom. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Department of Education align itself with supportive associations, such as Autism South Africa, so as to provide comprehensive training programs. The second need to be addressed by the Department of Education is that of class size. It was apparent in the data that the teachers in independent schools felt that the successful inclusion of a learner with ASD would not have been possible in a class bigger than fifteen to twenty learners. The current reality of large class size in public schools makes responsiveness to learners' individual educational needs difficult. Thirdly, the Department of Education must address the issue of classroom support. The literature presented in this study concurs with the data collected, showing that a facilitator is an essential component to the accommodation of learners in the mainstream classroom. It is the recommendation of this study that the facilitator be provided with the necessary skills and knowledge so as best to understand and assist the learner with ASD. Finally, on-site specialist support is necessary in any school so as to ensure all children's educational needs are met. The research has shown that the learner with ASD required the support of a number of specialists, including, psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and remedial teachers.

Regarding the role of the school in ensuring an inclusive environment, the following recommendations are made. Firstly, all schools should endeavour to familiarise staff with the key principles of inclusive education policy. Secondly, all schools should provide and encourage participation in teacher training on inclusive education practices and special needs education and attend any training workshops provided by the Department of Education. Third, a team-based support system should be set up for any learner with special educational needs, in order to successfully provide the necessary support to the teacher and learner. Team meetings should occur frequently, ensure parent involvement and allow for open communication between all team members in order to provide the necessary support.

The following recommendations are made specific to the role of the teacher in the inclusion of a learner with ASD in their classrooms. Firstly, commit themselves to on-

going training and life-long learning. Teachers must have a sound understanding of specific needs of a learner with ASD in order to correctly support such a learner in the classroom setting. They should be adaptable, knowledgeable and should strive to continuously update themselves on the educational needs of a learner with ASD. Secondly, ensure continuous, open communication with your “team members”. Frequent home-school communication is recommended for the successful inclusion of a learner with ASD. Third, be willing to make adaptations to your teaching strategies and physical environment in order to respond to the individual needs of every learner.

6.4. Limitations of the study

The study was confined to five independent schools in KwaZulu-Natal and the participants comprised of only one educator from each of these schools. Furthermore, the study was limited to the experiences of the participants and my understanding of these experiences limited to a short classroom observation period and one semi-structured interview.

Conclusion

In light of the introduction of the Education White Paper 6 in 2001, alongside an increasing prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), characterised by pervasive impairment in social interaction, communication, repetitive behaviours and sensory difficulties, the research focussed on how an inclusive education system currently provides for learners with barriers to learning, specifically those with ASD, in the context of South Africa.

Through the lenses of the ecosystemic perspective and the Education White Paper 6 the research was able to uncover the experiences of five teachers who are currently accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom of independent schools in KwaZulu-Natal, and in doing so, was able to address the research questions. Through analysis and interpretation the researcher showed how teachers are currently accommodating a learner with ASD in their classrooms, including teaching strategies and classroom adaptations, and the support systems available to

them. Furthermore, challenges these teachers face in the accommodation of the learner with ASD became explicit in the data.

It is clear from this study that learners with ASD have specific educational needs and it is necessary to take these into cognisance when addressing the issue of school placement. It is the researcher's hope that the findings and recommendations of this study be used to develop the necessary training programs and support systems to ensure the successful accommodation of learners with ASD in any classroom setting.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

The research will make use of the following guiding questions and will extend on these through the use of probing questions.

- Describe your school environment
- Tell me about your class, the type of learners, the classroom structure, class routine
- Tell me about the child with Autism Spectrum Disorders in your class.
- Tell me about your experiences working with a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- What is your understanding of Inclusive Education?
- How do you accommodate this child in your classroom?
- What difficulties have you experienced in accommodating this child in your class?
- Tell me about the support systems available to you in the accommodation of this child.
- How do you feel you could be better equipped to deal with children with special educational needs in the mainstream classroom?

APPENDIX B

10 April 2012

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Jan Weber and I am from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Edgewood Campus. I am also a teacher in the Autism Unit of a School for Learners with Special Educational Needs.

I am conducting a study that is interested in exploring the experiences of teachers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), in the mainstream classroom, in light of the Inclusive Education System.

How can your school assist in this research?

Your school can make a difference by being involved in this research, should you currently have a learner with ASD (Autism, Asperger Syndrome PDD-NOS) enrolled. Please note, the research is interested in the case of mainstream teachers accommodation of learners with Autism in the classroom, it is not interested in the learners themselves and does not require any personal information regarding these learners.

The research will be collected in the form of a short interview (30 – 40 minutes) at the participants' convenience to reach an understanding of their thoughts, reasons and concerns in the education of children with ASD in the mainstream classroom. There will be no name or identifying details used in the interview and your personal details will not be attached to the interview, I can therefore assure you of complete confidentiality.

The research will therefore consist of exploring these experiences through the interview, and then qualitatively analyzing them to understand and compare the results.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could find the time to share your thoughts with me.

What is the Purpose of the research?

By exploring the participants' experiences, the research aims to understand how teachers are accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom and what possible challenges they face. Furthermore, the research aims to identify the support systems available to such teachers.

I believe the research is relevant in the context of South Africa, 10 years after the implementation of the Education White Paper 6. The Education White paper 6 promotes a movement towards inclusive education and schooling, however at present in South Africa there seems to be some variance in the attitudes towards such a system and how it will provide for children with special needs in education, such as Autism and how such a system can accommodate them. It is our hope that the research will highlight the experiences of teachers of children with Autism and in doing so create an understanding of the different perspectives around inclusive education.

How can I help you?

As an experienced and qualified teacher of learners with Autism I hope that I can give back to your school by providing insight into the education of such learners in the form of specific teaching strategies, the structure of the classroom, the structure of the learners work space and understanding the learner with ASD.

If a teacher in your school is suitable and willing to contribute to this study in any way, alternatively if you have further questions about the study, please contact me via email or phone.

Sincerely,

Jan Weber

Email: janpia@telkomsa.net

Cell: 073 385 6785

APPENDIX C

To whom it may concern,

Together with the University of KwaZulu Natal, Edgewood, I will be conducting a study around the experiences of teachers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in mainstream schools. I would very much like to ask your permission and to have your support in involving the teacher/s in your school in this study.

The research will require about forty minutes of the teacher's time for an individual interview and a possible follow-up observation period of his/her class (This will be a short 40 minute observation in which the aim is not to observe the behavior of the student but to rather verify information received from the teacher regarding for example, teaching strategies and classroom structure. All data collected will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used.

By exploring the participants' experiences, the research aims to understand how teachers are accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom and what possible challenges they face. Furthermore, the research aims to identify the support systems available to such teachers. This research will be beneficial to schools, teachers, and parents of children with ASD.

I hope to have your support in conducting this research, and I hope that I can provide you with feedback on conclusion of the study, that will be useful to you and your staff.

Kind regards,

Jan Weber

Authorisation

I, _____, in my capacity as HOD of _____ Primary, give permission for this research to take place in my school.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX D

To whom it may concern,

My name is Jan Weber and I am from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Edgewood Campus. I am conducting a study that is interested in exploring the experiences of teachers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), towards inclusive education and mainstream placement and the idea of facilitating an education system that will accommodate for children of varying abilities.

What is the Purpose of the research?

By exploring the participants' experiences, the research aims to understand how teachers in mainstream schools are accommodating learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom and what possible challenges they face. Furthermore, the research aims to identify the support systems available to such teachers. The research will be collected in the form of an interview to reach an understanding of your thoughts, reasons and concerns in the education of children with ASD. The research will therefore consist of exploring these experiences through the interview, and then qualitatively analyzing them to understand and compare the results.

Why this topic?

I believe the research is relevant in the context of South Africa, 10 years after the implementation of the Education White Paper 6. The Education White paper 6 promotes a movement towards inclusive education and schooling, however at present in South Africa there seems to be some variance in the attitudes towards such a system and how it will provide for children with special needs in education, such as Autism and how such a system can accommodate them. It is our hope that the research will highlight the experiences of teachers of children with Autism and in doing so create an understanding of the different perspectives around inclusive education.

Who will be involved?

Three teachers from the greater eThekweni area that are currently teaching children with Autism in the mainstream setting.

The interview

The interview will aim to explore the themes around the research topic. Some examples of the types of questions I will be looking at are;

- Tell me about your experiences working with a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Tell me about the particular learner with Autism Spectrum Disorder in your class.
- How do you accommodate this child in your classroom?
- What difficulties have you experienced in accommodating this child in your class?
- Tell me about the support systems available to you in the accommodation of this child.

Furthermore, it will be interesting to look at any other concerns or areas around the topic, that you as a teacher might see relevant. The interview will take approximately forty minutes of your time and if you consent to it, interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed.

Are there any potential risks in being involved in this research?

The research is relatively low risk in that I do not perceive it as being harmful to you in anyway. I do not expect you to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, and refusing to answer will not affect you negatively in anyway.

Will the interview be confidential?

There will be no name or identifying details used in the interview and your personal details will not be attached to the interview, I can therefore assure you of complete confidentiality. We will use pseudonyms that you choose.

Feedback

I will provide feedback from the research to the teachers involved, as well as to the head of school, and head of department.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you are not being forced to take part in this study. However it would be greatly appreciated if you could find the

time to share your thoughts with us. If you choose not to take part there will be no negative consequences. If you agree to participate you may withdraw at any stage or decline from answering any questions in the interview, in either case you will in no way be prejudiced.

If you have any questions about the study you may call me on 073 385 6785.

Sincerely,
Jan Neilson

Authorisation

A. I hereby agree to participate in the research. I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way. I also understand that I can stop this interview at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will in no way affect me negatively.

The purpose of the study has been explained to me, and I understand what is expected of my participation. I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally.

I have received contact numbers of persons to contact, should I need to speak about any issues that may arise through the interview.

I agree that data collected can be used in further research by others, as long as personal details and names are not disclosed to other researchers:

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Please tick appropriate box)

I understand the consent form will not be linked to the interview and that answers will remain confidential.

Signature of participant

Date

B. In addition, I consent to the tape-recording of this interview.

APPENDIX E

Interview Transcripts

School One:

R: Describe your school environment

P: It is a mainstream school Grade 0-7. There are 2 or 3 classes in each grade. The special needs unit is a separate entity as such although they do work with the corresponding grade teacher and they are integrated into that mainstream class in certain subjects. Normally what happens with the junior kids is that they will spend the first part of the morning in the special needs unit doing academic work and then after tea where they can they get integrated into music, art, PE.

R: Do the children with autism have facilitators?

P: Yes, the learner has his facilitator with him at all times.

R: What are your experiences of inclusive education

P: Inclusive education certainly has its merits because we need to have some basics. With the child I have I want him to read, write and communicate and do a bit of math's. You want them to be able to achieve at least the foundations through inclusive education setting. He doesn't need to have to do exactly what everyone else is doing. Communication is key. Yes, so in the mainstream we try to achieve this. We are also lucky in that we can make adaptations for such children. For example with the art teacher she is happy that he takes his own route and doesn't follow the same curriculum as everyone else. With horse-riding, he takes out of academic time twice a week, but it is our feeling that the benefits there far outweigh and obviously as I said he doesn't do a second language, this is a concession we have allowed for him. So in the time that other learners are doing that class he is catching up with his other subjects. He is moving to a mainstream high school next year. This high school is taking on the responsibility of finding a suitable facilitator for him. They have not contacted us about him yet but I am sure they will be. It seems like they are quite accommodating I want there to be integrated education. I just feel there is a place for it and for everybody. So unfortunately govt funding and things like that. There should be more school but there are not. So schools like pvt school need to take them on. What is nb, and we have seen it here is that the rest of the class has been fantastic

with him. And I think it has been such an nb life lesson for them to learn how to cope with people that rent mainstream and the class and the whole grade has been phenomenon. And I have found that everyone knows that he will do things differently but they have learnt tolerance for that and its good for them. I know that at times some children can be intolerant but it allows for a wonderful learning lesson. I think the structure we have here works well as it does allow for them to be removed from the class and have some time for themselves.

R: Describe your experience teaching learners with ASD

P: It was a bit daunting in the beginning and it would probably have been too much to expect to have not had a facilitator in here with him. It wouldn't work. There have been days where people have been sick and things like that and he has been in here and it has been doable. We are lucky to only have 19 children and so it is still a manageable size. If it was a bigger class I don't know that I could have done it. But often if there is no facilitator with him I will do the normal lesson as I teach and then I will bring him to my desk to go over it again with him and coax him a long. If we didn't do that he would be quite happy to just sit and do nothing. He certainly isn't a problem behavior wise. So its just certainly the facilitators do the bulk of the one on one teaching I will oversee the whole thing but they are the ones who will actually sit and do the activity with him. They are the ones who have learnt the tricks to getting him to get through his work.

R: What have you had to put in place to accommodate him?

P: Fortunately nothing, the only, he has kind of been weaned away in his time here from the sort, he had a tent in the other class, he also then progressed to his own space or zone in the classroom that was just for him to go to. Now in my class the only thing we have done is given him a desk that is his own (which the others don't have they use lockers). ___ wouldn't be able to bring in his own books etc. so everything is here for him. And in that desk space there is a space for the facilitator to be there with ihm. There is normally a chair and a spare desk for his facilitator and generally work with him over their shoulder and then when he does need quite space to work we have the staff room with the tables and he can work at that and he can also use the computer there. Everyone does also work off a notebook. But ___ didn't really use it and preferred the desktop so he also goes and does that on his own. He does online educational games and he really enjoys that and we have found it quite beneficial. It is an obsession and he loves it but he has learnt a lot from it too.

When he writes tests he will also go to this separate area, it is quite.

With changes _____ can take a bit of time and can become quite flustered but he has learnt to adapt and it is important that he has learnt to adapt to change. He uses his timetable and it is in his diary and he would refer to it quite a bit. As the year progressed he wasn't so dependent and he has relaxed a bit more.

R: Describe the challenges

P: Certainly to answer questions and participate in discussions. So learning to go to him individually and ask what he thinks, discussions one on one, still doesn't communicate. Will answer the question briefly. So a challenge for me is getting him to communicate and trying to draw him out of his shell. But it is very difficult to do with the nature of him. My difficulty is him speaking. With orals it was a huge challenge. It took practicing on his own, then on to the tutor and then in the empty class and eventually with everyone in it, it was a huge breakthrough and I would ever expect it of him again. The classroom is quite a calm space, I am not a very load teacher and I think he finds it calming. Although the children can be quite noisy but he will tell me that he would rather go out the classroom to his own space.

I have bonded with him over this year, he has an amazing sense of humour.

R: Describe your support systems

P: Amazing parents and they will support everything. To the extent that the parent was even going to come on a school trip with im to Botswana. They are supportive. The school is very supportive. If we hear of a program, course etc we get the freedom to try it. We have also been working on learning styles, each child is assessed and then we try and structure our lessons accordingly. When there are courses available we will go. We attend conferences and we will go to those. The special needs teacher helps us to keep up to date. Lots of time researching on the internet. It would be nice to network with more people in kzn. We are still trying to build up our network base. And there is not a lot of support from other special needs schools in the area and I think if we can have a network set up as a province. I would like to be able to talk to more people about their experiences teaching and gain more practical knowledge.

School Two

R: Describe the school environment

P: It is a Private school with a separate unit for special needs integrated within the school.

R: What are your experiences of inclusive education?

P: Well I was a facilitator to a child with autism in the UK. There I became familiar to inclusive education as it is widely accepted and it seems to work. There are children with a number of different educational needs accommodated in the mainstream classroom. Many of them having facilitators to assist them. Back here in South Africa it seems we are still catching up. You do not see that many children with disabilities being accommodated in the mainstream schools. Especially the government schools. There are no facilities for them. That is why I am teaching here. We are trying to accommodate these learners as much as we can into an ordinary school system.

R: Do the children with autism have facilitators?

P: Each child had a facilitator, these are students who are studying to be teachers. Year or two out of school. In the special needs class there are only 3 kids and each has a facilitator. Especially with academic work.

R: What have you had to put in place to accommodate him?

P: Each child follows their respective Grades timetable. So ___ follows the grade 2 timetable. Then they have academic time in the special unit and additional special lessons like for example today they had horse riding. At times when he is integrated with the rest of the mainstream class, this is no academic activities such as art, music etc. his facilitator will take him to his mainstream class and he will stay with him. Help direct him through his class work. So everyday is different. Usually each day begins with academic time in remedial unit. We are very flexible with his timetable. He usually only get home here at about 9. He is obsessed with Mario games so we do use that as a way to get him here. He can sit at the computer outside my room and he will watch for a bit. Some mornings he will say hello. To get him in the class. It is usually a fight to get him into the class. We will negotiate with him and distract him with something visual to do with the theme. He is usually unhappy. He can be calmed by reading a story his favorite story. From stories he will then start interacting, he can go from difficult behavior to a sweet calm child. He then moves to do academic tasks with his facilitator. His academics is on an academic par with his grade. He struggles

with sentences. But for example with math, he can get the answer but struggles to understand the working out. I always integrate the work with rewards and visual prompts. His reading is good. He has a pvt speech therapist who comes into the school. She will then correspond with me with regards to what she is working on. And it is part of his school day. He was having OT but is no longer. What we try and do with the structure, we do an hour of academics. And educational games.

R: Describe the challenges

P: A problem we have with him is that his dad is a teacher at the school and he is allowed to go to him and he is obsessed with being with his dad. At 10am he should be at play but he will run to his dad instead. If he does stay in the junior play area he will play on his own. So I think in terms of interaction it is very limited. Last year he got on well with one of the other learners in the unit. But that was when he didn't know his dad's class was right down the passage so since he has realized this it is very difficult to keep him away.

When he has to go to the rest of the mainstream class it can be a struggle. He does pe, art, music with the main class.

I do try and engage with him about his Mario obsession to try and develop his language and communication skills. But I get more out of him and it is less of a struggle if we agree that he can have some time with his game instead of taking it away completely.

Next year he will move onto a grade 3 level with a corresponding grade 3 mainstream class, I think there will be a series of tests to decide when he can be reintegrated I not the mainstream class completely with a facilitator.

School 3

R: Tell me about your experience with this particular asd learner in your class.

P: well you know I have really not had a good year. It has unfortunately just been one of those years with him.

I actually have tried my hardest with him. You know when you are in gr 3 it is a big step and they re at the end of the phase and they are going to snr primary. You have to compare that when you look at the big picture. And when he started at the beginning of the year he was putting nothing on paper. When I say nothing I mean absolutely nothing. And that is what I have worked towards. I have actually worked towards getting him to orgnise and plan himself and actually get something onto paper. At the beginning of the year we had no capitals, no full stops we couldn't spell where or were and the sentences weren't making sense. And you know really he is a bright boy it is really just about taking what is here and putting it onto paper. They tried a facilitator last year and it was a disaster, in fact he actually walked all over the facilitator. So and he is a child that needs a facilitator. He sits right there next to me and I had put him in a group and I had about 3 emails this term to pleas e move my child away from him. Please my child is really struggling and cant afford the disruption. So now you know what I don't even risk it. I have always said to the children I just put ben in a position where he is not depending on the same children all the time and I say to them if there is a problem you come and tell me. But you know he is his worst enemy. I can take 4 steps forward and then he will come and he will have a shocking day and I will email mom and say we have had a terrible day. And she will say yes he is punching and kicking me in the mornings before school. So I feel like I take a few steps forward and a whole lot back.

R: Why did they not pursue other facilitators?

P: We as the school have researched. Let me tell you to find a facilitator first of all it is 5 full days a week it is not a lot of money. As it is on top of school fees. So to find a facilitator that is prepared to do that, these children are demanding so they are very exhausting and with a child like ben you cant just choose anybody they have to be mature, gotta have some experience. I made a suggestion at the beginning of the yr, I had a round table meeting to approach mom and dad. It was not a pleasant experience and there is a lot of animosity between the parents. I think bringing up a boy like this is not easy and they haven't had counseling. The school has requested it. Mom is

going to a support group but as a couple they need some management skills. We need them to come to the party. You have to be very careful that you don't label all behavior with the disorder and then nothing is done. We actually still have to put things in place there is no help in just saying this child is different. We actually need to help them because they are different. So I think that's where the training comes in. How can we help this little boy. We have been interviewing facilitators because I have recommended that he doesn't go into senior primary without one. Just because the days are very long for him and very tiring for him and myself. I think we could be more productive with a facilitator. And he is a frustrated little boy. You know like yesterday we had dress up for our play. Had to dress up as a character. Then talk about who they were in their book etc he crawled on his hands and knees around the classroom and refused to do it. And there are some battles I fight and some I don't. and it was just impossible to find time to fight with him. Because we are practicing for the play and we had book reviews etc. the children just ignored him. He was looking for attention, giggling and being silly and they just ignored him. So he is not getting their attention so I don't know why he keeps pursuing it.

R: what is the other children's understanding of his disorder

P: the children are very good, I just whisper in their ear every now and then and say you know, can you be patient, he is sitting next to you and I know it's hard but you can come and tell me. they get frustrated with him. Today he had peanuts and play time and he threw the peanuts until he got the child in the eye now a salty peanut in the eye is jolly sore. So that's what he does. This morning he was hitting a child with his library bag. So this is the type of thing he does. So the children get agitated although they try hard because they know he is different. Jan the thing is too is that I have had to determine what battles I am prepared to fight and I also am very aware that he is aware of what he is doing. And that is what makes me scared because he knows that he is being defiant. The zulu teacher called him out today I don't know what he did, and I actually chose not to deal with it because I am his class teacher and I think I deal with it enough that I feel like I don't need to so I got his previous teacher from last year to deal with it and I still actually haven't gone to the bottom of what actually happened but he comes waltzing through and she puts him outside the office and he sits there and smiles at me. And then I just think he just knows that he has got his way. They can be very manipulative. I think you have to, there is a fine line between the label that they are different that they will push boundaries and that they are non-conformists and you

have to put strategies in place for that you know. Like starting at the green dot, finishing at the red dot. And you dangle some carrots, and set times but it is just on going. You know I have had better days, but then I have no success. And I often wonder what is happening at home over that time. The very beginning of the year I would email mom immediately after a good day and ask, can you put your finger on it, was it diet was it something at how but there never seemed to be a pattern. His au pair came in last week and looked at me with big eyes and said you know I am so desperate we beg him to conform do his homework have his dinner, etc. she said she is so tired of begging.

R: what is your teaching experience

P: My first post was on the b_____ and then I have been here for 15yrs. Altogether 23 yrs. I have had aspie kids before and if you have the right parent support and other support in place and everyone works together it can be very successful and I have had some very good results with the children I have taught in the past I have just found this one very frustrating. I think you have to have the support structures in place. You know he cant not eat breakfast. Those kind of things. he cant have meds in morning and at tea time with not having eaten since supper. You know I can't monitor those things. He is on Ritalin.

R: Parents support?

P: mom is going to a support group

P: The child was only diagnosed half way through they year. Quite new. You suspect it and you watch a child and they haves some symptoms but you pick some of those up in other children. So it has been quite a late diagnosis. She is getting some support I think it is very hard for them as parents. He has a sister and it must be equally frustrating for her. I often can pick up what type of day I am going to have by the time he arrives. I try to engage him before he gets into the classroom. I try and stop him at the door for eye contact how are you, greeting etc and very often I can tell what kind of a day I am in for. There is this little frustrated boy but he is just his worst enemy. I can see immediately just from that engagement in the morning. I actually for a child like him that needs to know what his routine is for the day and what I am expecting so I do it with my whole class and I sit them all day and say right this is what I expect of you today, this is what we are doing. Sometimes I write it on the board and play the day with him. I think he did four lines today, I did his heading and boarding (cos that is irrelevant I can do it for him) all he had to do was give me the info, I think he gave

me four lines. But you just feel desperate. He isn't performing to be honest he is very bright his tests are the weakest in the class. He is the weakest. He can't do the written output. He hasn't done enough written work in his little life to actually produce it successfully. I know he has got it. I think one on one his life will be so much easier. But I have 24 children. I have put him into small group for next year for language and maths so that is a group of about 9. We have interviewed the facilitator. And I have suggested we employ a facilitator that could also be the au pair. You can't just have teachers and facilitators and au pairs going in and out of this boy's life but that someone takes on the whole role, so that they can build a relationship, do homework, make a routine, for homework etc and then if the relationship is good she would be a suitable facilitator but we haven't got to that outcome yet. I think we are narrowing our chances this little boy needs some other support. And I think the facilitator might be the solution. It is something we need to try. We have tried everything else. He is having play therapy it really hasn't made any difference. In himself it might be helping but socially and in this environment I haven't seen any improvement. He was given a star chart by the psychologist and I think he got two stars out of it, now for the whole term now that is negative reinforcement. It's not productive so then you have to find something else so I haven't seen an improvement in this environment. But I also feel if we get a facilitator that comes straight into the classroom it doesn't work. He can't keep going through facilitators. He can't keep winning the battle. That was my suggestion in July and look we are in November now.

R: Does the school make any kind of ultimatum for this child in this school based on your experiences this year?

P: It was my suggestion. So the school have taken on interviews for facilitators for the family so they are in that process. He has had one girl that might take him on but there have been another two who have turned down the position. As I said facilitation is tricky. They are often very experienced, highly qualified but there is not a lot of money in it. You can't expect parents to pay more when the school fees are so high. So we are in the interviewing process for next year.

P: I am always so determined with kids like this, to get it right but I think this has been quite a trial year for him and it hasn't been the most productive year, I would love to say it has been and that we had the support in place but it hasn't been like that so I feel a little bit heart sore about this little boy. I dreamt last night that he cut the cake into a thousand pieces. He is just, it's worrying me as the year comes to an end

and especially cos its grade 3 and we train them up to carefully for what they can expect in senior primary. And I don't think he is ready, but I didn't think they could keep him back a year cos I think he is too bright and he would be bored. And the children would be younger. But I think if we can get it right with the facilitator that is the key.

P: I think sometime as teachers we need support with children like this. You know for myself, I would have loved some more input for myself. I know that they need to counsel the parents and they need to help them but I feel like sometimes I am the one who needs the support. I need to know. I have had some guidelines but not enough. You know we have around table we have had 2 or 3 a year. But it is not enough I need almost every week to liase with the team to talk about what we need.

R: What changes did you have to make in the class

R: I tried my best to keep him in the group with the others cos socially he needs that interactions. What I have done is prep the table that he is coming to, and tell them why I have chosen them and given them tools to work with. But then I often have to move him away and put him next to me when it doesn't work you have to give him lots of prompts and time frames. I do use these with the whole class, so start the day by outlining the whole day. This is what we are doing. Then the starting and the finishing this is a start green dot and this is a red finish dot. It hasn't ben hugely successful. I sit with him and one on one is when you get the best out of him otherwise as soon as I leave him he might do a little bit on his own but it is not persistent. I have had to remove his stationary. He uses my stationary off my desk. He was too distracted by it, breaks everything.

P: HE IS A VERY FRUSTRATED CHILD, CUTTING UP HIS WORK INTO HUNDREDS OF PIECES AND I just feel like with all the therapy he has had this year I would love to have seen more progress.

P: he goes for speech therapy. He has good and bad days with her too. Some does he is productive and on a bad day it is a struggle. And that is one on one.

P: a facilitator can do some much more than I can. Because that's what he needs. He needs the constant prompting. I cant leave him in the classroom unattended to finish work before he can move to comps or pe etc. whereas a facilitator would be able to sit with him to work with him.

R: what training have you had

P: I have done an inclusion course. it was a 3 day conference and they covered all aspects of inclusion. Some was useful and some not. What has to happen is the whole team has to work together to support the child. But inclusion is here to stay but that involves team work. So this year I have struggled to include this child. With inclusion a facilitator is something they recommend. Unless they are in a class of 9 or 10. Or atleast until they develop the coping skills to move on on their own. In passed experience I have worked with a child in gr1 I worked well with the facilitator in my class. As a could the parents were great they were supportive and on the same page. There were a lot of boundaries and he is now in grade 11 without a facilitator and coping. He is always going to be different. But its fine he can cope. Handover session for next year, with every aspect of the child's learning for the teacher.

School Four

R: Tell me about your school

P: This is a co-ed school from 000 to high school. Each phase has its own head and is almost run in isolation. There is an HOD of FP and then the head of the Pre-Primary and HOD of the SP and then the high school has a headmaster. All have management meeting together. Then of course, we do have a GB as this is a pvt school.

R: What is your understanding of inclusion?

P: This whole inclusion thing, we have always had different kinds of children at this school. A boy in a wheel chair, quite a few deaf students, hard of hearing, two cochlear implant children and then we have had quite a few children on the spectrum. Some have gone all the way through. In fact there is one in high school at the moment who started off here in preprimary. I have had a child on the spectrum before, he is now in Grade 7 so we have had quite few children with special needs and have been luck as they just seem to have slotted into our school. You do have to adjust a few things and you do have to let the other children know. The learner in my class now was screened about 4 years ago as I actually taught his older sister. I recommended he go back to preschool for another to help with his social skills. His social skills needed to develop a little more. So he in fact is 9 he should be in Grade 3 he did grade 0 here and then he went into grade 1 and he has always had a teacher aid.

R: Describe your class

P: We normally have between 22 and 24, that's our normal but now because I have him I have 23. That is really just a space issue. To fit him and his assistant in the class and so he has his extra space.

P: They have their own little area, but he also has a desk in the classroom. So he has two desks. If we are doing art or something that he can participate in he has got his own place that he can sit with us. Sometimes Aid sits next to him at his desk in with the rest of the children. Otherwise she takes him aside and adapts whatever we are doing. So a lot of the things she does she has to do flash cards for him, um a lot on the white board like writing up homework we just find it easier he copies from her on the whiteboard rather than from the main board. But he is getting quite good. Actually he has initiated writing the date by himself. We were like so excited! Um I mean every little thing is exciting with a child like that. We want him to be part of a group socially so in the mornings we encourage him to come play with the children because

they build and they draw and that sort of stuff he often sits and watches. But to us that's important to because he is learning and now he is starting to verbalize with them and they are starting to include him. They will say "what do you think _____" or "do you want to have a go" and he will say yes or no, which is quite nice.

R: And your class...

P: Yes 23 learners and all different abilities, mixed, I have some that are exceptionally bright and some that are real strugglers but I group teach for everything, English, math, the only thing they really do altogether is usually art and that sort of stuff. I started the year putting _____ in my bottom group but of course they progressed and he didn't so by about July we decided to put him into his own group. His language has improved, he never talked and now mom says he is even talking about others in the class. He is very sweet

P: There was absolutely no speech when he came. There was no every now and again. But now we are getting sentences short ones there has been the most progress this year. Mom says he is talking about all the children in the class. The children do love him

R: Tell me about classroom support

P: He goes to OT with someone at school and then speech he does on a sat. it is difficult with him in and out of the class all the time so we decided not to do too much at school so he goes on a sat. So it is better for him. No that's all he goes to. He goes to speech and OT. I have been encouraging home to participate in sports. So I do the grade 2 swimming so I take him with me at the beginning of the year he couldn't keep up but he was with me so it was fine.

R: the primary school in general – they offer support classes?

P: We have a big AEU section so we have remedial, speech and lang, OT, lady who does ball therapy so we have quite a lot. This Christmas they are increasing the size of the space. We try not let the children go out in a learning subject so they got in music or life skills, we are quite firm about that.

R: Your experience teaching learner with autism

P: I have had one other learner with aspergers. At the beginning of the year when I heard I was getting _____ I did go up to Pretoria for a conference. I must say it did terrify me it is a very visual, they had all these movies of these children and I thought oh no how am I going to cope. But _____ has always been there and you know we have always worked very well together if she has something else she needs to do then

I will take him so we help each other. And she has been fantastic. She has studied a lot and has read a lot of books. The sad thing is she will eventually want to teach and we will have to find him another facilitator. Which is sad because she is really good. I was dreading having another adult there but it has actually been great. I'm lucky I could have hated her. She could have been very bossy or loud but she just very quietly gets on with it.

R: How long has she been with him

P: Second year.

R: So she was with him in Grade 1 and then came up with him to grade 2?

P: Yes in grade 0 there was a problem they tried 4 or 5 people and they just couldn't find anyone. When they found her she was just such a gem. But you know we are just not sure whether she will be here next year. She might stay one more year which would be nice to finish the foundation phase. He will always need an aid he will never be able to go on his own but maybe at senior primary he will be ready for someone else.

R: What kind of conference did you go to

P: It was purely on autism

R: Was it a fish bowl course?

P: Yes and it was Unica school. That's all I did. It's just trial and error really. You know we sit and chat and come up with...we know he needs.

R: What do you think you picked up in the course that you were able to transcend in your class?

P: Definitely that they need lots of visual, flash cards.

R: Behavior cards?

P: Not really we find he actually he last year he had a schedule strip. This year he hasn't needed it. It's been amazing. He started off with it and gradually he it just wasn't important to him and he seemed to cope. And you know I always say to them I say to the whole class this is what we are going to do today. Remember today is Monday so we are doing English then...and all of them need it and so I do give them the program and he seems fine.

R: So the structure in the classroom in general is assisting him

P: Yes, he knows now I will remind him. We liaise with the parents, to bring stuff like pe kit and he has been quite good like that.

R: Any other changes or structuring of your classroom?

P: Not particularly no he slotted in we had some quite hectic days because suddenly on a day a show will arrive and they have forgotten to tell us and we have to go and watch a show, and he is fine. You'll say is that ok? And he'll say yes that's ok and he is happy as long as he is with his friends. We did have a little thing with him with assembly he didn't want to go and he was quite adamant. And he didn't want the children touching him. If they tried to say come with me we going to assembly. He would come with the teacher but he would not go with the children. Then I said to mom lets not make it a big thing bring him after assembly so he normally comes at 8. I think she was also rushing him in the mornings and that was also upsetting him and he was associating assembly with being rushed. So it may not actually have been the assembly. I mean he can sit. He does polish the floor a little. I am amazed.

R: Are there any behavior issues?

P: He does sometime, his way of affection is licking so we had to train him out of that because he would come lick me and I would have to say _____ come and hug me don't lick me. And he has learnt much better no he is not licking as much he sometimes if the children do something he doesn't like he will shout at them and say no! and shut up! But we are quite firm and he has spot and we say ____ that is unacceptable and we say go to your spot and he goes the whole way there he says no spot no spot and then he goes stands there for a few minutes and then will come back and say sorry he always goes to the child and says sorry. A couple of times he has bitten but it is usually when the children are pointing and he bites their finger. But it is just because he doesn't have the words. Sometimes he will slap cos he doesn't know how to interact and they get upset and he gets very upset if they cry he will say don't cry don't cry ____ sorry

R: Do you have teasing in the class?

P: Not really we had to stamp out, they can egg him on to do naughty things and there are a couple that will eg him on and say _____ say something and he doesn't know any better. But they don't tease him and they love him. We did sit them down because he did come up with some of the children so some new more than others, and we just said he works differently and we have got to be tolerant and sometimes he will go out and do other things that you don't do and sometimes when you all having to sit he is lying down, doesn't mean you can lie down with him, but it has been very good.

R: Any physical changes in class

P: Not really, I do move the children around every term and they don't sit next to the same person. And he is quite happy with that. This term has been not so great because he is with an only child who is very intolerant and she has had to learn and you have to be firm. So next term he will sit with someone else. We always put him on the outside of the row so that _____ can get a chair and sit next to him that's the only thing. Then he has an area off to the side of the class which is his only and no one else goes there. And he also has a desk in the storeroom, he does go in there because he has a comp program that he does when _____ goes and it makes a noise and is distracting .

School five

R: Describe your teaching experience

P: I have been teaching at the school for 8 years, prior to that I had ecd experience running schools it is my passion and an area of edu that I believe to be vital and I am also involved in lecturing students on a Saturday for grade r teaching. There is such a need for that. That is my background.

R: Describe the school structure

P: Our school is essentially a prep school for boys. The _____ is actually co-ed.

P: The remedial centre is relatively new there has always been a part-time remedial teacher on hand we have a group of ot, sp and play therapists who have come in from their own practices and offer the service but over the yrs _____ has realized the need for early intervention. Next year the school will be opening two remedial classes. So that is a support class for that grade the physical location is in a quad amongst the rest of the jp. Just down the way is the therapists. Then there is also a lot of integration into the mainstream. Early days for us but it is more inclusive. But of course the question with a child with asd is that is is very specialist needs. But we do have many boys I have taught one or 2 on the spectrum and with hf aspergers. The one fellow is happily in the remedial unit. And learning beautiful very bright but has lots of quirks and such. A problem he does have is his anxiety. To watch this childs progress.

R: How many kids in your class

P: I have 20 in my group. Its an open planned system . so we have organized periods interspersed with free play which is various set up activities in different areas. The children are free to choose areas and that is a large part of our day as we believe in learning through play and then organized time and routine time. We have interns who help and then our ladies who assist with the cleaning and making paint etc. they are very involved.

R: What is your experience of inclusive edu?

P: years ago when I started teaching there were schools for children who needed extra help, like open air, that school depressed me. But even when I first started teaching I had a little girl with Downs in my class. She was a lot older than the other children but on the same level and so we included her in that group. Now it is more common to accept children with disabilities into mainstream schools but I think that special schools still have a place. Sometimes mainstream schools just aren't able to cope with

these special needs you know? And it is difficult to make sure you are familiar with any disabilities or disorders of children who are accepted into your class. So I think inclusion has its place but its not for everyone. In the past private schools like ours would only take the cream of the crop. It's not like that anymore. This school has become more inclusive in terms of learning disability. That is the aim of inclusive education. For any child you want them to achieve at least the basics in an inclusive education setting. I have taught a few children with ASD who have managed beautifully. I think the learner I had this year was just too sever to cope in mainstream school.

R: Tell me about the child with Autism Spectrum Disorders in your class.

P: Well, where do I start he was a very difficult child. From when he first arrived. He would scream and hang on the door not wanting to come inside. He didn't have much language, we had to get him a facilitator. Mom did that. He was not suited to this classroom environment.

R: How do you accommodate this child in your classroom?

P: I had to make sure the other children were going to be tolerant of him. The other children adapted. I explained to them that _____ had his own space and who the facilitator. I had a corner of the classroom that was for him. He had his visual schedule up there and we made it his own with his weighted blanket and things. We made him the visual schedule. The facilitator worked on that. I tried to use a lot more hand gestures during ringtimes and group discussions. The facilitator would work over his shoulder all the time with him. The learner has his facilitator with him at all times. His facilitator is very good with him and also with integrating him into the group with others. She would tell a group of children how to play with him.

R: What difficulties have you experienced in accommodating this child in your class?

P: It is usually a fight to get him into the class. We will negotiate with him and distrat him with visual stimuli but it was very tough. Story times were difficult, never peaceful, he would scream and move around constantly, distracting the others and myself. When he was having a bad day in the mornings he would scream and hang on the doors. He didn't want to be at school. I think the classroom was too visually stimulating for him. There was always music going on, lots of art and colours on the wall. It was too much. The noise of all the other children playing. It was too overwhelming for the poor child.

You know we accepted him and we just had to watch him and try and figure him out this year has been very tough on me. You know you have other children you can't just run after him all day. I felt stressed. I did feel alone sometimes and I am an experienced teacher. It was not an easy year.

R: Tell me about the support systems available to you in the accommodation of this child.

P: The headmaster had lots of meetings with me. He is very supportive. The other teachers were also very supportive. I was lucky to have their support this year.

R: How do you feel you could be better equipped to deal with children with special educational needs in the mainstream classroom?

P: You know that training was up to me. I would do a lot of research and I did have a lot of books and things to read. I also organized a classroom visit in a school for learners with autism. So training and exposure is a big thing.

P: So he is not going to continue in your class?

R: No from the school's point of view it was a means of showing mom that he can't cope in mainstream setting. The mom was hoping to get him into another private school of some sort. She definitely didn't want him in a special school. Mom wanted him in the real world. We didn't see eye to eye and I argued with her that he needed more tools.

P: The facilitator was leaving and we were trying to find someone else which was difficult. He came to school up to the end with his facilitator. Up until her last day with him. She was going overseas. She had given them a lot of notice but they weren't able to find anyone and then mom had been involved with ABA and she was keen to start. Her feeling was that if he was trained at home that was what she could start with 3 or 4 people just with him. She wanted him trained to be able to do the basics like listen, sit and do the school necessary things. So that was her focus so he was still has come to the therapists to receive OT and speech. But again coming here posed a problem. But just coming here posed a problem and it was all the time it takes to calm him down before you can work with him. I have been in touch with the speech therapist and up until quite recently he has been doing a lot better with the speech. Not nearly where should have been. And mom was still hoping at some point to get him into a school, a private school of some sort, she definitely didn't want him in a remedial school. But I don't think that is going to happen, he did go through our grade 1 assessment because all our 00 do. So he did the assessment with the facilitator. But of

course the scoring was difficult. And communication is a problem. Things have to be put to him in the right way for him to understand and respond even with the facilitator there were many things he couldn't do. From the schools point of view that was a means for showing mom that he couldn't cope in the mainstream class. We don't have the facilities. We have got a remedial unit that we started. But in fact I think they are using a model that where the boys come out for mainly lit, numeracy activities and then stay in class for everything else and that wouldn't really help such a case like his.