

**Novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired
learners in the foundation phase: A case of one special school**

Vanusiya Moodley

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Education

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has indicated that novice teachers in special schools usually require more training and support from their schools to have a positive teaching experience. Teachers in the foundation phase usually have a general teaching qualification that does not adequately prepare them for teaching special needs learners like visually impaired learners. Novice teachers therefore face many challenges in teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase.

This study focuses on novice teachers teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase. The dissertation is aspired to explore their experiences in teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase. Burden's theoretical framework that explores the stages of the teachers' career development was used to guide this study. The objectives of the study was to understand the experiences of novice teachers' teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase. The study also aimed at exploring the strategies used to enhance the teaching and learning of these learners according to the foundation phase curriculum. To explore this a qualitative approach and a case study design was employed. I sampled three teachers in the foundation phase at one special school. Data sources included teacher interviews, observations, questionnaires and document analysis such as teacher files which included lesson plans.

The findings were analysed and discussed according to the different data generation techniques that were utilised. The findings revealed that the teachers required more support and guidance as novice teachers on how to adapt their teaching for visually impaired learners. The teachers all stated that more practical training should be provided for special needs novice teachers. However, all teachers stated they had positive experiences teaching visually impaired learners. Teachers claimed that through experience they grow and learn new strategies to adapt their teaching for visually impaired learners. The findings also revealed

that teachers were supported by other staff such as experienced teachers, therapists and teacher aides. The teachers revealed that although they initially found it challenging, now they see it as a rewarding career choice.

DECLARATION

I, Vanusiya Moodley declare that

- a) The research report in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- b) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- c) This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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207511928

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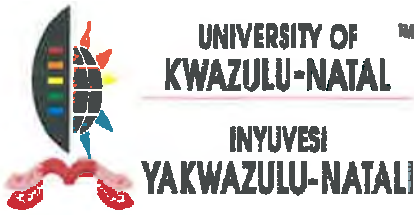
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Mrs B. Hadebe-Ndlovu

Date

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



06 August 2014

Ms Vanusiya Moodley (207511928)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: **HSS/0877/014M**

Project title: **Novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase: A case of one special school**

Dear Ms Moodley,

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application dated 30 June 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

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I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....
Dr Shenika Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: **Blanche Ndlovu**
Cc Academic Leader Research: **Professor P Morojele**
Cc School Administrator: **Mr Thoba Mthembu**

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Shenika Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4587 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4809 Email: sdmban@ukzn.ac.za / govmanm@ukzn.ac.za / mohuns@ukzn.ac.za

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All praise goes to God for being my strength and my shield.

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- To my friends and colleagues for their guidance and motivation.
- To my love, Nitesh, thank you for your continued and unfailing love, support and understanding.

DEDICATIONS

This thesis is dedicated to my late grandmother, Mrs R.A Govender, who believed education was the key to success.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAPS - Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements

PGCE - Post Graduate Certificate in Education

B.Ed. - Bachelor of Education

DoE - Department of Education

DoBE - Department of Basic Education

IEP - Individual Educational Plan

SADPD - The Secretariat of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities

UNESCO - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

DSD - Department of Social Development

DWCPD - Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities

IQMS - Integrated Quality Management System

LTSM – Learning and Teaching Support Material

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The study explored how novice teachers experienced teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase. The exploration comprised of a case study of the Foundation Phase in a special school located in the Durban geographical district. This chapter presents a discussion of the background of special education and the school in this study. Such background information is vital to understanding the context in which novice teachers had to function at the study site. The problem statement is presented in this chapter, followed by a brief overview of the literature pertaining to the study. These sections are followed by the rationale for conducting this study. The research objectives and questions are stated and a discussion of the theoretical framework that guided this study is presented. The research methods are then discussed and, finally, an outline of the study is provided.

1.2 Background and focus

During the apartheid era in South Africa, special education was provided only for white advantaged learners and therefore the education of disabled, disadvantaged learners of other ethnic groups was compromised (DoE, 2001). However, post-apartheid White Paper 6 states that all learners, regardless of their learning barriers, are to be accepted into and respected in the education system (DoE, 2001). This particular White Paper acknowledges that learners

may have different learning needs that all schools need to address by changing attitudes, behaviours, teaching methodologies, curricula, and the environment. It further states that some learners may require more intensive and specialised forms of support to be able to develop to their full potential. Special schools operate especially for this need. DoE (2001) claims that learners who require intense levels of support should receive this at special schools due to the fact that mainstream schools will be unable to provide them with the specialised support they require.

Angels Haven School (pseudonym used) is a special needs school situated in the Durban geographical area. It is classified as an LSEN (learners with special educational needs) school. At the time of the study, the school catered for approximately 294 physically disabled learners who came from various socio-economic backgrounds. The staff comprises of teachers, teacher aides, psychologists and nurses, as well as speech, occupational and physiotherapists who work together to meet the needs of the learners. This was currently the only government school in the area that catered for visually impaired learners from Grade R to Grade 12.

Research conducted by Lynch, McCall, Douglas, Mclinden and Bayo (2011) states that, for learners with visual impairments, an education in a mainstream school is not possible, especially in developing countries, due to the specialised support and assistive devices they require. A study by Rogow (2005) found that these learners can also have additional disabilities such as cerebral palsy and intellectual disabilities that further impede learning. Because these learners usually require extra support from their teachers during learning, they are placed in a school that caters for special needs learners (Salleh & Ali, 2010). Angels Haven School is such a special school and it caters for learners who are visually impaired. The school follows the mainstream curriculum used by other Foundation Phase teachers in South Africa. However, in this special school teachers have to adapt the curriculum to meet

the needs of diverse learners such as those suffering from visual impairments or other psychological disabilities such as cerebral palsy. The teachers in the school do not have to hold a special needs qualification and can have a general teaching qualification. They are supported by other staff members such as occupational therapists and teacher aides who have acquired skills in reading Braille and who usually have years of experience working with visually impaired learners. It was therefore deemed important to explore the role that teachers play and the experiences that they bring to the teaching environment, with special reference to those teachers who enter the classroom as novice teachers in the Foundation Phase.

The study thus focused on the experiences of novice teachers in the special needs educational environment at Angels Haven School and explored their experiences of teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase.

1.3 Research Problem

Research has demonstrated that special needs teachers are scarce (Mcleskey, Tyler & Flippen, 2004). This may be due to the fact that the majority of novice teachers' experiences determine whether they stay or leave the profession (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Lui & Donaldson, 2004). Davis (2003) states that teaching visually impaired learners requires that the teacher is able to adapt the curriculum to cater for these learners' complex needs, whereas Topar and Rosenblum (2013) claim that more research is required in order to improve how teachers educate learners with visual impairments. A study conducted by Kesiktas and Akcamete (2011) found that teachers lack sufficient knowledge and skills to effectively teach visually impaired learners. Therefore, there was a need for this study to be conducted on the experiences of teaching visually impaired learners to provide novice teachers with more effective ways of teaching these learners. The question that

therefore underpinned this study was: *What are the experiences of novice teachers who teach visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase?*

1.4 Literature Review

Novice special needs teachers often battle to adapt their teaching methodology to meet the special needs of their students (Jones, Youngs & Frank, 2013; Billingsley, Carlson & Klein, 2004). This may result in challenges for novice teachers because learners with visual impairments require special education modifications, appropriate educational materials, specialised equipment, resources, and special measures such as extra time (Palmer, 2005). Research has also revealed that teachers require training in assistive technology that is required for visually impaired learners (Kamei-Hannan, Howe, Herrera & Erin, 2012). The study by Lynch *et al.* (2011) found that an important aspect of learning for visually impaired learners is Braille, and that teachers of such learners require detailed knowledge of the Braille code as well as techniques of developing learning through touch. However, in my experiences as a novice teacher, I never had any exposure to learning Braille prior to teaching at the special school and therefore I am still gaining experience through my teaching. This observation is supported by Gehrke and McCoy (2007), who claim that novice teachers learn from experience as they teach their learners with special needs.

According to Batir (2008) and Fraser and Maguvhe (2008), learners without vision are deprived of certain aspects to learning because they cannot perceive or see the world around them. It is for this reason that they require special teaching methods. This is supported by Bardin and Lewis (2008), who argue that learners who are visually impaired may reach developmental milestones differently compared to learners with sight, due to their lack of

sensory input and the restricted interaction with their environment. Therefore, Cox and Dykes (2001) suggest that teachers must look at teaching learners using their various senses like touching different materials even though they cannot see them. Jurmang (2004) claims that it is vital that teachers acknowledge that these learners have special needs and they must pay attention to these needs by adapting the learning environment to facilitate learning. I concur with these researchers because in my classroom, for example, learners with visual impairments may need actual objects to assist them in reading as they cannot use pictures to guide them. Learners with visual impairments may also need to be assessed differently compared to their sighted peers. They may require a longer time to complete activities as Braille reading requires more time than visual reading. Teachers may also need to read questions orally while the learners use Braille to provide the answers (Vaughn, Bos & Schumm, 2000).

To meet the needs of visually impaired learners, Metsiou, Papadopoulous and Agaliotis (2011) state that a school should, in addition to the mainstream academic curriculum, have an expanded core curriculum that focuses on the specific needs of visually impaired learners. This idea is supported by Agbeke (2005) who suggests that educational programs developed for special needs learners should focus on academic performance, daily life skills, orientation and mobility, and social interaction. Palmer (2005) and Westling and Fox (2009) suggest that teachers should develop an 'individual education plan' (IEP) to outline the needs and address the barriers that each specific learner experiences. However, research has shown that novice teachers have challenges with lesson planning and developing an IEP for their learners' unique needs (Casey, Dunlap, Brister & Davidson, 2011).

At the school under study, the mainstream South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is followed for the Foundation Phase learners. In light of the above challenges for teachers of visually impaired learners, it was therefore important to explore how novice teachers adapted the mainstream curriculum to support teaching and learning in a classroom for visually impaired Foundation Phase learners.

Fraser and Maguvhe (2008) demonstrate that universities and education departments do not provide adequate training for educators to teach learners with special needs. Moreover, Fraser and Maguvhe (2008) argue that some educators possess negative attitudes towards visually impaired learners simply because they lack the necessary skills and confidence to teach these learners. This observation is supported by Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2006), who also claim that novice teachers have negative attitudes towards learners with special needs. However, according to Griffin, Kilgor, Winn and Otis-Wilborn (2008), novice teachers who were in schools that provided support and collaboration had a more positive experience and thus developed professionally. It is vital that a novice teacher collaborates with a mentor teacher who has experienced teaching special needs learners (Jones *et al.*, 2013). Teachers in a special school also collaborate with other professionals such as occupational therapists, speech and physiotherapists, and teacher aides to assist in the teaching of their learners (Giangreco, 1997). This idea is supported by other researchers who suggest that novice teachers should use a team approach to teach their special needs learners, because this allows them to obtain advice and gain support from others (Fraser & Maguvhe, 2008; Grum & Bobinski, 2005; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007).

Many studies have been conducted on teaching visually impaired learners; however, there is a lack of research regarding the experiences of novice teachers who teach such learners in the Foundation Phase. In order to create a positive learning environment for visually impaired

learners to reach their full potential, novice teachers require more information on others' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners.

1.5 Rationale for and Purpose of the Study

The topic was drawn from my own personal experiences because I taught visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase prior to the study. As a fairly newly qualified teacher at a school for physically disabled learners, I had faced various challenges in teaching visually impaired learners. For example, I had not been exposed to Braille before accepting the position and therefore I had to start learning this skill as I taught my learners. I have since observed that teachers have to learn various innovative ways to teach concepts to visually impaired learners compared to sighted learners. For example, a teacher may have to use an actual flower for the learners to touch and smell instead of a picture. Teachers also have to provide individual support to these learners during a task; for example, they have to read what is written on the blackboard for other learners.

Research conducted by Fraser and Maguvhe (2008) shows that most teachers who work in schools that cater for visually impaired learners obtained a general education training qualification; therefore they lack the appropriate knowledge to meet the needs of these learners adequately. I concur with Fraser and Maguvhe (2008) because university students do not receive specific training in the teaching of learners with special needs in the Foundation Phase. My own experience is a case in point, as I have been teaching from experience gained at the school I am currently working at. As a result, I perceived the imperative need for conducting this study in order to learn more effective ways of and approaches to educating visually impaired learners.

The research site was the only government school in the Durban area that catered for visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase at the time of the study. The Department of Education launched the White Paper 6 policy in 2006 (DoE, 2001) which states that special schools in South Africa could be used as resource centres in order to share their specialised experience in working with learners who attend these schools. This particular school is therefore perceived as a resource centre where knowledge could be gained that will assist novice teachers who want to gather information about the teaching of visually impaired learners. This is important in South Africa where mainstream schools are opening their doors to inclusive education and where many teachers may not be aware of ways to teach learners with special needs. Therefore, the findings of this study will hopefully be utilised to improve the training and support of teachers who teach visually impaired learners. It was also envisaged that the study findings would afford me the opportunity to reflect on my own teaching of visually impaired learners.

1.6 Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

1. To understand the experiences of novice teachers who were engaged in teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase; and
2. To explore the strategies used to enhance the teaching and learning of visually impaired learners with reference to the Foundation Phase curriculum.

1.7 Research Questions

1. What are novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase?
2. How do novice teachers' experiences influence the teaching of visually impaired learners?

1.8 Theoretical Framework

The study was framed by Burden's (1980) theory that explores how teachers move through three stages in their teaching career. This theory was relevant to this research as it examines how teachers develop from their first year of teaching till their fifth year of teaching. This period of teaching is usually characterised by a teacher moving from being a novice teacher to becoming a more mature and experienced teacher (Burden, 1980). Burden (1980) claims that teachers have different experiences and concerns as they progress in their careers. Firstly, Burden (1980) looks at how first-year teachers are perceived to have limited knowledge of teaching methods and how to plan lessons. However, with time they become more knowledgeable by developing their teaching methods and, by improving their planning, they become progressively able to put all their experience into practice (Burden, 1980). The second category relates to how much knowledge teachers possess about the teaching environment they work in (Burden, 1980).

Burden (1980) claims that novice teacher's progress from lacking information about the curriculum and learner characteristics to understanding these more fully, and that they are able to reflect on and thereby improve their teaching as they gain experience. Beginner teachers have a limited understanding of the role and image of what a teacher should be

(Burden, 1980). Another important category for Burden (1980) is teachers' professional insight and perception. He posits that teachers are better able to understand the complexities of being a teacher through experience. How teachers approach the curriculum and instruction is the next category. Here, Burden (1980) states that teachers learn how to adapt the curriculum to meet their learners' needs. Burden argues that teachers move from feeling confused as beginner teachers to gaining confidence as they grow in experience (Burden, 1980). Lastly, Burden (1980) looks at how teachers develop and become more willing to try new methods.

1.9 Research Design and Methodology

1.9.1 Research paradigm

Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) state that a paradigm is an all-encompassing system that integrates practice and thinking and that defines the nature of enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Blanche *et al.* (2006) identify three types of paradigms, namely a positivist, an interpretive, and a constructionist paradigm. For the purpose of this research, I have chosen the interpretive paradigm.

According to Blanche *et al.* (2006), the interpretive paradigm allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of people's subjective experiences. The interpretive paradigm allowed me to explore the subjective experiences of novice teachers who were teaching visually impaired learners and to explore what was considered their reality (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). From a point of empathetic understanding, I attempted to make sense of what my participants revealed to me by interacting with them and listening to their experiences of teaching visually impaired learners (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). This paradigm allowed me to produce qualitative

data in a flexible and continuous manner using qualitative methods namely: interviewing, a questionnaire, observations, and document analysis, as suggested by Lichtman (2006).

1.9.2 Research approach

Blanche *et al.* (2006) distinguish between the different approaches to research, namely quantitative and qualitative research that looks differently at knowledge claims, strategies and methods. For the purpose of this study I chose to focus on a qualitative approach.

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research allows the researcher to understand how participants make sense of their world and experiences. In this research study the qualitative research approach sought to understand and interpret novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners. I utilised qualitative methods, such as interviewing and a questionnaire, to generate the data that allowed the participants to tell their own stories about teaching visually impaired learners in context (Lichtman, 2006).

1.9.3 Case study

According to Walter (2006), methodology refers to the frame of reference for that particular research that is influenced by the paradigm we choose. Lichtman (2006) outlines different types of methodologies that can be used in qualitative research such as ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenology and narrative research. Yin (2009) refers to a case study as a study within a particular context to gather rich descriptions. In this particular study, the special school catering for visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase was the context. The Foundation Phase teachers who were teaching these learners were the particular cases used to explore their experiences in teaching these learners. A single case

study design was used that focused on the experiences of Foundation Phase teachers teaching visually impaired learners (Yin, 2009).

1.9.4 Sampling

According to Blanche *et al.* (2006), sampling refers to the selection of participants from an entire population and involves looking at what people, settings, events or behaviours to observe. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) distinguish between a probability sample, which is random and represents the wider population, and a non-probability sample, which represents only a particular group. Non-probability samples can include convenience, quota or purposive sampling (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

Cohen *et al.* (2011) refer to purposive sampling as a type of non-probability sampling method where the researcher chooses participants from a particular group who they feel would be appropriate for the study. Therefore the results of such a study cannot be generalised to the whole population (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). In this study I used purposive sampling by means of which participants were selected because, at the time of the study, they were Foundation Phase teachers who were teaching visually impaired learners. This was a small scale research study, therefore only three Foundation Phase teachers teaching visually impaired learners were asked to discuss their experiences as novice teachers in the Foundation Phase.

1.9.5 Data generation tools

Blanche *et al.* (2006) state that data generation involves generating data that capture the meaning of what the researcher is observing. Qualitative methods such as interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis are therefore used to generate data. Interviews allow the researcher and participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live

in an open and natural conversation (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Lichtman (2006) defines the semi-structured interview as using a pre-planned set of questions while still allowing the researcher the opportunity to probe participants for further information. In this research study I conducted semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule that allowed me to explore the topic in depth while giving teachers the opportunity to express their experiences in their own words (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). The interview also allowed the participants to be authentic and open without fear of ridicule from other colleagues if they perhaps talked about their challenges of teaching visually impaired learners as novice teachers (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Some of the data utilised for this study were therefore obtained from interviews that I conducted with the research participants. Each interview lasted between 15-20 minutes.

According to Cohen *et al.* (2011), a semi-structured questionnaire refers to a questionnaire that uses open-ended questions that allow the respondents to answer in their own words. I utilised a semi-structured questionnaire as it allowed me to set questions without assuming what the answers should be. Because the participants knew me professionally, this data collection tool was useful in allowing the participants to share what they felt without responding in my presence if they felt shy or too embarrassed to reveal certain aspects during the interview. Questionnaires were emailed to the participants to be completed at a time that was convenient for them.

According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), observations occur when a researcher goes into the research site (such as the Foundation Phase classroom) and observes what is happening. Using a semi-structured observation schedule, I observed each of the three teachers separately while they were conducting a lesson in the classroom. It allowed me to

observe first-hand what was occurring rather than relying on what the participants revealed during the interviews or in response to the questionnaire (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

According to Lichtman (2006), document analysis includes analysing articles, official documents or journals that are important to qualitative research because they serve as written records about people's ideas and perceptions. I therefore analysed the teachers' files that contained documents such as their lesson plans. Document analysis was therefore used as a data collection tool in addition to other data collection methods, because it allowed me to cross check and validate the information that was generated from the participants, or to augment any information that may have been excluded from the interviews, questionnaire responses, and observations. Copies of the interview schedule, the questionnaire, and my observation schedule that were used as data collection tools are attached as appendices (Appendices B1, B2, and B3 respectively).

1.9.6 Data analysis

Blanche *et al.* (2006) state that data analysis involves transforming the generated data in order to answer the research questions of the study. According to Blanche *et al.* (2006), qualitative data analysis involves formulating a thick description of the phenomenon being studied. Inductive thematic analysis is a process whereby the researcher moves from the specific to the general through studying the data and allowing themes to emerge (Lichtman, 2006). In this study the data that were generated were transcribed and analysed through a process of inductive thematic analysis. Thus, from a point of empathic understanding, I placed the narrated real-life events and experiences of the teachers into perspective (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). I perused the data that were generated by making notes and identifying themes. The data were then coded into specific themes. These themes were explored more closely to

ensure proper coding and interpretation, until no new insights emerged (Blanche et al., 2006). I also analysed the participating teachers' files and lesson plans with reference to the requirements as set out in the relevant policy documents. In addition, I made comprehensive field notes during my observations of the teachers' lessons. The analysis of the data started from the beginning of the data generation process (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Triangulation of the data allowed a process of validation to ensure that no inaccuracies occurred in the presentation of the findings (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

1.10 Definition of terms

- The term **'novice teachers'** refers to teachers who have less than two years or no teaching experience at all (Gatbonton, 2008).
- **'Foundation Phase'** refers to the first phase in the education system which includes Grade R (the reception year) up to Grade 3. It is a four-year phase and the subjects comprise of Home Language, Mathematics, Life skills and a first additional Language from Grade 1. The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements are used as the curriculum in the foundation phase (DoBE, 2011).
- **'Visual impairment'** is a broad term that can be described as blindness with total or a high grade of vision loss. Visually impaired learners will need Braille for reading and writing. The term also refers to learners with low vision and partial visual loss that can be corrected with visual devices (Haddad, 2009).
- **'Braille'** refers to a tactile substitution for visual letter forms for the blind which consists of a series of raised dots that can be read using your fingers (Sadato, 2005, p. 557).

1.11 Brief Overview of the Study Report

This study report is divided into five chapters. In this section the structure of each chapter is briefly outlined.

Chapter One is an introductory chapter that commences with a broad background to the study. Subsequently, special needs education and the school that was the study site are discussed. The chapter also presents the statement of the research problem, a brief review of related literature, and the rationale for the study. The objectives of the study and the research questions are also stated. The theoretical framework within which the study was situated is outlined and the research design, the methodology of choice, and the structure of the study are presented.

Chapter Two reviews relevant literature to explore novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase. The literature reviewed included relevant academic articles, research reports, and scholarly books. The theoretical framework that underpinned the study is also discussed in greater depth.

Chapter Three provides an account of how the research was designed and conducted. The chapter explores the research approach, paradigm, and methodology utilised to undertake the study. The sample, data generation tools and the data analysis process are also discussed.

Chapter Four presents the data obtained from the interviews and a discussion of the findings after analysis. The chapter includes verbatim inserts from the interview transcripts. The four themes that emerged from the data are discussed.

Chapter Five concludes the study with a summary of the findings. Recommendations are also presented.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief historical background to special needs education and presented some insight into current special needs schools that cater for visually impaired learners. This was followed by the statement of the research problem that sparked a need for the study topic to be explored further. A brief overview of previous literature was presented and the rationale for the study was discussed. The objectives of the study and the main research questions were then stated. The theoretical framework underpinning this study was discussed briefly. An overview of the research design, methodology and data generation methods were presented. Finally, the structure of this study report was outlined. The next chapter will present a review of related literature surrounding the topic of novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners. The theoretical framework that guided the study will also be explored.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of various publications and literature that relate to the experiences of teachers who teach visually impaired learners. The chapter presents a review of the place special education has in today's education system where every learner must be catered for in all classrooms. I explore how disabled learners, such as visually impaired learners, still require the services of special schools post-apartheid even though we have inclusive schools. I also review the impact of education policy and how it shapes the education of special needs learners in these schools. I further explore the special role that teachers play in these special schools, with specific focus on the experiences of novice teachers. I frame my discussion within Burden's theory of the different stages of teacher development, because this theory assisted me in exploring how teachers of visually impaired learners continue to develop and learn through experience.

I also review how these teachers collaborate and are supported in the education system. Because the focus of this study was novice teachers' experiences with visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase, I review the concepts 'visual impairment' and 'Foundation Phase', and present a discussion of my exploration of the literature on how teachers adapt the curriculum and their assessment strategies for visually impaired learners and how they provide appropriate learning and support material and devices needed for visually impaired learners.

Teachers who teach visually impaired learners share experiences that may be different from the experiences of those who teach sighted learners. In his introduction to White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001, p. 3), the late Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, clearly states that “...special schools will be strengthened rather than abolished”. The most important statement that the Minister made at the time was that “learners with severe disabilities will be accommodated in these vastly improved special schools as part of an inclusive system” (DoE, 2001, p. 3). Thus, as far back as 2001, the government planned to improve the quality of education in special schools, and therefore special schools still hold a very valuable place in the South African education system even though it has become an inclusive rather than a separate system as it was in the past. For this reason, it is important that special schools receive due recognition and are also explored under the inclusive education umbrella.

2.2 A Place for Special Education in an Inclusive System

In the past, special education in South Africa was characterised by race and disability. During the apartheid era, special schools that were well resourced were mainly for white disabled learners. Learners could only gain admission on the basis of the rigid medical categories they fell into and if their parents could afford it. This meant that disadvantaged disabled learners could not get a quality education they deserved (DoE, 2001). The curriculum did not provide for diverse learners and many learners therefore were pushed out of the system. Special attention may have been given to some special schools but some phases were overlooked, like Early Childhood Development (DoE, 2002).

However, post-apartheid the Department of Education began to re-examine special education and formulated a new policy called the Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System. This policy established the principle of

inclusive education whereby all learners should receive a quality education (DoE, 2002). The White Paper defines ‘inclusive education’ as acknowledging that all learners have the potential to learn despite their differences (DoE, 2001). Therefore, inclusive education means respecting learners’ different needs and their disabilities, such as visual impairment (DoE, 2001). White Paper 6 also recognises that learners with disabilities (such as visual impairment) are learners who are most vulnerable to barriers in our system, because in the past they had “special needs” that were not correctly catered for (DoE, 2001). Therefore the question arises: *Now that we have an inclusive education system, are visually impaired learners being catered for equally?*

UNESCO (2005) argues that although inclusion allows disabled learners the opportunity to be involved in mainstream education, the doors on facilities of special education for learners who need it must not be closed. This is an important factor as inclusive education has had some challenges in terms of implementation, especially when accommodating learners with disabilities, and it is a fact that special schools are still needed for these learners. The DoBE (2011) states that schools must respect learner diversity such as visual impairment, and they must do away with their evaluation systems that reward only certain abilities (DoBE, 2011). Moreover, as far back as 1995 Burden claimed that mainstream schools expected learners to fit into a particular way of schooling and questioned whether the inclusive goal would really be reached. Subsequently, Farrell (2004) demonstrated that, in some cases, special needs learners were put into mainstream schools, only to be separated into special classes or compelled to attend special groups, which defeated the true purpose of inclusivity and ultimately caused the segregation of special needs learners rather than including them. Haq and Mundia (2012) state that the education of learners with moderate disabilities is not looked upon in the same light as that of learners who are severely disabled. They posit that

although the community accepts disabled learners, there still seems to be a stigma attached to disabled learners, as they claim that their 'special treatment' is a sign of punishment. Both Burden (1995) and the DoE (2001) argue that inclusive education should require schooling programmes to fit the child rather than expecting the child to fit into the schooling system. Research by the DoE in 2001 (DoE, 2001) showed that only about 64 200 learners with disabilities were accommodated in about 380 special schools and that an estimated 280 000 learners with disabilities were not receiving the quality education they deserved. More recently, under the inclusive dispensation, Ngcobo and Muthukrishna (2011) conducted a study on inclusion in a mainstream school and found that it did not practise the inclusive principles as set out by White Paper 6. The reality of South African education today is that many schools simply do not have the appropriate resources required to accommodate learner diversity. The harsh reality is that many special needs learners are left without a school to attend.

Engelbrecht, Oswald and Forlin (2006) reported that schools in their study had class sizes of 50 or more learners, which made it difficult for a teacher to create a positive learning environment for every learner. Ladbroke (2009) conducted a study about challenges of inclusive education in primary schools and found that educators argued that smaller class sizes with better teaching resources were needed for inclusive education to become a reality. A study conducted by Bendova, Cechackova and Sadkova (2014) found that pre-school teachers battled to accommodate special needs learners in large classes without the help of a teacher assistant. The school in this research study had small classes with not more than 15 learners and relied on the support of a teacher assistant and yet teachers still faced challenges. Therefore from my observations I concur with previous research regarding the challenges inherent with teaching special needs learners in classes with such large numbers. The

teachers in the study also lacked knowledge of how to work with these learners in an inclusive pre-school classroom. Ladbrook (2009) and Laauwen (2007) claim that, in reality, the White Paper 6 goals of full service schools and special schools as resource centres have not been achieved, because many learners with diverse needs are still stranded without a school to attend. DoE (2001) claims that inequalities in the special school system should be eradicated. However, it appears from the literature reviewed that mainstream schools are battling to accommodate these learners adequately, which implies that the initial planning for inclusivity was flawed.

Ladbrook (2009) posits that special schools have special areas of expertise and resources that are lacking in mainstream schools. In this regard, Pather (2011) makes the important claim that inclusive schools that already accommodate disabled learners would be further strengthened if they had the support of special schools and resources. Cigman (2007) concurs, stating that our education system is simply not ready to cater for every type of disability, and argues that to think that this is possible now is a fallacy. Daniel (2010) also agrees and compares urban and rural schools, stating that there are major differences between the resources in urban and rural schools where the former have far more access to specialized support such as psychologists and therapists. This author posits that, from 2009 to 2021, South Africa will have to build more full service schools to realise the goal of inclusive education. However, Mbelu (2011) argues that full service schools are not even receiving the necessary support and funding for non-disabled learners from the Department of Basic Education to function effectively.

In light of the above, the White Paper 6 states that the role of special schools in the current inclusive education system should not be disregarded. The document states that learners with

severe disabilities are to be catered for in such schools because mainstream schools are not yet ready to cater for these learners' needs. This has been corroborated by the literature, and it is clear that special schools still play an important role in our school system today, as mainstream schools are battling to cater even for mild disabilities and diverse learners.

White Paper 6 also states that it is important for both mainstream and special schools to be upgraded and supported to cater for different learners' needs (DoE, 2001). Such upgrade and support are important, as Gray (2005) found that both mainstream and special schools face challenges in accommodating disabled learners adequately. For example, it was found that some parents of learners in mainstream schools felt that disabled learners would not be able to participate in the same activities as their sighted peers, which in my view further labels them as 'different' and 'exclusive' and which may exacerbate their perception of being 'outsiders'. It is also a fact that some schools cannot cater for learners who may have multiple disabilities (Gray, 2005).

DoE (2008) recognises that it would be pointless trying to create special schools that provide support services to full service schools if those special schools themselves are not properly functional. Special schools with good resources tend to exist in urban areas only and those in rural areas lack qualified teachers with appropriate expertise (DoE, 2008). The DoE (2008) states that special schools should "specialise in the kind of support they offer so as to become centres of excellence in a particular form of support and offer an outreach programme to schools where learners with similar needs are being educated" (p. 9). Therefore, teachers at a special school should excel in how they teach disabled learners. Teachers are therefore seen as the primary resource to achieve inclusive education practices in schools, whether it occurs in a special school as a resource centre or within a mainstream school. It was thus deemed

important to explore the experiences of teachers in special schools as they are the back bone for uplifting special needs learners and creating inclusive classrooms (DoE, 2001).

However, Oswald (2007) and Lumadi (2013) found that our teachers are not aligned with the inclusive education principles and are still trained to think that learners with special needs should attend special schools. Therefore, for inclusive education to work, teachers need to change their mind-set from an individualistic deficit view to one that allows for student diversity. However, this is not simple due to past exclusionary policies that existed in South Africa (Naicker, 2005). Wildeman and Nomdo (2007) also claim that the implementation of inclusive education is still not happening in our education system. Courses that currently train teachers must develop new programmes in order to change learning and teaching in a way that supports learner diversity (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Previously, a general teacher qualification in South Africa prepared one for teaching in a mainstream classroom and teachers were required to get additional training if they wanted to teach special needs learners. This meant that mainstream teachers were unprepared to teach special needs learners, which is a problem that still exists even in today's inclusive classrooms (Oswald, 2007). I constantly engage with my colleagues in mainstream schools who are shocked to hear that currently I did not receive special needs qualification to teach in a school for special needs learners. I conclude that they feel they are not prepared to accommodate learners with special needs in their classes. Therefore there is a dire need to prepare all teachers to accommodate diverse learners in their inclusive classrooms (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma & Earle, 2009). It will be interesting to explore how novice teachers are coping in classrooms with diverse learners.

2.3 Burden's Theory as a Framework for the Study

Burden (1980) believes that teachers go through various developmental changes as they advance in their career. I have chosen this particular theory as it related to my study to determine how novice teachers experienced working with visually impaired learners for the first time and how they advanced through experience. I refer mainly to the first stage of Burden's theory which explores a novice as someone who has limited knowledge of teaching activities. However, I will also be exploring how teachers develop and grow through experience and years of teaching.

Burden (1980) argues that the perception exists that in their first year of teaching, novice teachers have very little experience of what to teach, what methods to use, and how to plan lessons. They seem to be unorganised and do not know how to manage learners and behaviours and how to keep records or identify learner problems (Burden, 1980). According to Burden's theory, novice teachers see the first year as a trial period to see if they actually like a career in teaching (Burden, 1980). Research has demonstrated that novice teachers of special needs learners are more likely to leave the profession than other teachers (Wiebke & Bardin, 2009; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), and it is therefore important that these teachers are supported during their first year and that their challenges are addressed as early as possible. It is for this reason, among others, that the experiences of novice teachers were explored in this study.

Research has shown that novice teachers are less certain about their teaching than more experienced teachers (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014). This implies that beginner teachers learn from experience as they continue their teaching career and that they will inevitably face some challenges. In a study conducted by Rieg, Paquette and Chen (2007), novice teachers

identified the main stressors in their job. They were concerned about how they would meet the needs of diverse learners in their classroom. Assessments and standardised tests also left novice teachers feeling pressured to perform up to a certain standard and to do better than teachers in other schools. They claimed that learner performance reflected on whether they were good teachers or not. Haq and Mundia (2012) state that novice teachers lack knowledge and therefore develop poor attitudes towards diverse teaching because they are left to face challenges that do not occur among more experienced teachers. Research has shown that novice teachers have limited knowledge on report planning and long term planning, which are aspects they do not learn a great deal about at university (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Melnick and Meister (2008) found that novice teachers find it even more difficult when a class has learners of various abilities, for example in the case of a class with learners who have various physical disabilities. The biggest challenge is that there isn't a curriculum designed for special needs learners, therefore novice teachers are expected to use their own creativity to adapt the curriculum, with little guidance offered (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007). Lack of curriculum guidance has been one of the biggest challenges for me personally and through the study I have found that fellow teachers also faced the same issue.

Novice teachers claim that their training in the first year of teaching was a waste of time as the topics covered were not relevant to the situations they faced in practice and they chose to gather their own information (Marable & Raimondi, 2007). Ladbroke (2009) also argues that teachers with little training have less confidence in their ability to teach learners with special needs. Some teachers in the latter researcher's study claimed that when they entered the profession, they did not want to teach learners with special needs as they felt they had not been adequately trained to do so. One teacher stated that she wanted to "educate learners, not nurture special needs learners" (Ladbroke, 2009, p. 105.) In a study conducted by Lumadi

(2013), novice and experienced teachers demonstrated negative attitudes towards the learners with special needs that they taught. One novice teacher in the study felt that her learners were “cursed by the gods” and that she had been “cursed” as well for having to teach them. This shocking statement clearly shows that this novice teacher was experiencing a very hard time teaching these learners. Experienced teachers also held the same negative views of these learners, with one teacher claiming that she was afraid to even shake her learners’ hands (Lumadi, 2013). These comments imply that some educators don’t actually think special needs learners can be given quality educational experiences. Another teacher in the Ladbrook (2009) study questioned her training, saying: “We have a four-year diploma and we can all of a sudden handle...this inclusion?” (Ladbrook, 2009, p. 105). This suggests that teachers who hold a general teaching qualification find it difficult to teach learners with special needs. It is important to state that research found that what teachers learn during the course of their studies and what they experience in the classrooms as novice teachers are very different (Melnick & Meister, 2008). It would be a worthwhile exercise if course planners for teaching could look at what students’ preconceived ideas are about teaching and then show student teachers the reality of what teaching is like so that there are no surprises for novice teachers (Melnick & Meister, 2008).

The DoE (2008) states that all teachers should have an initial teaching qualification which should include special needs training and if it does not, a teacher should get this training immediately upon being employed in a special school. Research has shown that many countries in Africa do not pay enough attention to courses being offered by universities to equip teachers with the proper skills to build an inclusive system (SADPD, 2012). It is also important to note that student teachers who completed a four-year Bachelor of Arts degree with Honours in physical education received more training in special needs than their fellow

Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) physical education student teachers, because there is more time available in their course to do so (Coates, 2012). However, both groups of student teachers felt that the training they received on inclusion and special needs was not beneficial as it just provided a basic overview. They required more practical experiences and specific inclusion strategies that they could use in their teaching (Coates, 2012). However, it was felt that the training provided to the students improved their confidence and competence to teach special needs learners. This finding showed that improved training will increase teachers' competence and confidence to teach (Coates, 2012). I concur with this as I completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Education and did not agree that the practical experiences and theory were adequate to prepare me for the challenges I faced in a special school. Moreover, I had not been exposed to practice teaching at a special school was also a challenge therefore I was confronted with the reality of teaching in this school as a novice which proved challenging.

Practical work for student teachers could prove more valuable than actual theoretical coursework (Oswald & Swart, 2011; Nketsia & Saloviita, 2010; Ezer et al., 2010). Novice teachers need practical experience in working with special needs learners. They also need to build partnerships and network with others who are involved in teaching these learners. These teachers also need training on inclusive education policies and how these have changed from exclusionary, deficit-based models to more inclusionary and strength-based models of teaching (Oswald & Swart, 2011). Universities should provide practical courses that develop students' skills in teaching disabled learners. However, on-going training of teachers that is initiated by the educational authorities even after university is important, as this will help teachers overcome many challenges (Stella, Forlin & Lan, 2007).

Research has shown that student teachers who do practice teaching at special needs schools are better able to understand learners with special needs and how to teach and plan lessons for them (Lawson, Norwich & Nash, 2013). These scholars found that student teachers who went into inclusive classrooms and worked with special needs learners became more confident and were able to change their attitudes towards these learners. Moreover, expectations of learners' abilities began to increase as these teachers began working with and understanding them. They learnt that even learners with special needs have the potential to learn and that they deserve respect and opportunities for a quality education (Voss & Bufkin, 2011). Jobling and Moni (2004) agree with the idea of practical special needs teaching experience, but argue that in some schools where they do practice teaching, the teachers themselves have little knowledge of and experience in teaching special needs learners. Therefore, schools and different service providers need to ensure that all teachers are updated on knowledge in the system. In this regard, Motitswe (2012) found that teachers who attended training regularly and who were exposed to a workshop on addressing the needs of learners with visual impairments found their experiences valuable and useful.

Kumi-Yeboah and James (2012) looked at how a novice teacher was able to transform into a more experienced and successful teacher in his career. The teacher in the study claimed that when he first started, he experienced great difficulties such as managing his classes, using technology, and understanding the diversity of learners. He felt frustrated and insecure when he didn't see learner progress. Burden (1980) states that the first-year teacher does not know a lot about the teaching environment itself, which includes learner characteristics such as achievement level (Burden, 1980). Novice teachers do not understand the curriculum and school rules and regulations (Burden, 1980). Moreover, most novice teachers cannot adapt their teaching to suit their learners because they are too rigid in their ways and teach in the

traditional way they believe a teacher should teach (Burden, 1980). First-year teachers also battle to see the whole picture of their learners and their environment. They seem to focus only on trying to do things the way they see fit and they tend to fail to use their objectivity to solve the issues that they are faced with (Burden, 1980). First-year teachers also seem to be too academically oriented and just want to finish the curriculum, instead of focusing on learner needs and whether those have been achieved (Burden, 1980).

However, looking back, the teacher cited in the study by Kumi-Yeboah and James (2012) claimed that one should continue to work hard and dedicate one's efforts to being well prepared. Soon such a teacher will be recognised by the schools for his/her efforts. The teacher further stated that, through experience and hard work, he had learnt to deal with challenges such as technology and meeting the needs of different learners. He also stated that a teacher who is new to the field needs to be self-motivated, well organised and enthusiastic about what he/she does. He further claimed that without a mentor to assist the novice teacher, it would be difficult to transfer what a new teacher had learnt at university and apply it to the classrooms. He noted that, at any stage in one's teaching career, it is important that one continuously keeps abreast of new teaching content and methods through further training. This is supported by Burden (1980), as he demonstrates through his theory that teachers gain more experience after their first year. After novice teachers have improved their initial teaching skills through experience, they are more willing to experiment with teaching methods (Burden, 1980). Ultimately for Burden (1980), during the second, third and fourth year, novice teachers become more relaxed and confident compared to their first year of teaching. Teachers are now beginning to let go of their preconceived teacher roles and are moulded into the teacher they want to be for the type of learners they teach (Burden, 1980). Woolfolk (2010) agrees with this and claims that the more confident teachers are about

including and teaching disabled learners, the more positive their attitude will be and they will have fewer concerns about their abilities.

Novice teachers should be encouraged to express their ideas and feelings through the art of reflection, thereby enabling themselves to reduce unrealistic expectations and any disappointments they may experience (Meristo & Eisenschmidt, 2014). Both novice and experienced teachers claim that a positive relationship with their students and a genuine love for their learners is why teachers stay in the profession. Some teachers view teaching as a calling and are proud that they are able to make a difference in the lives of their learners (Bennett, Brown Jr, Kirby-Smith & Severson, 2013). Teachers are in special needs education for many reasons, but mostly because they enjoy making a difference in the lives of learners who underachieve in the classroom or because it means greater job prospects (Hausstatter, 2007). Ezer *et al.* (2010) found that novice teachers enjoyed a high level of self-efficacy, with the majority claiming they were confident to fulfil their professional duties. However, although the teachers in the latter study felt that they could be successful in teaching, half of them claimed they would not continue to work in this profession. The study concluded that this attitude could be due to the low material rewards or to the challenges novice teachers faced as new teachers. Therefore UNESCO (2009) states that it is important that teachers' lives are improved through education programmes to update their knowledge and to provide incentives and an improved social status as they are important tools in the implementation of an inclusive education system. Burden posits that a teacher only starts becoming more confident, mature and secure in their teaching in the fifth year as a teacher. Teachers are now comfortable with changes and with the way they need to teach (Burden, 1980). They are willing to add to their skills by learning new methods and are more perceptive to learner needs (Burden, 1980). It is at this stage that they want to be updated with new methods so

that their teaching does not remain static and is always interesting (Burden, 1980). They are more willing to attend workshops, get advice from their colleagues, and share ideas with other teachers (Burden, 1980).

According to Gavish and Friedman (2011), De Jong (2012) and Teague and Swan (2013), novice teachers have a more successful first year when they have a good sense of school support and feel part of a team. Novice teachers experience many challenges and self-doubt when they face unhealthy and unsupportive school environments and particularly when they become overwhelmed with the workload in special education schools (Scherff, 2008). It is therefore important to examine how both new and more experienced teachers need to be supported and how they can collaborate with others to ensure that they have successful teaching experiences.

2.4 Collaboration and Support for Novice Teachers

The negative attitudes of teachers that are brought about by large class sizes, a heavy workload and poor support of learners in the classroom can contribute as a barrier to inclusion. Several specialists are required in special schools to support the teaching staff. Specific knowledge and competencies cannot be vested in one individual; therefore we cannot expect teachers to deal with the education of special needs learners on their own. For example, visually impaired learners may need a trained Braille specialist teacher to assist them to learn Braille. Also, teachers and other staff need to be trained in how to assist such learners and any lack of properly trained teachers and other staff to assist learners must be addressed. The best teachers must be assigned to the Foundation Phase to lay solid foundations in literacy and numeracy (UNESCO, 2009). Therefore, teachers need to

collaborate with others and gain the necessary support they require to give these learners a quality education.

Davis and Hopwood (2002) and Downing (2008) suggest that schools employ professionals in specific areas such as a Braille teacher, therapists and mobility instructors. These specialists should collaborate with teachers and provide support during certain times of the day when the teacher requires it most. This collaboration among teachers and other professionals will not only assist the teacher by decreasing work pressures, but it will also mean that the learner gets the best possible education from different experts (Lehohla & Hlalele, 2012). Teachers' in a study by Ladbrook (2009) posit that mainstream schools need the support of psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and teacher assistants to provide quality education to learners with special needs in primary schools. Steenkamp (2012) and Motitswe (2012) agree with Ladbrook (2009) and claim that teachers need adequate support to assist diverse learners in full service schools. However, Steenkamp (2012) claims that nothing has been done to help teachers in full service schools even though they are dealing with large class sizes with learners who have mixed abilities and need support.

Research has found that teachers' attitudes towards teaching learners with disabilities tend to change from negative to more positive when they have the support of a teacher aide in the classroom (Cook, 2004). Teachers' expectations of learner performance also seem to improve when they have the support of parents and access to larger budgets and thus to the resources that are needed (Cook, 2004). Collaboration among teachers, parents and other professionals is seen as a key component to prepare teachers for the inclusive classrooms as well as for being effective and lasting advocates of this form of education (Dotger & Ashley, 2010). For

instance, a study by Hebel and Persitz (2014) found that positive parent and teacher collaborations meant that teachers were more knowledgeable about their learners' needs and that more individualised educational plans were developed.

The support that novice teachers receive from their schools is a very important indicator of how positive or negative their teaching experiences are. Both novice and experienced teachers need mentoring as well as ongoing professional development in order to grow and become more effective (Melnick & Meister, 2008). This was shown in research conducted by Kutsyuruba (2009), who posits that novice teachers' classroom performance would be enhanced if they had the correct and constructive supervision and feedback. The correct guidance and instructional support for novice teachers means these teachers will have a greater opportunity to broaden their skills and performance in the classroom (Thomas, Thomas & Lefebvre, 2014). When information is shared among teachers in a school, it allows more experienced teachers to pass on their knowledge to novice teachers and it also allows novice teachers to review any challenging areas they may encounter (Thomas & Thomas, 2012; Thomas, Thomas & Lefebvre, 2014). Therefore, special schools need to provide opportunities where teachers can be supported through mentorships, meetings, feedback sessions, and induction programs.

According to Boyer (2005), induction programs for novice special education teachers should have the following components: they should provide professional development to the special educators, and they should mentor these novice teachers through the support of experienced special educators. Collaboration between these mentors and university faculties is also important for the development of up-to-date induction programmes to cater for the needs of novice teachers. It is therefore important that an induction programme should ensure

collaboration among all the involved role players as a key to success. Another form of an induction program is intensive mentoring, which was studied by Stanulis and Floden (2009). This latter study showed how intensive mentoring improved teacher effectiveness among novice teachers. The mentoring program involved how to develop balanced instruction through engagement with learners using strong content. Mentors would work closely together with novice teachers by observing them in their classrooms, helping them plan learner work programmes, and reflecting on their teaching so as to improve those challenging areas that were experienced.

Fantilli and McDougall (2009) support the idea of induction programs at school; however, new schools have mainly new teachers with little experience which is why schools need to employ teachers who are experienced and can serve as mentors to novice teachers in these programs. Marable and Raimondi (2007) found that teachers require more peer support and networking opportunities to meet with one another, to collaborate, and to discuss ideas.

According to Ben-Yehuda, Leyser and Last (2010), teachers find it useful to be involved in team work and to collaborate with their colleagues daily through meetings where they plan instructional strategies. The latter authors also posit that constructive, focused meetings help teachers to share any concerns they face and to reflect on their experiences of inclusive teaching. These in-service sessions also help clarify the responsibilities among different staff members such as teachers, counsellors, therapists and other support staff (Ben-Yehuda, Leyser & Last, 2010). Based on their findings, these authors suggest that meetings should be held with novice teachers to discuss the challenges they experience in a comfortable atmosphere without fear of intimidation. These meetings could provide training in areas such as curriculum guidance, ideas for creative lessons, or instructional techniques. A handbook

for first-year teachers with guidelines on common issues faced is also one of the recommendations offered by Marable and Raimondi (2007).

A great source of support for many teachers is a mentor at the school. According to Marable and Raimondi (2007), teachers feel that mentors and other colleagues provide a great deal of support in the first few years of teaching. In the latter study, one teacher claimed that a colleague at her school gave her useful tips to survive the first two years and they used team teaching as a coping mechanism (Marable & Raimondi, 2007). In the latter study, novice teachers claimed that their mentors were great when providing positive reinforcement and one mentor went as far as allowing the novice teachers to observe another teacher's class to learn more. Mentors provided help on how to balance school and life outside work. Novice teachers also found that the school psychologist was a great support in preparing IEPs and understanding special education policies. One novice teacher found that her university lecturer offered a lot of support during her first years of teaching (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007).

However, research has shown that although a school may provide mentors or induction programs to novice teachers, many challenges still have to be faced. Teague and Swan (2013) state that some novice teachers who come in late in the school year, do not even get an induction programme, and therefore they just have to learn as they go along. Therefore, schools should have an induction programme twice a year to ensure that late entries to their staff are equipped with the correct information on what is expected of them. Research has shown that although novice teachers are offered more support, experienced teachers are more able to take advantage of this support (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014). According to Marable and Raimondi (2007), some novice teachers felt that their mentors were unprofessional and did not respect confidentiality. The respondents in this study claimed that some mentors would

discuss the challenges faced by beginner teachers with other staff members, which could be damaging to novice teachers' feelings and self-esteem in the workplace. Some teachers claimed that their supervisors were very unhelpful and redirected any problems they faced to their mentors. According to the teachers, they learnt as they gained more experience and as they dealt with the problems they faced as novice teachers by themselves (Marable & Raimondi, 2007). Caspersen and Raaen (2014) found that both novice and experienced teachers received more relational than professional support from their senior management, with novice teachers receiving less professional support. They also found that novice teachers often felt that they lacked confidence in the presence of their more experienced colleagues. This research by Caspersen and Raaen (2014) further found that novice teachers seemed to participate less in joint planning than experienced teachers. The latter authors therefore posit that collaboration with other teachers seems to have an effect on teacher certainty for novice teachers, and that as teachers gain more experience, their uncertainty seems to decrease (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014).

According to Msila (2009), a teacher evaluation programme used in South Africa makes use of peer evaluation for teachers which leads to the sharing of skills and experiences without fear of criticism by senior management. This peer review method could be useful in cases where novice teachers may fear that their teaching methods are being put under critical evaluation by their superiors. Research has shown that novice teachers respect the assistance of experienced teachers, but that they also wish to hear about the challenges faced by teachers who have recently experienced teaching for the first time (Teague & Swan, 2013). The latter research would be helpful when schools are appointing mentor teachers to assist novice teachers coming into a school.

Rieg et al. (2007) state that novice teachers who speak to their fellow teachers are allowed to de-stress because they share experiences with those who went through similar challenges. One teacher in the latter study stated that his colleagues made him laugh, which alleviated his stress. Finding a balance between work and play also helped novice teachers to cope with stress (Rieg et al., 2007). Marable and Raimondi (2007) posit that teachers need a supportive environment where their supervisors provide guidance and encouragement and discuss expectations of teachers on issues such as correct school protocols or how to teach. Novice teachers expect support and good relations between the staff and the principal and among their fellow teachers. They expect their school to support them in their efforts of becoming good teachers as well as allowing them to grow as teachers through training and promotion opportunities. They value teaching as a rewarding and worthwhile career that deserves public recognition for all that they accomplish for their learners (Gavish & Friedman, 2011). Frankel, Gold and Ajodhia-Andrews (2010) suggest that in order to bridge the gap between inclusive theories on paper and making inclusivity in schools a reality, all stakeholders such as teachers, policy makers, therapists and parents must play an active role in developing and strengthening inclusive practices in their communities. In the following paragraph, I will now explore visual impairment in the Foundation Phase and how teachers adapt their teaching to meet the needs of visually impaired learners.

2.5 Visual impairment and the Foundation Phase

Statistics show that there are approximately 285 million visually impaired people in the world (World Health Organisation, 2012). Many people are at risk of visual problems due to poor eye care services, mostly in low and middle income countries (World Health Organisation, 2010). Visual impairment is a broad term that can be described as blindness with total or a high grade of vision loss and these learners will need Braille for reading and writing. It also

includes learners with low vision who have partial loss that can be corrected with visual devices (Haddad, 2009). As far back as 2001, the South African census (2001) revealed that visual disabilities were common and that 23% of all disabled learners were either blind or had severe visual limitation (DSW, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012). More recently, visual disabilities have been classified as the most common disability and statistics show that one in ten learners with disabilities has multiple disabilities (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012). The General Household Survey of 2014 showed that 4.9% of South Africans five years and older were classified as disabled in 2014. The survey also found that more women had disabilities than men. Statistics also show that in 2014, a total of 2 850 000 people in South Africa suffered from different degrees of visual impairments (Statistics South Africa, 2015).

Statistics further show that learners with disabilities are more likely to drop out of school than their non-disabled peers as they progress to high school (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012). A study conducted in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces show that more learners who are of school going age and have disabilities do not attend school compared to their non-disabled counterparts (Loeb, Eide Jelsma, Toni & Maart, 2008). It is quite an alarming fact that many disabled learners still do not have access to appropriate forms of education. Moreover, learners with disabilities are often subject to negative attitudes by their peers and others such as being teased and seen as ‘charity cases’ (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012).

In a study conducted by Kasiram and Subrayen (2013), a visually impaired learner stated that learners with visual impairments faced many challenges in mainstream schools. In some cases of educator ignorance, learners were abused and teased because they were different. One learner recalled being “smacked” because she could not see the chalkboard. Another learner stated that the teacher called him “blind man” and he could not pass due to his inability to access the information visually. The learners also recalled that they were

overlooked when it came to leadership positions such as class or student representatives, as teachers believed that they were not competent enough. The study further revealed that people with visual impairments felt that their impairment might lead to poverty because of the restrictions society creates and opportunities lost in order to develop themselves (Kasiram & Subrayen, 2013). The latter authors posit that these learners face various challenges as they grow through their schooling life.

Visually impaired learners may have cognitive developmental delays. They are slow to process information compared to sighted people as they have to depend on memory and other senses to decode information. Their performance in intellectual tests may be weak because these tests are not appropriate measures of their abilities (Hadidi, 2013). These learners may experience problems with spatial tasks and reasoning. They also may have developmental delays, especially if they do not get the necessary interventions in the early years to make up for the lack of visual experiences (Hadidi, 2013). Teachers must therefore provide visually impaired learners with rich sensory experiences and encourage self-expression by looking at the impact of the disability on their development and then providing appropriate interventions (Hadidi, 2013). Visually impaired learners lack the ability to learn visually and through observation, which is one of the ways that learners learn. It is therefore imperative that other ways of learning are provided for them (Fraser & Maguvhe, 2008). Visually impaired learners may have difficulties making friends at school because they have challenges using their other senses to determine how their friends feel. They may also be prevented from making friends because they have adults around them who assist them throughout the day at school, so peers are reluctant to get involved freely (Roe, 2008). Therefore, social skills training and learner independence should be a priority in any education plan for these learners. Hess (2010) also posits that visually impaired learners are at greater risk of being

socially excluded due to their disability. In a study conducted in Botswana, learners with Albinism suffered from low self-esteem, loneliness and lack of acceptance from their peers. Overall they had a poor educational experience (Dart, Nkanotsang, Chizwe & Kowa, 2010). Disabled learners are said to make up one third of all learners who are excluded from education (UNESCO, 2009).

However, recent research has shown that society is now changing its view of disabled persons from viewing them as economically dependent to being an important part of human capital (Hashash, 2013). Therefore, teachers need to equip our young visually impaired learners in line with this view. We need to see them as learners who have the right to obtain a quality education in order to contribute meaningfully to society, and not just as people who are dependent on society because of a disability. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007, article 24) states that disabled people and learners have the right to a good quality, inclusive education at all levels. It also asks that state parties facilitate the learning of Braille and mobility skills. They must also ensure that the education of visually impaired learners is delivered in the best possible way in environments that assist in academic and social development. States should also employ teachers who know Braille or train teachers in the use of Braille. Moreover, teachers must be trained in disability awareness and how to use educational techniques and materials to support disabled learners. The article also states that disabled people should participate effectively in society and all their abilities must be developed to their fullest potential.

UNESCO (2009) argues that early childhood education, which is a critical period for the acquisition of cognitive skills, should be the focus of inclusion policies. Therefore, careful attention needs to be paid to the visual education of learners in the Foundation Phase in South

Africa. (DoBE, 2011) refers to the Foundation Phase as the first phase in the education system which includes Grade R (the reception year) up to Grade 3. It is a four-year phase and the subjects comprise of Home Language, Mathematics, Life skills and a first Additional Language from Grade 1. The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements are used as the curriculum in the foundation phase (DoBE, 2011).

The Foundation Phase learner is said to be in the fourth stage of Eric Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. During this stage of early school development, learners move from the pre-operational stage to the concrete-operational thinking stage. Learners are able to process more information and their memory increases. Their cognitive development is occurring much more rapidly (Woolfolk, 2007). Therefore, we need to research how teaching impacts these learners and explore how we can lay a good foundation for them. The DoE (2008) states that disabled learners who are not properly accommodated in mainstream schools must receive admission to special schools. The DoE (2008) states these learners must be properly screened and assessed and supported appropriately in these schools. Therefore we will explore how teachers adapt learning and teaching for learners in the Foundation Phase to provide them with a quality education.

2.6 Teachers' Experiences of Adapting the Curriculum for Visually Impaired Learners

Research has found that the South African curriculum is not flexible enough to cater for the needs of diverse learners, and particularly for learners with disabilities (SADPD, 2012). Previously, special schools had their own curriculum, and teachers now find it difficult to follow the National curriculum that caters for all schools and all learners (Fraser & Maguvhe, 2008). The DoE (2008) insists that schools may not offer a curriculum that is not agreed upon by the Department of Education, and therefore special schools are to follow the same

curriculum currently applicable to all schools. The curriculum is guided, among others, by the principle of inclusive education (DoE, 2008). In the case of a school that caters for various disabilities, the school's curriculum must be able to cater for differences in the needs of its learners (DoE, 2008). It is thus important that teachers use different ways of delivering the curriculum to learners and cater for their individual needs (DoE, 2008). The DoBE (2011) explains that the Department of Basic Education provides all learners and teachers with the same core curriculum; however, it is up to the teacher to adapt the curriculum through curriculum differentiation. Curriculum differentiation involves adapting, modifying and varying teaching methodologies, teaching strategies, assessment strategies, and the content of the curriculum to respond to learner diversity (DoBE, 2011). The curriculum content must be adapted so that it becomes available for a wider range of learner abilities (DoBE, 2011). However, it is important to note that this does not mean watering down the curriculum, but it involves a different graded process of how a learner will learn that specific content (DoBE, 2011). It is therefore imperative that teacher training be provided to teachers on curriculum differentiation and how to adapt their classroom activities when teaching learners with disabilities (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012). The Department of Basic Education has formulated plans for teacher development in South Africa between 2011 and 2015, and states that curriculum differentiation should be a key focus of the training. The Department also states that training in specialised skills of teaching visually impaired learners will be needed for district and school staff (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012).

Fraser and Maguvhe (2008) posit that an inflexible curriculum and assessment standards are prejudicial factors resulting in ineffective learning of persons with visual impairments. Research has shown that teachers lack ways and ideas of adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of the visually impaired because they only have a general education qualification and

have not learnt or been exposed to specialised skills (Fraser & Maguvhe, 2008). Visually impaired learners require that class work is transcribed or converted to Braille for learning. In a study by Herzberg and Stough (2007), teachers stated that they had been inadequately prepared to transcribe Braille early in their careers. However, attending workshops on Braille assisted in this area. Teachers reported using computers and a Braille translation software program to transcribe work. They also used the Perkins Braillewriter when preparing Braille work. It was found that teachers had not attended any online, university or local refresher courses to update their skills. This research therefore suggests that refresher Braille courses are needed for teachers to ensure that their skills remain current (Herzberg & Stough, 2007). As a novice teacher I battle with teaching braille to blind learners as I was not trained therefore I concur that more courses on braille should be available for teachers who are teaching these learners.

Research has also shown that when a teacher makes an effort to learn and understand Braille, then the visually impaired learner feels included in the lessons (Davis & Hopwood, 2002). Teachers who had more training on special needs education had more knowledge on topics like differentiating the curriculum and they were well able to develop IEPs, assess progress, manage behaviour, and collaborate with colleagues. These teachers therefore possessed appropriate skills to ensure that inclusion was successfully integrated into their classrooms (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). A study by Rakap (2015) explored the quality of IEPs that had been developed for preschool learners with disabilities. The study concluded that IEPs needed to include high-quality goals that would serve as a guide for how and what teachers should teach specific learners. These goals should be developed after a comprehensive assessment of learners and should further involve interventions that lead to better individualized support for that learner. However, it was found that teachers in the study

lacked proper training on how to draw up IEPs that addressed the specific needs of their learners (Rakap, 2015).

Research has also revealed that teachers tend to choose accommodations for special needs learners that do not require too much work (Kuyini & Mangope, 2011). Nketsia and Saloviita (2013) posit that IEPs are not popular among teachers because of the greater workload they create. Kuyini and Mangope (2011) concur, stating that one can conclude that negative attitudes or non-acceptance of disabled learners by teachers could stem from concerns of a greater workload. However, despite these challenges that teachers face in adapting the curriculum for visually impaired learners, it is important to explore what teachers find that actually works in a classroom.

A flexible curriculum is the key to creating schools for all and therefore a curriculum shouldn't expect all learners to be learning the same things (UNESCO, 2009). For example, can a blind learner learn how to write the same way a sighted learner can? No, the blind learner needs to learn the Braille code while the sighted learner is educated on pencil grip and writing starting points. Therefore, if learners are so different and have different abilities and needs, then it is important for the curriculum to be flexible enough for adjustment to individual needs and to encourage teachers to adapt the curriculum to meet these needs (UNESCO, 2009). A learner-centred curriculum moves away from rote learning towards more hands-on, experience-based, active and cooperative learning practices (UNESCO, 2009). When teaching visually impaired learners, one must remember the content needs to be simple and not abstract as learners visualise like others when certain concepts they have not seen are mentioned. For example, the difference between ugly and beautiful are concepts that need to be explored and explained in detail by feeling real objects, if possible (Fraser & Maguvhe, 2008).

Special needs learners should not have a different curriculum from sighted learners, but should receive additional assistance and support (UNESCO, 1994). Fraser and Maguvhe (2008) state that any curriculum that is not learner-based and learner-paced will prevent effective teaching and learning for visually impaired learners. Teachers must consider how they deliver the curriculum and how they assess learners by using technology, aides and planning different work that is suitable for learners.

In South Africa, Braille books and recorded tapes are used to deliver the curriculum (Fraser & Maguvhe, 2008). However, Braille books and diagrams, or other tactile objects, are not readily available in all schools. Previously, special schools had Braille specialists who produced and used Braille books; however, the Department has terminated such posts in schools and therefore learners cannot access information unless they have a sighted person to assist those (Fraser & Maguvhe, 2008). Research has shown that teachers should have the appropriate requirements and accommodations made for visually impaired learners. The pre-school classroom in the study by McKenzie and Davidson (2007) focused on making literacy learning available to visually impaired learners. The classroom library had available literacy media such as Braille books, audio tapes, object books with Braille, and tactile objects. The Perkins Brailler and Braille paper were available in the writing corner. The teacher made sure that activities reached her learners by using a variety of strategies such as total communication, Braille, large print, or other communication devices. Shared reading activities were modified through the use of augmentative communication devices to encourage learner participation. One learner was seen using literacy computer software during letter recognition activities. In a study conducted by Davis and Hopwood (2002), visually impaired learners in a mainstream classroom were always made to feel included in the classroom lessons. For example, one learner used his electronic Brailler while his sighted

peers wrote on paper for a writing activity, but they all discussed the activity together. Another learner with low vision who was participating in a shared reading activity had his own enlarged copy of the text so that he would not be left out.

Davis and Hopwood (2002) suggest that teachers should deliver the curriculum using non-visual aids as well as visual ones in order to cater for all learners at the same time. In a study by Brian and Haegele (2014), teachers even made adaptations for learners to be included in sporting activities because it was part of the curriculum. A beep ball was used in softball for learners with visual impairments. This ball made a buzzing noise to alert them as to where the ball was. This gave the visually impaired learners a chance to participate in a sport they would otherwise not have been able to do and it also made their sighted peers aware of the barriers that visually impaired learners need to overcome.

An inclusive curriculum that is holistic in terms of learners' development addresses their cognitive, emotional, social and creative development (UNESCO, 2009). It involves breaking down negative stereotypes and protecting human rights through educating learners and changing teacher attitudes. Inclusion emphasises the need for a common core curriculum that allows every learner to be taught through flexible methods (UNESCO, 2009). The curriculum should allow for both informal and formal learning to take place (UNESCO, 2009). For example, this implies teaching the visually impaired learners social skills as well as academic subjects because a highly academic, heavily overloaded curriculum is counterproductive to inclusion (UNESCO, 2009). It is important that the curriculum accommodates and promotes access for all. This can be achieved by allowing teachers more flexibility and freedom in their work methods where teachers can provide special support in practical subjects like mobility, instead of only following a rigid school curriculum (UNESCO, 2005).

Research on teaching visually impaired learners has found that, in classrooms, teachers spend the bulk of their teaching time on academic work and focus on core curriculum skills only when the need arises. For example, the core curriculum for the Foundation Phase includes communication skills like teaching learners how to use the Braillewriter, learning the Braille alphabet, reading a Grade 1 Braille story, or learning how to use computer software. Other areas of the core curriculum include teaching the learners social skills such as how to interact with their sighted peers, sensory motor activities like matching, or mobility skills such as cane techniques to go around the school environment. The teachers should also include daily life skills such as food preparation or how to clean their glasses. However, a study by Wolffe, Sacks, Com, Erin, Huebner and Lewis (2002) found that teaching these skills did not take up the large amount of time that was expected; conversely, no lesson was set aside for teaching the learners Braille or daily living skills, but rather these were secondary activities when there was time for them. This is a big problem that must be addressed as it is important that teachers acknowledge that visually impaired learners learn differently and require an additional curriculum to the core curriculum to cover these skills adequately. McDonough, Sticken and Haack (2006) suggest that an expanded core curriculum needs to augment the normal curriculum for learners with visual impairments. Such a curriculum is important for learners who cannot use their vision to learn; therefore they require other skills such as reading Braille or learning how to use optical devices. They also need to learn how to interact with people in conversations where they are not able to read visual cues such as gestures or facial expressions (McDonough et al., 2006). It is therefore important for schools to consider having this expanded curriculum for their visually impaired learners where it is not already part of the current curriculum.

Griffin, Cynthia, Kilgore, Winn and Otis-Wilborn (2008) found that novice teachers felt that having good communication and collaboration with other teachers enhanced their own learning and improved their curriculum and teaching practices. Therefore, when developing an inclusive curriculum, multiple stakeholders are involved (UNESCO, 2009) such as teachers, parents, the education department, therapists, psychologists, and the wider community. It is important that the teacher collaborates with support staff like mobility instructors or Braille teachers when developing lessons and activities for visually impaired learners.

UNESCO (2009) states that there needs to be a smooth transition and understanding of the curriculum from the Foundation Phase to the next phase. This will ensure that learners are still being catered for under an inclusive education policy. Moreover, this will prevent drop-outs between the levels because of failure to include these learners through the curriculum. However, it is also important that the curriculum is flexible enough to allow for changes in learning and assessment as required by a diversity of learners in the classroom.

Motitswe (2012) conducted a study on teaching and learning in inclusive Foundation Phase classrooms. The participating teachers claimed that in order to overcome barriers to learning, the curriculum needed to be adapted in the school. Teachers in the study emphasised that it was more important to focus on the pace of teaching to accommodate every learner than to rush in order to finish a curriculum within the required time. In a study conducted by Steenkamp (2012), teachers claimed that it was important that the curriculum was adapted so that all learners had the opportunity to learn and none were left out. The teachers agreed that changing the curriculum for diverse learners would mean that teachers would also have to change their teaching strategies.

I will now explore how teachers use different teaching strategies to assess learners with visual impairment.

2.7 Assessment Practices Involving Special Needs Learners

Research has shown that in some countries, governments pressurise schools and teachers to demonstrate their own performance by promoting their students in the shortest possible time. To this end, many teachers do not register disabled learners, claiming they require more teaching time and will take longer to pass through the system (SADPD, 2012).

In a study by Rieg *et al.* (2007), teachers felt that standardised tests and assessments contributed to the stress teachers experienced because they have to perform to a certain standard and do better than other schools. The teachers claimed that the learners' performance was a direct reflection on their teaching abilities. Because learners in special schools also have to progress through the grades, they need to be assessed throughout the year by means of appropriate assessment techniques (DoE, 2008).

Research has shown that novice teachers find it easier to assess learners when they use multiple methods (Melnick & Meister, 2008). This would be helpful in the case of a visually impaired learner who needs more than just a written test in terms of assessing their learning. When assessing learners with impairments, concessions may be given such as extra time, or reading the instructions to the learners, or providing different means of assessment (Lehohla & Hlalele, 2012).

Learners with visual impairments who also have multiple disabilities may take longer to respond when asked a question. In this regard a study conducted by Johnson and Parker

(2013) found that people communicating with these learners should allow for a ‘wait time’ for learners’ responses when they are asked questions. This demonstrates that teachers need to be patient when conducting assessments of visually impaired learners, because oral assessments may need more time as learners are slower when communicating answers back.

Based on the study findings, Motitswe (2012) argues that Foundation Phase learners are very diverse; therefore differentiated lesson planning is required. Activities should be planned according to the ability levels of the learners where some may do different activities while others do activities according to the particular grade’s assessment standards. Teachers can straddle the assessment standards of the grades so that learners can then be given activities according to their abilities. For example, learners could be assessed orally with reference to objects, and songs or bodily expressions could be used. Some learners are left feeling frustrated when the pressure to meet the academic standards of the school is in conflict with their needs. When these needs are not being met, they perform badly and often do not meet the assessment requirements to pass (SADPD, 2012).

It is important to assess learners, but teachers must not forget to praise young learners in the Foundation Phase for every effort they make. Praise makes learners feel proud and confident enough to participate in learning fully and freely, which ensures that they are being assessed according to their potential (Motitswe, 2012). Teachers must refrain from classifying learners into categories such as “bright” and “not intelligent”. Schools need to do away with evaluation systems that reward only certain abilities (DoBE, 2011).

A study by Ngcobo and Muthukrishna (2011) found that teachers urgently require training around curriculum and assessment for diverse learners. The study found that a 17-year-old

disabled learner was placed in Grade 1 and, when questioned how this could happen, the researchers found that teachers had not assessed the learner academically - they just took the parent's word about how they thought the learner would cope. The teachers also did not know how to teach such a diverse class. They felt that they required in-depth training instead of just basing their teaching on general facts they would come across. The study found that teachers posed the biggest barrier towards inclusive education for all learners. The study also found that some teachers were not very welcoming and enthusiastic about teaching disabled learners. Moreover, the teachers who did have disabled learners in their classes did not receive any support from their colleagues, psychological services or the Department. The teachers claimed that when they attended workshops, the trainers themselves did not understand inclusive education, which painted a bleak picture for teachers expecting some guidance from their senior members of education (Ngobo & Muthukrishna, 2011).

Besides poor teacher training on assessment, current assessment practices are being questioned, such as schools that do not have access to equipment like Brailing machines that are required for fair assessment of learners with visual disabilities (SAPDP, 2012). In light of this, the next section explores how teachers and schools can provide an environment that is supportive towards learning for visually impaired learners. A crucial question is: *Is the teaching and learning environment for learners with visual impairments equipped with the correct learning and support material and the devices needed?* Such provision – or lack thereof - will affect how a teacher is able to teach visually impaired learners and if they have positive and negative experiences.

2.8 Learning and Support Material and Devices Required for Visually Impaired

Learners.

The 2014 General Household Survey showed that 9 481 000 disabled people in the KwaZulu-Natal province and a total of 48 441 000 people in South Africa required the help of some form of assistive devices to function (Statistics South Africa, 2015).

The DoE (2008) states that it is important for schools to provide learners with learning and teaching support material, for example a Braillewriter, large print texts, and appropriate electronic devices. Special schools should have appropriate learning materials for visually impaired learners such as the Perkins Braille writers and Braille printers (DoE, 2008).

However, schools in rural areas face problems such as a shortage of assistive devices, learning materials, and the physical inaccessibility of classrooms (SAPDP, 2012). Research has shown that there is a lack of textbooks and other learning materials in Braille and large print books that should be provided to schools. Since 2009, the Department of Basic Education has developed a programme through which schools can order Braille materials and books, but there is a slow production of these resources (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012). Marable and Raimondi (2007) found that teachers in their first year of teaching were not given many resources to begin their teaching. The teachers claimed that they had been given out-dated curriculum documents and had to borrow or purchase materials for their classes with their own money. The respondents felt that a resource library with curricular materials and lesson plans, or even access to the internet, could assist them in their preparation time. Classrooms should always have flexible seating arrangements and proper lighting for visually impaired learners (Davis & Hopwood, 2002). Motitswe (2012) found that teachers enjoyed classrooms that were not overcrowded and allowed the learners and themselves to move

freely for group activities and to access resources. They made sure that learners who had visual problems were seated at the front of the classroom (Motitswe, 2012). Resources such as tactile and kinaesthetic materials, access to low vision aids, and access to the curriculum through special aids, equipment and furniture are vital (Davis & Hopwood, 2002).

Some visually impaired learners use a dual approach where they learn both print and Braille. Learners can read print using large print or bold markers to write on bold-lined paper. Some learners have access to a keyboard with large print. The Perkins Brailler is seen as the most important tool that teachers can use for Braille writing, while some learners use electronic Brailleurs if they have access to such a commodity (Lusk & Corn, 2006).

As technology develops, teachers will require new training on particular devices needed for their learners and their teaching, thus special schools can serve as resource centres to train teachers in the use of these assistive devices (DoE, 2008). Teachers can use different types of resources to enhance learning and to reach all learners, such as puppets, embossed diagrams, puzzles, games, magazines, videos and toys (Weeks & Erradu, 2013). Teachers could also make tangible cue cards for learners with visual impairments who have difficulty communicating and making choices. Tangible cues are real objects that are placed on cards and given to learners when they need to make a choice. For example, for a play activity the visually impaired learner would be given a card with a doll and another one with a block. The learner can then decide which toy s/he prefers playing with by feeling the appropriate object and handing the card back to the teacher. This allows learners to be involved in decision making, which is a valuable life skill (Trief, 2007). Batir (2008) suggests that teachers should also create resources such as labelling actual objects with Braille words. Resources such as Braille books with tactile illustrations are useful for learners in the Foundation Phase who learn to read words when they cannot see pictures (Swenson, 2009).

A report on how simple adaptations made by teachers allowed visually impaired learners to attend a mainstream school, was issued by the DoBE (2011). For example, modifications can be made to the physical environment such as more spacious desks for visually impaired learners to place their Braille equipment on. The school and teacher should also be able to assist impaired learners with mobility around the school. Teachers should be sensitive to learners' needs and they could contact the local branch of the South African National Council for the Blind to obtain technical advice on how they could adapt the classroom to make the learner more welcome (DoBE 2011). Another strategy could be to get together with the community to raise funds so that blind learners could obtain their own Braille machines. Teachers could also start learning Braille with help from the Blind Workers' Organisation and learn ways to develop teaching aides for multi-sensory teaching (DoE, 2002). If more teachers would be proactive and apply strategies such as the above, then visually impaired learners and learners with other disabilities could have positive learning experiences in all schools.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented a discussion on the importance of special schools in our inclusive society, as well as the importance of the role the teachers play in these schools. I explored how teachers, and in particular novice teachers, teach diverse learners, with specific attention given to visually impaired learners. I also examined how teachers should use the curriculum and assessment strategies and how they could adapt their teaching to address the needs of special needs learners, with particular reference to visually impaired learners. I also explored the support material and devices that teachers require in order to enhance their teaching of visually impaired learners. The literature research revealed that the teaching of visually impaired learners requires a lot of exploring, especially around the experiences of novice

teachers in the Foundation Phase. I had conducted a literature review on the teaching of visually impaired learners and found that there seemed to be limited research available with regards to the experiences of novice teachers with these learners, particularly with reference to the visually impaired in the Foundation Phase. The research that could be traced mostly focused on a very broad approach of all visually impaired learners in schools and not on a particular phase. The current study therefore explored and evaluated the experiences of novice teachers teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase. The next chapter presents a discussion on the research design and the methods that were employed in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter two was an exploration of past and recent literature that focused on the experiences of novice teachers teaching visually impaired learners. In this chapter I discussed the methods of research that assisted me in understanding the experiences of novice teachers teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase. I focused on the research design and the methods used to understand the research questions. I began by discussing the research paradigm and the justification for employing this paradigm. These are followed by an illumination of the research approach that I followed. I then discussed my choice of research methodology, followed by an exposition of the sampling techniques that I employed. The data generation tools and how I analysed the data are then discussed. In conclusion, the trustworthiness and ethical considerations that underpinned the findings of the study are illuminated, and the limitations to this study are highlighted.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Bertram and Christiansen (2014, p. 22) define a research paradigm as “the particular worldview that researchers are subscribed to which will define how they will conduct their research.” Blanche *et al.* (2006, p. 6) refer to a paradigm as an “all- encompassing system of interrelated practices and thinking that defines for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology.” This study was located within the interpretive paradigm that explores the multiple realities and experiences of people in context (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). I as the researcher sought different views from the

experiences of other teachers who had experienced what I was trying to understand myself as a novice teacher. I acknowledged that the teachers who I had observed in the research site would all have different experiences and understandings that influenced how they taught visually impaired learners. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) state that within this paradigm, the researcher must not predict what will happen but, instead, must try to gain a deeper understanding into how people make sense of what is happening. Therefore, in this study the ontology of this paradigm allowed me to explore the subjective experiences of three novice teachers and what they viewed as their reality (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). As suggested by Bertram and Christiansen (2014), using this paradigm had implications for the relationship between myself as the researcher and the participants, as the relationship would be subjective. In this regard, the epistemology explored how I as the researcher interacted with the participants and tried to remain subjective and empathetic as I began to understand and make sense of their experiences with visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Although I held my own views on teaching visually impaired learners as a novice teacher I did not predict how my participants viewed their own thoughts on the matter. I assured the participants that I was there to gain a deeper understanding of what teaching these learners entailed through their experiences in order to strengthen my own understanding and not pass judgement on my colleagues. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) state that meaning can only be understood through interaction between the researcher and the participant, therefore the researcher must choose methods of data generation that provide this interaction. The methodology of this paradigm allowed me to use interviews, document analysis, observations and a questionnaire for in-depth exploration. These multiple data collection tools facilitated in-depth analyses of the data to gain a rich understanding of the teachers' experiences (Blanche *et al.*, 2006).

3.3 Research Approach

I used a qualitative approach in this research study. Blanche *et al.* (2006, p. 272) refer to the qualitative approach “as research whereby the researcher aims to describe and interpret people’s feelings and experiences [in this instance the experiences of novice teachers] in human terms rather than through quantification.” As Yin (2011) demonstrates, qualitative research looks at real-world settings, and I explored how my participants coped, or had coped, in the context of a special school. I captured the richness of these participants’ experiences with visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase. According to Yin (2011), qualitative research requires that data be generated by means of various methods, which allows for the complexity and diversity of the participants to be demonstrated. Therefore, I used a variety of methods namely semi-structured interviews, observations, document analysis, and a questionnaire to increase the validity and trustworthiness of my study (Yin, 2011).

3.4 Research Methodology

Yin (2009) and Rule and John (2011) state that a case study allows the researcher to explore and understand a particular case in a specific context in depth. In this research study I chose to explore the experiences of novice teachers teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase. I therefore used a single case study design which focused on providing rich descriptions of the experiences of novice teachers within the context of one special school (Yin, 2009). An example of a case study design was used by Hebert (2002) who conducted an in-depth exploration of four first-year teachers, using triangulation. She spent a long time in the schools observing, interviewing, and collecting documents and artefacts, and then she analysed the experiences of the teachers. I also used a variety of data generation

methods namely observations, interviews, a questionnaire and documents and I spent a great deal of time at the school site to ensure that I fully explored the case.

I interpreted the data that were generated with reference to Burden's (1980) theoretical framework of how teachers move through various stages in their career. I specifically explored how teachers moved from the first stage as novice teachers and how, as they gained more experience, they moved on to become better developed teachers. The theoretical framework that underpinned this study was discussed extensively in Chapter two. Table 3.1 below indicates how the theoretical framework was used to explore teachers' views of their capabilities and experiences:

Table 3.1: Teachers' Perceptions of Their Professional Characteristics.

PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	FIRST YEAR	SECOND, THIRD AND FOURTH YEARS	FIFTH YEAR AND BEYOND
Knowledge of teaching activities	Limited knowledge	Increased knowledge of planning and organisation	Good command of teaching activities
Knowledge of teaching environment	Limited knowledge	Increased knowledge of learners, curriculum and teaching methods	Good command of teaching environment
Changing images of teaching	Conform to perceived image of teaching	Gradually abandon preconceived views about teaching	
Professional insight and perception	Limited insight and perception	Gradual increase in perception and insight	
Approach to curriculum and instruction	Subject-centred curricular approach	Transitional period -discovering learners are people	Child-centred curricular approach
Professional confidence, security	Uncertain, confused	Gradually more confident about	Confident, secure

and maturity		subject matter and teaching techniques	
Willingness to try new teaching methods	Unwilling to try; still mastering basics	Willing to experiment with new teaching methods	Continually trying new methods

(Source: Burden 1980, Appendix D. Teachers' perceptions of their professional characteristics [*Adapted*])

3.5 Sampling

Bertram and Christiansen (2014, p. 59) refer to sampling as the type of people, settings, events or behaviours that the researcher will decide to include in a particular study. I chose to use purposive sampling in my study, which refers to choosing participants who have a particular characteristic that the researcher requires (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). For my research I purposively chose three novice teachers from the Foundation Phase who taught visually impaired learners. Therefore these teachers could specifically discuss their experiences of working with visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase. The sample was also a sample of convenience because the participants chosen for this study were available and accessible at the time (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). The Foundation Phase comprises Grades 1 to 3. The research site had one teacher in each grade and therefore I could not gain access to a larger sample of teachers who were in their first year of teaching, or who had experienced teaching in this phase at the school. I was therefore compelled to select teachers who were either novice teachers in their first year of teaching or teachers who were in their second to fifth year of teaching. However, all these respondents could report knowledgeably on their experiences as novice teachers. The fact that more experienced teachers were included in the

study was fortuitous, as this allowed me to explore how they developed from being novice teachers to becoming more experienced teachers, according to Burden's (1980) theory. In order to be included in the study, the research participants were required to be teaching visually impaired learners and had to be in their first five years of teaching. The participants had to be teaching in the Foundation Phase.

I undertook various steps before commencing the study. First, I sought permission from the Department of Basic Education in order to conduct the study in the special school selected as my study site. Thereafter I arranged a meeting with the school principal to discuss my intentions and the purpose of my study. I requested his permission to make contact with the selected teachers in the school. After having gained the permission from the principal, I then contacted the teachers to meet with them at the school and to discuss the nature of my study and obtain their voluntary consent to participate in the research project. The selected participants were three female teachers from the Foundation Phase who were currently in their first five years of teaching. The study was not restricted in terms of race or age. The sample size was small and limited to three participants as this was a small-scale research study and it did not intend to generalise the results (Cohen *et al.* 2011). The sample was chosen according to the interpretive paradigm; therefore the sample was not chosen to be representative of the actual population but rather to yield a detailed description using rich, in-depth qualitative data (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 59).

The next section presents a description of the research site as well as of the participants.

3.5.1 Brief Description of the Research Site

**A pseudonym is used to protect the identity of the school.*

Angels Haven* is a South African governmental special school in the Durban geographical area. The school caters for learners who have different physical disabilities such as muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, or visual impairments. The school caters for learners from all socio-economic and racial backgrounds from Grade R right up to Grade 12. The school follows the mainstream curriculum prescribed by the Department of Basic Education. Staff at the school comprises of teachers and teacher aides, as well as therapists such as speech, occupational and physiotherapists and a school psychologist. The school is the only site that currently provides an education to visually impaired learners in the Durban geographical area. The school is also the only school in the area that has the necessary expertise, manpower and equipment to cater for learners who are visually impaired. To this end, the school has a specific Braille unit which assists with teaching learners Braille and also converts material for learners into Braille.

3.5.2 Brief Description of the Research Participants

**The three participants in this research were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.*

Miss Honey was in her early twenties and she had been teaching at Angels Haven for a year. She had completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Education and also held an Honours degree in Special Needs Education. She had three visually impaired learners in her Grade 1 class.

Mrs London was in her late forties. She had experience as a teacher at a mainstream school and had only been teaching special needs learners at Angels Haven for three years. She had four visually impaired learners in her Grade 2 class. One learner was new to her class at the

time of the study. Mrs London had a Diploma in teaching and had done an ACE course in special needs.

Mrs Summer was in her late twenties and she had been teaching at Angels Haven for five years. She had two visually impaired learners in her Grade 3 class. Mrs Summer had a Bachelor of Education degree with no special needs qualification.

3.6 Pilot Study

According to Creswell (2012), a pilot test allows a researcher to determine if the methods of data generation chosen would be appropriate for the sample selected and if they would yield the required information. Therefore I ran a pilot test of the interviews and the questionnaire with three teachers who would not be participating in the study. The teachers understood what was required of them and no problems were experienced with any of the data generation tools.

3.7 Data Generation Procedure

The term 'data' refers to the information that is collected by the researcher to answer the research questions (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). I ensured that I followed the correct protocols in order to generate the data required for the study. I obtained permission from the Department of Basic Education and the principal of the school. Thereafter I arranged meetings with my research participants at the school at a time that was convenient for them. I reminded the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage if they felt uncomfortable. I also assured the participants that their identities would remain confidential and that pseudonyms would be used.

I then arranged the times for the interviews that would be convenient to each teacher. The Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers chose a time period after their learners had gone home. Foundation Phase learners left the school around 12h30. The Grade 3 teacher chose to speak to me after school as her learners left school at 14h00. She chose to do the interview at her own residence as she felt more comfortable there. I emailed the questionnaire to each teacher and they returned the completed questionnaires to me after three weeks. The classroom observations were subsequently conducted during one period in the school day that had been chosen by the teachers. Documents such as lesson plans and teacher journals were examined with the teachers' permission. Each data generation tool will be discussed.

3.8 Data Generation Tools

3.8.1 Interviews

An interview is a structured and focused conversation between a participant and the researcher where the researcher is the one who sets the agenda to gain a deeper understanding on a topic (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). An interview is a flexible tool of data generation that allows participants to discuss their reality of the world and to express their point of view regarding a situation through multi-sensory means (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Therefore I chose to use interviews to generate much of the data. I conducted a semi-structured interview with each of the participants. First I develop an interview schedule with questions I wished to ask, but I also allowed the participants a chance to expand their answers if they wished (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). This freedom to go beyond what I expected was important, as Cohen *et al.* (2011) state that interviews should allow for the researcher to have some control but should also allow for participant spontaneity.

I conducted the semi-structured interviews prior to the observations and handing out the questionnaires. This allowed me to first explore what the participants viewed as their reality and how much they were comfortable to share with me. The Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers preferred that the interviews be conducted in their respective classrooms during their free periods when their learners had gone home. The interview with the Grade 3 teacher was conducted at her private residence after school. Before I commenced the interviews, the participants were reminded of the confidential nature of the project and that they could stop and withdraw at any time. The participants agreed that their interviews could be audio-recorded. I tried to create an environment of openness and trust before each interview so that the participants would express their authentic selves, as suggested by Blanche *et al.* (2006). I asked opened-ended questions which allowed me to explore and listen attentively to the participants' views and experiences (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were then transcribed by me.

3.8.2 Questionnaires

Bertram and Christiansen (2014, p. 73) refer to a questionnaire as a list of questions that are either open- or closed-ended that the research participants answer. After the interviews, I then administered the questionnaire to each of the participants to ensure that they could still express their views on any experiences that they could not share with me face to face during the interviews. Cohen *et al.* (2011) posit that a self-administered questionnaire enables participants to complete answers in private in their personal time and space without pressure or threat from a researcher. Therefore, I emailed each participant the questionnaire. I chose to use a semi-structured questionnaire in which I used open-ended questions to allow the participants to answer freely while still following a set agenda (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). The participants responded via email within three weeks of receiving the questionnaire.

3.8.3 Observations

After interviewing them and asking the participants to complete the questionnaire, I then wanted to go into the field and explore, by means of classroom observations, if what I had gathered was what was actually happening. This method is supported by Cohen *et al.* (2011) who refer to observations as a way for a researcher to generate data as it is occurring in context rather than from a second hand account. Bertram and Christiansen (2014, p. 84) refer to this data generation tool as providing “first-hand data”. I used a semi-structured observation schedule in which I had listed a range of topics to observe. As the schedule was semi-structured, I was afforded the freedom to observe the classroom activities in more depth if I so required. Each observation lasted approximately 45 minutes. I observed and took field notes during one lesson period per teacher while I remained as an observer without participating in the lesson in any way (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

3.8.4 Document Analysis

Creswell (2012) states that document analysis consists of collecting public and private records about the participants in a study, such as referring to documents in a teacher journal. Flick (2006, p. 252) states that these documents can be seen as “communicative devices” if their production and use are explored in context. Therefore, the researcher should explore who produced the documents, their intended use, and the way they are utilised in the natural context (Flick, 2006, p. 251). I explored and examined teacher files which included lesson plans, assessment plans and notes on parent interviews. I also reviewed the information from the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) of teachers which looks at feedback and monitoring in the teaching profession. According to the DoE (2003) a lesson plan is a detailed structure for teaching, learning and assessment activities. The DoE (2003) states that a lesson plan should include the objectives, assessment that will be used, resources needed,

links to prior knowledge, and teaching methods that teachers will use. The DoE (2003) also states that the teacher should include information on how s/he will make provisions for the diversity of learners in the classroom. The lesson plan could cover daily or weekly activities (DoE, 2003). The teachers granted me permission to look at these files in the school setting and to take notes that were related to my study.

3.9 Data Analysis

Blanche *et al.* (2006) argue that in order to provide a “thick description” of experiences and perceptions, data must be interpreted from a point of empathic understanding. Therefore I used the inductive approach to analyse my data. This involved reducing the data and organising it so that I would be able to identify emerging themes (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Creswell (2009) argues that inductive data analysis requires qualitative researchers to build their themes from the bottom up by working back and forth between themes and the database. It also involves interacting and collaborating with the participants to ensure that enough data have been gathered and that these data will also have a chance to shape interpretation (Creswell, 2009). First, I immersed myself in the field notes and transcripts to familiarise myself with the themes that were emerging by reading carefully through the material (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Thereafter I coded the data according to the emergent themes (Blanche *et al.*, 2006)

A major part of qualitative analysis is coding the data which involves reducing the text you have collected and then examining it to get a general sense of it in order to allocate themes (Creswell, 2012). I began exploring the data more closely and looked for similar viewpoints as well as any differences that existed among the participants’ views. I explored how, in some

instances, the answers given were different from what I had observed in the classrooms. I also noted that some participants offered more information in their responses to the questionnaires than during the interviews. I then reflected on my own views and role in finally putting the interpretation together. In this process, I tried consciously to remain free from bias.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that trustworthiness refers to how much the study actually represents the views of the participants. They outline the following factors that improve trustworthiness. The first factor is confirmability, which refers to how the findings can be supported by the data and confirmed by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research study I ensured that I kept all the audio recordings and transcripts in a safe place so that they can be made available if my study is challenged. The second factor is transferability, which refers to whether the findings can be applied beyond the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this regard, I broadly discussed the methods, sampling and context for the research in this chapter for anyone who would like to transfer the results of the study. It must also be noted that my study does not intend to generalise. Moreover, I reflected on my own role as the researcher whilst interpreting and analysing the data. In the third instance, credibility refers to the nature of the data being reported from the viewpoint of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Creswell (2012) argues that we can use ‘member checking’ to examine the accuracy of our findings by taking our reports back to the participants to ensure that our interpretations as researchers are correct. I ensured that my data were correct by conducting member checks, whereby I went back to the participants and discussed my findings with them in a follow-up interview (Creswell, 2012). Finally, dependability looks at the processes involved in data

collection, data analysis and theory generation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I ensured dependability by means of the use of triangulation. In this process I used various methods of data generation, namely interviews, a questionnaire, observations and document analysis, and I compared the data to ensure that the findings were dependable (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Creswell (2009) also suggests using a peer debriefing to add validity to a study; hence I asked my supervisor and a peer to examine my data during the analysis process. An external auditor was used to review the entire study and to provide an objective assessment, as recommended by Creswell (2009).

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Adherence to research ethics is important during the planning, design, implementation and reporting processes of all research projects (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The term 'ethics' refers to all the behaviours carried out by the researcher along three main ethical principles: autonomy, non-maleficence, and beneficence (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Throughout my research I took the necessary steps to ensure that I followed the correct protocols regarding ethics. In the first instance the researcher must respect the autonomy of all participants. This implies gaining their consent and maintaining their right to privacy (Bertram & Christensen, 2014). I first obtained permission from the relevant gatekeepers to conduct my study. I sought ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. After I had been given clearance, I then obtained permission from the Department of Basic Education to conduct the study in one of its schools. Thereafter I discussed my study with the school principal who allowed me access to the teachers who were the proposed participants in the research.

The teachers were then contacted and the nature of the study was discussed with each of

them. I obtained their informed consent after ensuring them that their participation would be voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Non-maleficence refers to the fact that no harm must come to the participants in a study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Pseudonyms are therefore used in this study report to protect the identity of the school and the participants in the study. All the participants were assured of the confidential nature of the study. Beneficence refers to how beneficial the study will be to the participants and to society at large (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). All the participants and the school were assured that the results of the study would be discussed with them so that they could explore and reflect on their experiences and comment on what was needed to improve teaching and learning of visually impaired learners. This study could also be beneficial to other mainstream teachers or schools who have visually impaired learners in their classrooms and who would like to learn more. On a larger scale, I hope that my research may inform the training needs of future teachers who will teach learners with special needs.

3.12 Limitations to the study

The study had several limitations. Firstly this was a small-scale Master's research study with a limited time frame and budget, therefore the sample size and results of the study cannot be generalised (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

The participants who were selected were purposively and conveniently sampled, meaning that they were chosen because they were the only teachers available at the study site and in the grades that pertained to the study. Although not every teacher was a novice first-year teacher, the other two teachers could still discuss the experiences they had when they were novice teachers. This was a limitation as access to teachers was limited due to the small available sample.

As the researcher, I was known to the participants because I am a teacher at the school and therefore I could have received biased responses to some extent. However, I maintained a professional demeanour throughout the research and always reflected on my own role in my interpretations. I also asked the participants not to be afraid to disclose any information even though I was their colleague, but to rather see me as a person who wanted to learn more of herself and of what other teachers were experiencing.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter explored in detail the research design and methodology that had been used in this study. I demonstrated how I used my research design and methodology to answer the research questions. I explained why I chose my sampling method and gave a description of both the research site and the participants in the study. Thereafter I discussed the different data generation tools that I employed to reach my findings. This was followed by how I used the inductive process to analyse my findings and to build up themes. I also discussed what ethical procedures I followed and finally explained the limitations of the study. The next chapter will be a presentation of the findings that emerged once the data had been analysed.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter looked at what methods I utilised to generate the data. This chapter will discuss the findings. The study was aimed at an exploration of novice teachers' experiences in teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase. The research design used a case study to explore the experiences of three teachers at one special school. The interviews were used to gather an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the participants as teachers. The findings from the interviews were coded according to four emergent themes: 1) training and qualifications for teaching visually impaired learners; 2) the rewards and challenges of a teacher teaching visually impaired learners; 3) teaching beyond the curriculum, and finally, 4) it takes a team to support teachers who teach visually impaired learners. After the interviews, a semi-structured questionnaire was administered to each of the same respondents. The data allowed me to gather any information that the teachers did not share during the interview. Three main themes emerged from the questionnaire, namely: 1) training and qualifications; 2) the challenges faced by novice teachers; and 3) the importance of support and collaboration. This section is followed by a discussion of the observations that I conducted in each of the teachers' classrooms. The findings that will be discussed were based on the field notes that I recorded for each teacher I observed. The observations are then concluded with a discussion of my observations of all three teachers. Finally, a discussion of the document analysis is presented. The documents I perused were located in the teachers' files, as there is no separate curriculum that guides the teaching of visually impaired or any other challenged learners at this research site. For trustworthiness, the data from the teachers'

files were used to triangulate data from the classroom observations, the responses to the questionnaire, and the interviews.

4. 2 Interviews

According to Blanche *et al.* (2006), an interview is a qualitative data generation tool that allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences using an interview schedule. An interview allows a participant to provide detailed personal information, whilst also giving the interviewer control to ask specific questions to gain specific information that may be required (Creswell, 2012). The data obtained from the interviews are discussed in this chapter. For the purpose of authenticity, the responses of the participants are presented verbatim and may contain linguistic errors. The findings will be presented according to four emergent themes.

4.2.1 Training and qualifications for teaching visually impaired learners

The teachers in the study were professionally qualified teachers who possessed appropriate general teaching qualifications. I had hoped to find that the teachers had some training relating to visually impaired learners prior to or while teaching at the school. I had also hoped to explore if any such training was beneficial to the teachers' classroom practice while teaching visually impaired learners. However, the findings revealed that the majority of the participants had had no training in special needs before they were employed as teachers at this special needs school. Previous research by Ladbrook (2009) demonstrated that when teachers had poor training in special needs, they had less confidence to teach these learners. Moreover, research by Lawson, Norwich and Nash (2013) found that teachers who had previous practical experiences and training in special needs, understood diverse learners better and planned and taught better lessons. Only one of the participants in the study

actually held a special needs qualification. Miss Honey was in her first year of teaching at the school without any teaching experience apart from her practical teaching experience. She had received a post graduate Certificate in Education and then did her Honours in special needs teaching before she entered the classroom. During the interview, Miss Honey had the following to say about her qualifications regarding visually impaired learners:

“I did a post graduate Certificate in Education so I got eleven weeks’ teaching practice and then I did my Honours in Special Education, but I didn’t actually work in a classroom with that, so this is my first time teaching [in] special education.”

She indicated that even though she might have had training in special needs during her studies, it was mostly theory-based and she had not been exposed to any practical experiences of teaching these learners. This finding was similar to that of Coates (2012) who found that teachers felt that their qualification did not provide the actual teaching experiences for special needs education that they required. Mrs London, who was in her third year of teaching at the school, had had some experience teaching at a mainstream school before she could come into a special needs classroom. She was in possession of a Diploma in teaching. While teaching at the school, she decided to complete a special needs course at a university. However, her response in the interview showed that her qualification did not entail an in-depth study of visually impaired learners.

“I have done an Advanced Certificate in Education course through ... University in special needs. That came into it.”

When she was asked if she thought the course was useful, her response indicated that it was not very helpful to her actual teaching in the classroom. Mrs London said:

“Well... look... much of what you do with visually impaired learners is common sense, as there is no training.”

It is also important to note that the longest serving teacher at the school did not have any special needs qualifications or courses before teaching at this school. Mrs Summer was in her fifth year of teaching at the school and held a Bachelor of Education degree. This indicates that the school did not require teachers to have any special needs qualification before entering the school. Teachers were simply required to possess a teaching qualification without any special needs experience. The findings also indicated that even while teaching visually impaired learners, the teachers had not received actual formal training, specifically for visually impaired learners. However, the DoE (2008) states that teachers with a general teaching qualification must receive special needs training while teaching if they have not already done so, but this was not required in Mrs Summer’s case. When asked about the training she received while teaching these learners, Mrs Summer replied:

“Well, I went to some departmental workshops for teachers. And our school sometimes has training for teachers on different topics at our school each term. But I haven’t done training specifically for visually impaired learners.”

Miss Honey’s responses further demonstrated that she also had not done any training related to visually impaired learners specifically, but that she learnt from experience. She said:

“I haven’t had any formal training; as a result I only use my gut feeling. Sometimes it works and sometimes not.”

When asked to elaborate about learning Braille, Miss Honey replied:

“Oooh!! My dear...self-taught.”

The above findings indicated that the school did not really prioritise the teaching of visually impaired learners, because the teachers had not yet had any training on the topic. This included the longest serving teacher in the study. However, the teachers felt differently about how teachers needed to be trained adequately and be prepared for teaching visually impaired learners. The participants were questioned about what training they thought would be appropriate for novice teachers. Their responses indicated that they would have enjoyed proper training on teaching visually impaired learners and special needs learners. Mrs Summer said:

“Well, I think part of teacher training should be teaching children with special needs, especially with all the hype of inclusive education....As I have mentioned, teachers with general teaching qualifications, like me for example, don't have any knowledge of working with special needs [learners]. So things like Braille and a course prior to teaching at a school for visually impaired learners would help the teacher tremendously. Like I feel universities should provide this training in the degree for teachers willing to teach at a special school. It would make the dream of you know inclusion in schools possible because it would mean teachers have the knowledge and training before they even enter the classroom.”

Mrs Summer's response showed that her general degree made no provision for teaching in special needs education, which is often a problem in most university courses for teachers. The teachers in the study felt that their qualifications did not allow them to obtain any practical experience of working in special needs schools. The participants also believed that their degree did not prepare them for the reality of what they faced as novice teachers in the classroom. The participants expressed their thoughts about the quality of teacher training at universities and what improvements could be made. Miss Honey was asked to reflect on whether she felt that her qualification had adequately prepared her for teaching visually impaired learners. She said:

“Not at all! I really, really don’t believe that they are. Especially doing the PGCE programme that doesn’t even prepare you for mainstream schooling. They basically do more theory. I believe that they should give you a wider variety and knowledge of what teaching is all about, and how to include children with special needs.”

It therefore became evident that Miss Honey felt poorly prepared for teaching after obtaining her qualification. Another participant agreed with her fellow teacher and emphasised the importance of practical experiences in special schools compared to a strictly theoretical qualification. Mrs Summer said:

“Universities should also allow students to go to special needs schools like a teaching practice so they are able like first-hand to see and experience what it would be like.”

The teachers also felt that it would be important to extend the skills and expertise from a special school to other schools where the inclusion of visually impaired learners is a possibility. They stated that staff at special schools could provide specialised training to mainstream teachers on things like Braille skills. This finding corroborated both Ladbrook (2009) and DoE (2001). Both state that special schools should share their expertise as resource centres. The teachers could also share their experiences of working with visually impaired learners with other teachers who are not aware of what it entails. When asked about support and training, one of the participants responded about promoting special schools as a resource centre for other schools. Mrs Summer commented:

“Special schools like ours could also provide training to mainstream schools on things like Braille. It’s a very valuable skill for even support staff within a school who want to help teachers with these learners. I know things like this would have helped me a lot if I could afford it.”

However, both Ladbrook (2009) and Laawen (2007) show that the goal of special schools serving as resource centres has not yet been achieved. This study corroborated their

viewpoint. When Mrs London was asked whether this special school shared its resources with other schools, she stated: *“There was some talk about it”*, which demonstrated that nothing concrete had been put into place yet.

4.2.2 The rewards and challenges of a teacher teaching visually impaired learners

During the interviews, the teachers were asked to discuss the challenges they faced when teaching visually impaired learners. The participants highlighted the fact that they did not know Braille or had been poorly trained in Braille instruction. Research has indicated that novice teachers’ battle to teach visually impaired learners because they lack the proper skills and training, such as Braille skills (Frazer & Maguvhe, 2008; Herzber & Stough, 2007). This is extremely challenging for teachers as it means that they are unable to enter into the visually impaired learner’s world and provide the most effective teaching. None of the participants had been formally trained in Braille instruction. Miss Honey responded that she was self-taught; however, this did not give any indication of her expertise in the area. Mrs London indicated that she knew Braille, but not at a very advance level. Her response was:

“I can read Braille sort of, but I have to get the alphabet sheet out and refer to it.”

Another participant agreed that she had some knowledge of Braille but was also not adequately prepared. Mrs Summer had the following to say when asked about the challenge of teaching visually impaired learners through Braille instruction:

“Also, the challenge for most teachers and me as well was Braille. I have learnt some unconstructed Braille letters but not enough for me to scribe out the Braille work done by my learners, which is now contracted Braille which is a shortened type of Braille letter to form words.”

The teachers also mentioned that visually impaired learners required a great deal of support and individual attention. This sometimes became a challenge in a classroom with diverse learners as there was not always sufficient time to provide individual attention to every

learner. Miss Honey's response highlighted the need for individual attention for a visually impaired learner:

"The biggest challenge is that they constantly need somebody by them telling them what to do, how to do it. I find they are not as independent as other children. They are more dependent. They often lose their place in their work and they constantly need somebody by them. I find that is the most challenging."

Mrs London further argued that there was insufficient time during the day to revise difficult work with individual learners. She commented that Braille work usually required a time-consuming method whereby the teacher had to decipher the Braille code. Therefore she usually required assistance from someone who could transcribe the work into sighted words so that she could mark it. This took a long time and the work usually ended up coming to her very late and this caused a problem, particularly when she needed to assess or revise what the learner had found challenging in that section. She expressed her frustration in the following statement:

"I have done some scribing but the problem is time. It really is a problem. Because you know, you just don't have time for all this. It's difficult enough to mark. What's very important is to go over the marked work with the child. Because if you don't it's a bit of a waste of time, because they don't know if they did the right thing or the wrong thing. So it's important to go over the work with them. And it's hard to find time to do that."

Therefore, the learners usually require individual attention and support from their teachers who also have to work with other learners who have various problems. Teachers in the study therefore found it difficult to accomplish everything they had planned even though they had smaller class sizes compared to mainstream schools. Research by Ladbrook (2009) and Bendova, Cechackova and Sadkova (2014) supports this finding, as mainstream schools with large classes and poor resources battle to cater for the needs of special needs learners. From the above findings it became evident that visually impaired learners would not be able to cope in mainstream schools under current circumstances because they still need the

specialised support offered in special schools (DoE, 2001). The teachers felt that being in a special school alleviated some of the burden of these challenges. Mrs Summer made the following comments when asked if visually impaired learners would cope in mainstream schools:

“For a mainstream teacher who hasn’t had training in Braille it would be difficult for her to mark and set work for learners. Scribing of Braille is a time consuming task and the mainstream teacher already has 40 other learners to also assist.... At a school with few resources and patience you know it would be such a challenge. So right now our South African classroom, including these learners in a mainstream class, is not the best choice because special schools are better resourced when it comes to these learners’ needs.”

Mrs Summer therefore highlighted that large class sizes and poor resources in mainstream schools would currently not prove to be the best educational environment for a visually impaired learner. Another participant showed her agreement and went further to suggest that it largely depended on whether learners were adequately supported by their families and the school. Miss Honey said:

“...if the school that they are going to is prepared to have a facilitator in their classroom as well as noise from the Braille. The Braille makes a lot of noise and it can be very disruptive. It also depends on the support of the family of that specific learner. Where would that family get support from? Would they bring their own Brilled work and curriculum worksheets and where they would get that from is the next question. The mainstream school might not have the resources such as Braille worksheets and Braille books. So it depends on a) the school and b) the family.”

Miss Honey mentioned a few resources that, if lacking, would create great challenges when visually impaired learners were to be enrolled at mainstream schools. Such resources include facilitators, parental support, noise level control, and Braille books and worksheets. She stated that mainstream schools might not have the finances and resources available to offer Braille books and neither would many families in South Africa that are not financially

equipped to provide a facilitator or Braille resources such as a Braille, which is very expensive. Similar findings are reported by SADPD (2012) that claims that rural schools have poor resources, particularly Braille. The Department of Basic education also has a very slow production of Braille books (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012). Moreover, I was shocked to learn that a Braille can cost in the region of R15 000 and may be difficult to repair as they are sent from overseas suppliers.

Parental support was another challenge that faced these teachers when working with visually impaired learners. The teachers stated that some parents were sometimes more supportive than others. The teachers also had to deal with parents who did not want to apply their suggestions at home. The teachers stated that this became a problem as the concepts and skills taught to these learners were not being reinforced and there was often no consistency between the home and the schooling environment. Teachers were also aware of the fact that parents were especially sensitive and liked to treat their child with extra care due to their disability, but they also felt that this was to the disadvantage to the child who needed to learn skills and independence. The teachers also understood that work and other life pressures could get in the way of parents being fully present to show their support, but they felt that it was needed for a successful school-home relationship. The participants also mentioned that parents themselves were not sufficiently empowered to deal with their visually impaired child and how to teach Braille. However, they claimed that teachers tried their best to include parents in every step of their child's progress. Mrs Summer stated that she met parents every term to discuss the learners' progress. However, not all the parents attended. Research has demonstrated that parent-teacher collaboration for special needs learners allows for their unique needs to be catered for and this results in better progress (Hebel & Persitz, 2014). Mrs London made the following comment when asked about parental support:

“Some are more supportive than others; some have been very good, some get home tired. They also don’t understand Braille. But with a blind child support is very important.”

Another participant agreed with her colleague and outlined the important issue of parental empowerment. Miss Honey stated that if parents were educated to understand what the learner would benefit from and how to support them, then maybe support from parents would increase:

“I do have parental support but from some parents not at all. I feel as though they might not have the knowledge of Braille, of what is expected of them, how to teach their child. Maybe the parents aren’t empowered themselves but that could be one aspect. Then you get another aspect of it where the parents want to do everything for the child themselves and that doesn’t make them independent and then they have learnt helplessness.”

Mrs Summer agreed with the above comment on parental support and added that support from parents is the key to learner success:

“I find that learners who have parents who support them are the ones who progress in my class.”

The teachers agreed that although they had many challenges teaching visually impaired learners as novice teachers, they also found it extremely rewarding. All the participants faced some challenges; however, they claimed that their learners’ needs always came first. Burden’s (1980) theory posits that it is only in the fifth year of teaching that teachers start becoming more committed and satisfied and are able to enjoy their teaching and their learners. However, research by Kumi-Yeboah and James (2012) found that novice teachers can grow to become successful as early as in their first year if they work hard, are self-motivated, dedicated, and show enthusiasm for what they do. The following response by Miss

Honey indicates that even the first-year teacher found teaching visually impaired learners rewarding:

“I would like to add that it’s extremely challenging. Very challenging, very demanding, but at the same time it’s extremely rewarding.”

Therefore due to the above findings I disagree with Burden’s theory that only in their fifth year do teaches begin to see it as a rewarding career. I as a researcher also agree with Mrs Honey in that even though I face many challenges in my teaching, I still look forward to teaching these learners with excitement and enthusiasm every day. Mrs Summer agreed that teaching visually impaired learners was challenging. However, having more experience than Miss Honey, she stated that one overcame these challenges as one developed as a teacher. Her growth and confidence as a teacher can be seen in the following response:

“I enjoy teaching these learners. I mean, you know they are a blessing to me. Although I’ve had some challenges over the years as a teacher, you always grow in order to become a better teacher for your learners. So after all they are what matter and you need to give them the best possible education that you can.”

Mrs London agreed that they were challenges in teaching. However, she stated that her learners inspired her to overcome these challenges when she witnessed their strength to succeed against all odds:

“I have always enjoyed teaching visually impaired learners. People think it’s difficult. I actually enjoy the challenge. I am always quite impressed with how they manage and how positive they are. The little one I got now, now that she’s comfortable with us she’s becoming much more interactive and smiles more. Yes, life isn’t easy for them, so I think one always has to try to be sensitive to their needs.”

4.2.3 Teaching beyond the curriculum

The research aspired to explore which curriculum was used to teach the visually impaired learners and how it was delivered to them. The findings revealed that at this special school all the learners were taught using the normal mainstream curriculum which is the Curriculum and Assessment Statement (CAPS). However, the teachers stated that an individual educational plan (IEP) had to augment the curriculum for some visually impaired learners. These IEPs were used only for learners who could not cope with the pace of the curriculum and were behind with grasping the concepts. Therefore, although it was individualised for a learner or learners, the IEP still covered what was expected in the CAPS. Mrs London made the following comments about what she thought an IEP should entail:

“With the child I got now, she’s only been with me for a month, she came so late in the year, she’s way behind, so she’s doing English with the class, but Maths we started her from the beginning of Grade 2. In that respect it is an IEP because it’s individual for her.”

Miss Honey agreed, and was of the same opinion about what an IEP should entail:

“I’ve only got an IEP for one of my blind learners. That is because he’s working at a lower standard than the other two.”

The responses clearly revealed that no separate curriculum or IEP was drafted by the teachers and used for all visually impaired learners. The findings also indicated that the teachers were not fully aware of what an IEP actually should involve. Rakap (2015) suggests that an IEP requires a full assessment of the learner in order to draw up actual goals that will lead to better teaching and interventions designed for the unique needs of that learner. However, in this study the teachers seemed to refer to an IEP as curriculum work that was delivered at a lower standard because the learner was not coping. Mrs Summer, a fifth year teacher, seemed to have more experience in this field when asked what an IEP was. She was currently not using one in her class but seemed to have some knowledge of what was required to draw up

an IEP. Her knowledge of what an IEP entailed could also be indicative of her increased experience as a teacher compared the other participants:

“We set out work at a lower level to what CAPS is covering. This plan also has goals that need to be reached by the learners each term to make sure that they are progressing and what is attainable for them. We also draw up this plan with others who help, like the therapists, the psychologist and also the parents are very important as they are the ones who also play a role to make sure that their child is on the right track.”

From the above response it is clear that the teacher had more knowledge about what IEP plan entailed. This was in line with Burden’s (1980) theory that teachers in their fifth year are more knowledgeable of learner needs. However, her response also indicated that an IEP involves a lengthy process and may be a reason why the teachers were not using such a plan for all their learners. The data also revealed that the teachers used the same curriculum for all learners and that they did not have a guideline document to refer to, such as an expanded curriculum that addressed other skills like Braille and social skills, as suggested by McDonough, Sticken and Haack (2006). They were quite clear that there was one core curriculum that all the learners used as required by the DoE (2008). This is clearly demonstrated in Mrs London’s statement:

“There’s no special work. Well, it’s special in that they have to have their work Brailled and they work from a Braille book rather than an ordinary book. We all stay together.”

When using the same curriculum, teachers had to find ways of adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of visually impaired learners. The DoBE (2011) requires that teachers utilise curriculum differentiation where they adapt their teaching to suit learner needs, for example by modifying their teaching and assessment strategies. However, when adapting the curriculum and teaching to meet the learners’ needs, some learning areas proved to be a

challenge. The majority of the participants in the study found it very challenging to teach Mathematics to visually impaired learners. When asked which area of the curriculum was the most difficult to teach, Mrs London replied:

“Oh yes, definitely Maths. The way that they teach Maths now they don’t just teach you like you were taught; like you add your units and you add your tens and later on you learn to carry them. Now you have to pull the whole thing apart and decompose numbers, put the tens together, put the units together. That kind of thing. And they find it very difficult. They get so confused. That is hard for them. And it’s difficult to try and let them get a picture of it. You can’t really do the tactile stuff, and the blocks don’t help.”

Mrs London’s response indicated that when teaching her learners place value, she found decomposing numbers and building numbers extremely hard to teach as the learners could not visualise the breaking down like the sighted learners could. She also emphasised that the method of teaching this section of Mathematics had changed and made it more difficult for visually impaired learners in the CAPS curriculum. She found the old method of vertical sums much easier to work out than the expanded notation and breaking down horizontally that learners had to do currently. She also stated that with sighted learners she could use resources like flard cards to enhance their understanding of place value. These are cards that have numbers printed on them that learners use to build or break down numbers. However, these cards were not brailled appropriately for her visually impaired learners. She said:

“They tried to make some flard cards for them but they weren’t very effective. I gave up. It wasn’t helping me at all. I find that aspect difficult.”

This comment by Mrs London showed her frustration in trying to teach mathematical concepts without proper resources and guidance, because the curriculum does not guide the teacher on how to teach or what resources to use for visually impaired learners. This finding

would suggest that even though Mrs London was a third-year teacher in this school, she still battled to adapt the curriculum and to find ways to address the needs of her visually impaired learners. Burden (1980) theorises that during this year teachers should have an increased understanding of their learners and should be able to effectively respond to diverse needs. However, Raimondi (2007) suggests that novice teachers receive limited resources and guidance and that this might be why teachers are still battling even in later years to adapt the curriculum. The first-year teacher in the study shared the same sentiments when it came to Mathematics teaching for visually impaired learners. Miss Honey stated:

“Maths I found extremely difficult to adapt to teach, especially when it comes to things like measurement and capacity. That I find extremely difficult because how do you teach a blind child capacity or measurement? Money is also extremely difficult. Because you see, with the visual children they’ve got coins, now with the blind children they’ve got to identify the different shapes of the coin and which numbers, [and feel] which coin is different to the rest.”

Burden (1980) suggests that in the first year the teacher battles more with understanding the curriculum and is more focused on teaching the subject and less on the learners’ needs. However, from this study it was evident that it was not only a first year teachers who battled to adapt certain areas of the curriculum to the learners’ needs, but that even more experienced teachers like Mrs London (a third-year teacher) struggled with certain aspects. This indicates that teachers may still need guidance on how to adapt the curriculum even after their first year and are still learning, as there is no document to guide them. Therefore I feel It was also revealed that the teachers found it challenging to deliver the curriculum to learners who could not use their sight to learn. This is a logical challenge because the way that most young learners internalise learning is through visual input (Hadidi, 2013; Fraser & Maguvhe, 2008). However, it was clear that even though these teachers were required to use the normal mainstream curriculum, this did not prevent them from teaching and delivering their lessons to visually impaired learners to the best of their ability. The findings suggested that the

teachers had found, through their teaching experiences, that every learner is unique. They understood that all learners are different and that the way they teach these learners needs to be different. The teachers in this study respected and acknowledged that all learners could learn despite their disabilities and they therefore adhered to the principles of inclusion (DoE, 2001). This concept of inclusion is encapsulated in the following comment by Mrs Summer:

“These children should not be deprived because they cannot see.”

Mrs Summer’s response indicated that learners’ psychical disabilities should not prevent them from learning. The teacher emphasised that every learner needed to be respected and deserved the same quality of education as able-bodied learners. Mrs London agreed with this statement and stated that visually impaired learners should never feel excluded from the learning experience:

“One doesn’t want to make these learners feel different.”

However, it is not always easy for a teacher to learn how to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of diverse learners. Burden’s (1980) theory suggests that in the first year of teaching teachers are still getting to know the environment, their learners and themselves. They also seem to be stuck in traditional ways of teaching and therefore battle to meet the needs of their learners through new teaching methods (Burden, 1980). During the first year, teachers are still battling with the challenges faced by a new teacher like understanding the curriculum and how to plan a lesson for their learners (Burden, 1980). The following response corroborates this theory, as Mrs Summer indicated that inclusion was something that was learned through experience:

“When I first started teaching visually impaired learners I had some challenges. It wasn’t so easy to come and teach children who could not see what you put in front of them on the board. I had to learn to adapt my teaching to accommodate learners who cannot use their

eyes. As a new teacher that is sometimes strange when you first begin; you teach on the board and you use textbooks and stuff like that. But then I had to start thinking outside the box and also every child learns differently.”

The response indicates that the teacher found teaching visually impaired learners different to teaching sighted learners. However, I found that even though these teachers had to face various challenges, they made a great effort to go beyond the curriculum and to “think outside the box” as they progressed. They were always trying their best to adapt the curriculum even though they may have had some doubts as they went along. Miss Honey, who was a first-year teacher, seemed to question her abilities to adapt her teaching compared to teachers who may have had more experience:

“So I try my best as far as possible. Obviously it’s not at the same standard of what the visual children have but you do your best with what you’ve got.”

This statement shows that a first-year novice teacher may have her doubts about what works and what does not work. Burden (1980) states that first-year teachers often feel insecure about their abilities to teach and are more concerned about finishing the curriculum instead. A more experienced teacher, Mrs Summer, stated that experience allowed teachers to grow and to become more confident in teaching visually impaired learners. Burden (1980) claims that, in the fifth year of teaching, teachers are more willing to learn new methods and skills, thus ensuring that their teaching remains interesting for their learners. This theory was confirmed as Mrs Summer, through her experience, had become more confident in her abilities and knew what worked best for her learners:

“I thought about how I can make it more exciting for them. I think as a teacher you need to learn from experience and you need to grow every day.”

The teachers used various ways to make learning more exiting for their visually impaired learners and always went the extra mile to make learning more interesting for these unique young people. Even though the teachers mentioned the challenges they experienced when teaching concepts, they went above and beyond what was required to understand what each learner required to grasp a concept. The teachers had learnt various strategies and ways of delivering lessons for visually impaired learners who could not use their sight to learn. Miss London had this to say when asked how she involved visually impaired learners during a lesson:

“Just try and involve them as much as possible. I keep calling them by name, keep asking them questions. Keep them with me. Because it’s very easy for a visually impaired learner to actually drift off and get into their own little world and not listen, because they don’t have the visual stimulus of seeing you. So it’s very easy for them to lose the thread. So I’m kind of including them all the time.”

The teacher had a deep sense of respect for these learners, as revealed by the above comments. She therefore always tried to ensure that the visually impaired learners were included in the lesson. The findings revealed that the teachers went to great lengths in their teaching to ensure that all learners were included.

The teachers usually had different resources that they used to make learning more interesting for the learners. Mrs London, for example, stated that she often had to look deeper and explore what a learner really required from her as a teacher. She highlighted that it was vital that teachers remained sensitive to their learners’ needs. During the interview she highlighted how some learners were often forgotten in mainstream schools as teachers did not observe their needs. This is Mrs London’s response about an Albino learner suffering from a visual impairment:

“He was sitting in the back row, and not really making progress, because he was forgotten. He came here. He was in my class, and I made sure he got the right seat, his work was

enlarged, and he started picking up. His marks improved, and it was just a happier situation.”

It was revealed that if a teacher is willing to identify learner needs and be sensitive to what each learner has to offer, then every learner has the potential to learn. Mrs Summer agreed and claimed that it was all about the different teaching strategies that one employed to teach the learners. She stated that if a child could not learn through the sense of sight, then teachers needed to come up with other fun and creative means of teaching these learners. She gave an example in her interview of how she would bring an actual flower to school so that the learner could learn about a flower through touch and smell instead of just a picture. Mrs Summer had also made a Braille clock that she used for her Mathematics teaching during a lesson on time for her learners. She explained that teachers needed to think about how they would learn if they could not use their eyes. She was adamant that teachers should learn to be creative in their teaching:

“The visually impaired learners are using their other senses remember besides sight, so we cannot just rely on books and pictures to teach them. So sometimes my learners learn through songs and dance and sometimes I actually take them to the farm to learn about animals so they could actually feel that a sheep has fluffy wool on its body. Small children won’t only learn through books and the chalkboard and that’s when you learn and grow as a teacher.”

Miss Honey, who was new to teaching, also made sure that she had the correct resources to enhance the learning of the visually impaired learners in her classroom. During her interview she made mention of various ways in which she had adapted her teaching strategies to accommodate all the learners in her class. She stated that when she taught high frequency words during English, she had the same sight words Brailled for the visually impaired learners so they were not left out of the lesson. She also used tactile letters with the Braille alphabet on them to teach phonics. Mrs London also stated that when she first started the Braille unit, there were very few of Braille books available so she recorded stories and questions so that her blind learners could have something to listen to when her sighted learners were reading

books. Similar adaptations were made by a teacher who used tactile objects and audio and Braille books in her preschool classroom (McKenzie & Davidson, 2007). These findings could therefore argue against Burden's (1980) theory that first-year teachers find it difficult to adapt their teaching and resources to meet learners' needs.

The teachers also used different assessment methods for visually impaired learners. Research found that teachers need to give special needs learners extra time or to have readers available if learners require them for a fair assessment (Lehohla & Hlalele, 2012). It was found that all the teachers preferred to assess the learners orally, as Brailing is time consuming and requires a scribe. Therefore they did what was easier for the learner and for themselves as teachers. However, the learners had someone to assist them if they needed questions read orally when they Brailled the answers as they were still learning Braille. The teachers also ensured that they had the correct assistive devices needed like enlarged worksheets for learners or if they required a telescope to read. These measures ensured that the learners were gaining the maximum benefit from teaching and were assessed fairly. However, the teachers ensured that the learners were not treated differently even though they were assessed differently compared to sighted learners. They also ensured that their learners all followed the same curriculum and had the same learning opportunities. They also emphasized the need to let visually impaired learners gain their independence rather than treating them differently to their peers. Mrs London claimed that she used a teacher aide to assist her visually impaired learners during assessments, but ensured that her assessments were fair:

"I must be careful because I don't want them to put the answers in her mouth. I don't want them to give her too much of an advantage. I want to see what she knows."

4.2.4 It takes a team to support teachers who teach visually impaired learners

The findings showed that teachers require a great deal of support to teach visually impaired learners effectively. The teachers in the study revealed that good support is vital to providing a good quality education to visually impaired learners. It is evident that the special school allowed for more support than a mainstream school would have provided due to better resources and smaller classes. However, the main structure of support that most teachers in the study valued above all else was that the staff in the school were diversified and provided a great deal of expertise that the teachers could use together with their own knowledge. The DoE (2001) states that some learners such as the visually impaired require specialised support that is only available in special schools. Therefore even novice teachers or those with general teacher qualifications can lean on others who have become experts in certain areas, such as Braille. The teachers participating in the study were asked what support they received when working with visually impaired learners at the school. The teachers mentioned that their first system of support was their fellow teachers in the school who always assisted them when they needed advice on learners in their class. Miss Honey said:

“...especially the other Foundation Phase ladies, we give each other a lot of support. So, say I teach Grade 1; so if a child from Grade R comes into Grade 1 and I want to know where about they what help they need are,, what part of the curriculum they are at, where they struggled, I will go to the Grade R teacher and she will talk me through the child’s strengths and weaknesses.”

Mrs London was in agreed about the support received from fellow Foundation Phase teachers:

“Yes, I think we all try and support each other, like borrowing equipment and that sort of thing. When I needed the Braille clock the other day it was in another classroom. Everyone is happy to share and we all help each other. We are always happy to pass on ideas that we have. I think that’s how the school works. It’s not a case of keeping things to yourself.”

The above responses indicate that the teachers valued the support shared among other teachers in their phase. They were happy to share experiences and ideas with each other. Previous research also demonstrates that when teachers collaborate, it allows for the exchange of information between experienced and novice teachers (Thomas & Thomas, 2012; Thomas, Thomas & Lefebvre, 2014). However, the findings showed that supportive behaviour was not always there. Sometimes novice teachers felt embarrassed to ask their fellow colleagues for assistance and might have been afraid to do so because they feared ridicule. This finding was similar to a finding by Caspersen and Raaen (2014), who found that novice teachers lacked confidence in the presence of experienced teachers. Mrs Summer explained during her interview that when she first arrived at the school, she was given a mentor teacher who assisted her with her planning and documentation that was required of her as a teacher. However, she confessed that she did not always feel comfortable asking for this assistance:

“But as a new teacher you are not always keen to ask for help in case the teacher thinks you don’t know your stuff.”

This is a common problem for novice teachers who battle to ask for assistance when they face challenges during their first few years. However, it appears that as the teachers became more confident in their own abilities, they were more willing to accept help without fear of embarrassment or judgement.

The teachers also mentioned that the management staff such as their Head of Department and the Principal of the school offered them a great deal of support. This is an important finding as Marable and Raimondi (2007) found that supervisors often did not provide guidance to novice teachers, which was a vital component to their success. Mrs Summer had this to say

when asked about the support provided by the management of their school for novice teachers:

“My Principal was also very keen and very helpful when I arrived. If we needed anything our Head of Department or another teacher would help.”

Miss Honey was in agreement that a good support system was offered by the management team of the school. However, she felt that the support was not always available when needed:

“The HOD has helped a lot. There are times where she’s been very busy herself and I just have to, for lack of a better word, “wing it”, and I have to learn by myself. In a way that is good because then we get thrown into the deep end and we have to learn; we have to swim, so that the kids can learn, but at the same time you want to be able to go and be able to ask your HOD for advice. I found it more beneficial going straight to the occupational therapy department or the Braille unit for help and support.”

Mrs Summer, a more experienced teacher, said she enjoyed good support from her management team and supervisors like the Head of Department. Miss Honey stated that the Head of Department provided great support, but that she was not always there to assist if required. This was a surprising finding as one would expect the management of the school to provide more support to a new teacher, especially in her first year at the school. The teacher emphasised that she felt the support of other staff like therapists and Braille specialists to be more beneficial.

It was clear that the teachers valued the support provided by teacher aides in the school, whether they were assistants in the classroom or members of the Braille unit. The teacher aides usually assisted the learners a great deal when they were busy attending to other learners, because the visually impaired ones required individual attention. They also demonstrated that the teacher aides provided more efficiency where they helped with scribing the Braille work done by the learners, which involved a lot of effort. They were very grateful to be working together with these assistants in their classrooms. Cook (2004) claims that teachers display a positive attitude towards teaching disabled learners when they have the

support of a teacher aide in the classroom. Mrs London had a volunteer teacher aide in her classroom and had this to say about her:

“She works with the blind child. I desperately need her; she actually sits with the blind learner. The volunteer helps her one-on-one with the maths orally and scribes the work into the department book.”

The teachers also commented on the great support provided by the Braille unit in the school. The Braille unit consisted of teacher assistants who had been trained to work with visually impaired learners. The findings clearly suggest that the teachers appreciated the unit’s expertise that they may have lacked as new teachers and that they valued the support staff’s opinions and suggestions. The assistants at the unit also taught the learners Braille skills as they had been trained, whereas the teachers did not possess Braille skills. The teachers said that the Braille unit was also well resourced with many teaching aides and books that they needed. The Braille unit also had the important task of adapting and brailing books and readers that were often required by visually impaired learners. Teachers saw this as an important resource available to the school, and they commented that the Department rarely provided Braille books or materials needed for these learners. The teachers showed how much they valued the unit in the following responses:

“We have the Braille unit where if we need to ask questions about any form of Braille, any maths symbols they are more than willing to help. Their doors are always open. If we need anything to be Brailled and work to be set out, they will do that for us. That is purely because as teachers especially in a school we don’t have a lot of time on our hands. So they do that to help us.”

Miss London agreed with Miss Honey and stated that the Braille unit had resources that increased efficiency, thereby creating a more positive learning environment for the learners:

“Oh yes, they have a lot of equipment. Things that make life easier, that speed things up.”

Mrs Summer’s response further illuminated the skills and resources available in the Braille unit that the teachers appreciated:

“They have a wealth of knowledge when it comes to working with these learners, specifically when teaching them Braille skills.”

From the above findings it is evident that all the teachers were in agreement about the value of the support offered by the Braille unit. Besides working together with the Braille unit, the teachers also had other professional support staff that made up the team in this school. Teachers were very aware that without these staff members, working with visually impaired learners would be a challenge. The findings showed that the teachers felt that they were not adequately prepared to work solely with visually impaired learners. These learners required different therapies and skills that were provided by other professionals who had been trained in these areas. The teachers stated that they often collaborated with therapists like occupational therapists who provided skills to learners like fine motor skills. Such skills are required by visually impaired learners to introduce Braille. They also had speech therapists who offered the teachers advice on how to get learners to speak clearly and engage properly in social conversations with their sighted peers. The school psychologist also provided counselling when learners faced emotional problems or suffered from social isolation due to their passive nature. The learners also received weekly physiotherapy sessions to assist in mobility and core strengthening. The teachers also had progress discussions on the learners in their classroom every term in consultation with all the staff that worked with these learners. Mrs Summer’s response demonstrated how much the teachers valued the support of their colleagues:

“I think we put a lot of team effort in and we are all on the same page when it comes to meeting what learners need. We are not left in the lurch, I guess.”

The findings also showed that the teachers worked closely with other people in the community. They formed a partnership with members of the Society for the Blind in the area

who provided skills like mobility training so that visually impaired learners could learn their way around the school using their canes. According to Miss Honey, the school also received a lot of community support in the form of donations and sponsorships such as tactile equipment. It was clear that when teachers needed to ask for assistance on a specific skill or challenge, they could collaborate and they received professional advice. Research has indicated that collaboration between teachers and other professionals not only decreases the challenges the teachers face, but also ensures that the learner is getting quality support (Lehohla & Hlalele, 2012).

However, in some instances the teachers felt that other staff members were not always on the same page as they were in terms of what the learners needed. Mrs London expressed her dissatisfaction with how visually impaired learners would receive individual therapy, but they were often left out of group therapy sessions. This bothered her as she believed that visually impaired learners needed to be included with other learners in everything. She emphasized the need for teachers to be sensitive to learners and their needs. She narrated a story from her own personal history as a child who suffered from a disability herself. She explained that if her teacher had empathised with her situation, she would have found a way to make her feel included. She acknowledged that it might be difficult for therapists to include all learners in therapy sessions due to their individual needs, but she felt that they should be sensitive to the situation. She strongly felt that visually impaired learners needed to be treated like any other learner:

“Also, from a psychological point of view, not only the physical stuff, you are dealing with a person who has a problem. I think visually impaired learners...I try to empathise with them, try to understand what they are feeling, how they are feeling. They need to train teachers to be sensitive to think outside the box. Then the rest is just common sense. You think outside the box, so much is logical.”

The teachers suggested that even though they received a great deal of help, there were times when they had to learn from their own experiences; this helped them grow into better and stronger teachers. Although the teachers in the study received support during their time of teaching visually impaired learners, none of them were given an actual induction course to clarify what they could expect before they started teaching. This was surprising, as none of them had experienced working with special needs learners. Induction programs are vital and should provide professional development and mentoring to novice teachers who enter special schools (Boyer, 2005). Miss Honey mentioned that an induction course before she started would have assisted her in better facing the challenges she experienced as a novice teacher:

“I really believe that before the school year even starts, that you need to have at least a one-day induction course where you are told about what skills the children should have when they come to your class. What concepts they should know. You should be given just an outline on the basic Braille letters. What dot each letter is. What resources the departments have. I came into the school not knowing what resources were available to me. I just had to go find out myself.”

As the researcher I agree with the findings from Miss Honey as an induction course would introduce novice teachers to an environment which they were not familiar with as student teachers. Therefore it would also allow them the chance to see what they require further training on and not being left with a sense of inadequacy and failure. I sometimes felt overwhelmed with all the new things I had to grasp as a new teacher in a classroom with so many diverse needs.

4.3 Responses to the Questionnaire

According to Cohen *et al.* (2011), a questionnaire allows participants to answer questions set by the researcher in their own private space without any pressure from the researcher. The semi-structured questionnaire that was administered to each respondent asked open-ended questions that allowed freedom in the participants' responses (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter three of the research report. As I was known to the participants and they may have been slightly intimidated by my presence as the researcher, I used the questionnaire to gather any further information that the participants may have left out during the in-depth interviews. Two very important themes emerged from the responses to the questionnaire: 1) the challenges faced by novice teachers; and 2) the importance of support to novice teachers teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase.

4.3.1 Training and qualifications

The findings from the responses to the questionnaire revealed that the most challenging experience of working with visually impaired learners was that none of the teachers had received proper training to teach these learners effectively. The teachers revealed that even though they may have completed a special needs course, it was more theoretical with little impact on the reality of classroom teaching. One of the teachers also had no special needs qualification and held a general teaching degree. The teachers had also mentioned this during their interviews. Teachers should therefore be given a chance to do some practical teaching in special needs schools like students do in mainstream schools so that they are better able understand the reality of teaching in such as school, and not just be informed by the theory

behind it. This was also found by other researches who valued practical teaching with special needs learners rather than a mere theoretical qualification, such as Oswald and Swart (2011), Stella, Forlin and Lan (2007), and Lawson, Norwich and Nash (2013).

The teachers also highlighted, in their responses to the questionnaire, that they had not received any actual training specifically for teaching visually impaired learners while they were at the school. This made it difficult for the teachers and led to various challenges as novice teachers. The teachers all responded to the questionnaire that they had not been trained in Braille and therefore needed assistance to scribe and teach their learners Braille. The participants acknowledged that they had learnt some basic Braille as they gained experience while working with their visually impaired learners, but no formal training was provided by the school. This finding corroborated what had transpired during the interviews. This lack of exposure to special needs teaching prior to teaching in this environment, coupled with a lack of proper training while at the school, may have created various challenges for the teachers when they first started teaching.

4.3.2 Challenges faced by novice teachers in their teaching

One of the major challenges for teachers was that they had to still learn how to adapt the curriculum for visually impaired learners during their first years of teaching. In response to the questionnaire questions, the teachers mentioned that they had to learn to use different methods and ways of teaching that differed from the traditional teaching methods that they were used to when they did teaching practice or first started teaching at the school. Burden's (1980) theory posits that teachers in their first year have preconceived ideas of teaching and hold on to more traditional ways of teaching. They are unwilling to try new teaching methods

and teach the subject rather than the learner (Burden, 1980). The teachers stated that they had to use different ways of capturing the learners' interest other than the usual visual teaching methods like using the chalk and board. Teachers now had to experiment and start trying new approaches that appealed to the visually impaired learners' other senses. As posited by Burden (1980), the teachers all agreed that they had difficulties in their first year as some of them were still getting familiar with the curriculum. Therefore they were not willing to venture off and experiment with new techniques. Miss Honey responded that, as a novice teacher, she was still getting used to the curriculum and planning without the assistance of her lecturers or textbooks. She found this quite a challenge.

The teachers claimed that they had not previously been exposed to the special needs environment and therefore experienced various difficulties. One teacher claimed that when she first started, she did not even know how to insert a Braille paper into the learner's Braille, which left her feeling insecure and embarrassed. They also mentioned that they had to create different resources that would appeal to the learners, such as Braille number lines and raised diagrams. The teachers agreed that, as they gained experience, they learnt that every child had different needs and had to be treated differently. The teachers acknowledged that visually impaired learners needed to learn through their other senses, which was a similar line of thought during the interviews.

Mathematics proved to be the most challenging for the teachers to teach, as concepts such as symmetry and measurement became difficult and the teachers had to find different ways of explaining these concepts to visually impaired learners. Mrs Summer further indicated that any concept that was abstract was difficult for learners to grasp. She also explained that it

was about how one delivered the concept and the method one utilised. For example, she responded that a cross word puzzle could not be used to teach sight words. Therefore teachers had to find interesting and new ways to deliver concepts.

When these participants were exposed to the teaching environment of special learners for the first time, they battled with the actual teaching environment. The teachers stated that it took some getting used to when they first entered the special needs classroom. Mrs Summer recalled a time when she had to look up her learners' disabilities in the medical files and read up on each learner. She felt overwhelmed with what a first-year teacher had to deal with and didn't expect to be reading medical files during her first week while she was still settling in. Mrs London responded that she had had experience in the Foundation Phase, but when she first arrived at the school and saw all the learners' physical disabilities, she became very emotional. She was heartbroken and used to go home every night telling her husband she could not go back the next day. Miss Honey also had similar feelings when she arrived at the school and she felt challenged and insecure when she entered the classroom as a teacher for the first time. Miss Honey stated that, as a novice teacher, it was overwhelming and that her studies had not prepared her for the classroom reality. She used to go home every night and question her choice of occupation. The teachers really opened up about this in their responses to the questionnaire and expressed how they actually learnt to cope being in a school with special needs learners. Burden (1980) theorises that novice teachers often begin to question their career choice in the first year. This was found to be true, particularly as the teachers in this study had to teach learners with physical disabilities, which could have further complicated matters. The study by Ladbrook (2009) found that teachers did not choose special needs teaching as a first choice when they wanted to do teaching. Lumadi (2013) concurs, claiming that most teachers hold a negative view of teaching special needs learners.

4.3.3 The importance of support and collaboration for novice teachers

The responses to the questionnaire revealed that this special needs school was well resourced in terms of materials and staff which were needed for a quality education for visually impaired learners. The participants mentioned that the staff in the school was quite diverse and added different levels of expertise that allowed a novice teacher to have a less challenging experience.

All the teachers mentioned that the school had a Braille unit that comprised teacher aides who had been specifically trained to work with Braille and visually impaired learners at the school. The teachers revealed that these persons were a great source of support, especially when it came to the Braille code because teachers lacked experience in this area. Mrs Summer revealed that, due to their experience of working with so many visually impaired learners, they could offer the teachers advice on how to adapt materials or how to teach a concept in a way that would be more appealing and accessible to these learners. The teachers also mentioned other support staff at the school such as the speech-, occupational-, and physiotherapists. A psychologist was also employed to assist learners with their social skills. It was clear that the teachers at the school were not left to their own devices, but that they had access to specialised advice and support. However, Daniel (2010) claims that for many schools such support is not always possible because not all schools are given specialised support for their special needs learners.

Miss Honey stated that the large staff component could be overwhelming for a first-year teacher arriving fresh at the school. The school had so many people with different expertise and novice teachers could find it challenging to discuss their shortcomings with others as they

might feel inadequate. To address this, Miss Honey revealed that the staff held progress discussions where teachers, therapists, teacher aides and management sat down and discussed each learner's progress. For a novice this was daunting, and Miss Honey found it challenging to speak about her challenges with a particular learner in front of her management and senior staff. To a large extent, this corroborates Burden's (1980) theory that first year teachers are less willing to express and share their ideas than more experienced teachers. This attitude by a first-year teacher had also been evident in the interview. However, Miss Honey acknowledged the benefit of putting ideas together with other staff members who could add value to her teaching and enhance it, rather than ridicule or judge her.

Miss London felt that more support and training were required for first-year teachers in special needs schools. She conceded that the school did provide support; however, she felt that more could have been done to orientate new teachers so that they would learn as soon as possible what was required of them. She felt that the school could provide a basic Braille course for teachers because this aspect was what teachers – both novice and more experienced - battled with most. She further suggested that ongoing training was imperative because teachers needed to update their skills to provide a better education for their learners. Mrs Summer also felt that the school sometimes expected even novice teachers to possess the necessary skills to teach special needs learners simply because they had attained a teaching qualification. She emphasised that this was not the case and that new teachers would feel more secure if they had more guidance on different disabilities and how these would impact their teaching.

During the interviews, the teachers stated that they enjoyed the positive support of their fellow teachers. However, in response to a question in the questionnaire, Miss Honey

revealed that, as a first-year teacher, she had a difficult time planning her lessons because she did not have any fellow teachers in the same grade to plan her lessons with. The challenge for her as a novice who had to plan lessons was that she had little knowledge of her learners and their different needs. Mrs Summer revealed that even though they received support from the staff and management, there were times when this support was not readily available due to busy schedules. She stated that basic courses and information should be given to novice teachers when they first start. She also revealed that she had expected more constructive feedback on her teaching when she was a novice teacher. However, the Head of Department used to provide feedback only after she had made a mistake; she therefore suggested that constant feedback, updating of skills and training were required to support novice teachers, and not only feedback when they made mistakes. Mrs Summer mentioned that praise was important for novice teachers to build them up and to support them in their efforts. Kutsyuruba (2009) agrees that correct supervision and constructive feedback can enhance teacher performance. Mrs Summer's response highlighted that ongoing training should involve everyone on the staff and not just novice teachers. Mrs London offered a similar response in that she felt the school should provide novice teachers with more training on basics, like Braille. She also revealed that the Heads of Department and other staff needed to be more responsive to suggestions and the needs of novice teachers, as they sometimes only dished out advice without listening to grievances. Melnick and Meister (2008) also found that ongoing professional development and mentoring were required for both novice and experienced teachers to grow. The above findings made it clear that the school needs to provide ongoing training and support for novice teachers who enter the school. A similar finding emerged during the interviews when the teachers also felt that more training was needed for novice teachers.

4.4 Observations

Cohen *et al.* (2011) refer to observation as a data generation tool that allows researchers an opportunity to observe participants in their natural context. In this study, semi-structured observations were utilised by means of an observation schedule that shaped and directed the observations but that did not restrict what was being observed (Cohen, et al., 2011). During an observation a researcher collects “first hand data”, which means that researchers gather information that they observe themselves rather than rely only on what they are told by the participants (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014, p. 84). This data generation tool is discussed in more depth in Chapter three.

The following are extracts from the field notes that I recorded during my observation visits to the teachers’ classrooms. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants. The observations may contain language discrepancies as they were taken down as observed. I observed the three participating teachers in my study during a lesson that each conducted in their respective classrooms. I used a semi-structured schedule to guide me on the following aspects: inclusion of visually impaired learners during the lesson; the teaching strategies employed when teaching the learners; the classroom environment; the resources used during the lesson for visually impaired learners; the assistive devices used in the lesson for visually impaired learners; the assessment strategies that were used; types of activities that learners were involved in; and evidence of support for the teacher to conduct a successful lesson.

4.4.1 Lesson Observation One

Miss Honey

Classroom environment: *The Grade 1 classroom was square in size. There were small windows in the entrance and lockers for the learners’ bags as you entered. There was also a*

stock room for reading books, games, puzzles and other learning equipment. The classroom walls were decorated brightly with lots of colourful alphabet freeze cards, number charts, number names and numbers, positions, a rewards chart, and sight word posters. Mention must be made that none of the posters were appealing to visually impaired learners in the classroom. The classroom also had been painted a bright pink colour on the bottom of the walls. There were windows on one side with yellow curtains to keep distractions and the morning sun out. There were ten learners in the classroom. All the sighted learners were seated in groups facing the black board. Every learner's desk had a name card with numbers and the alphabet letters. One group of learners had a wooden division so they couldn't really see each other and each had their own little compartment. This group comprised learners who were easily distracted and needed their own space. The three visually impaired learners (two boys, Thatho and Tim, and a girl, Leeya) were seated together near a corner towards the back of the classroom. Their desks were wider to accommodate the Brailleurs. The learners' names were stuck on their desks, but the writing was not in Braille. The teacher's desk was towards the front left hand corner of the classroom and there was also desk space for the teacher aide. There were some cupboards near the teacher's desk. There was a reading corner in the classroom with a carpet. There was also a big white board in front of the carpet area. The reading corner had books that were suitable only for the sighted learners as I saw no Braille books. There was also a corner with puzzles and a box with blocks.

Classroom observation: *I arrived in the classroom at 08h10. This was just after the morning assembly and learners were putting their homework diaries onto the desks and taking their homework out. The blind learners, however, did not take the books out themselves, as this task was done for them by the teacher aide who took their books out of their bags and put them in the baskets. I quietly went to sit at the teacher's desk. The learners were noisy and*

talking to one another. Some learners watched me as they must have wondered why I sat at their teacher's desk. The teacher seemed busy getting her materials ready. She was talking to the teacher aide and did nothing about the noise in the classroom.

Miss Honey: *Shh, Shh, learners. Quieten down please! Leave your books and please come to the carpet. (All the learners rushed out of their seats and unto the carpet area, pushing at one another other for a place.)*

Miss Honey: *Stop pushing, boys and girls, sit down quietly. Good morning, boys and girls. (Learners sat on the carpet and greeted the teacher. The teacher aide assisted the visually impaired learners to sit at the back, behind the other learners.)*

Miss Honey: *I hope everyone had a lovely weekend. Let's hear some weekend news this morning. (Learners put up their hands and shouted, "Me, me!" The visually impaired learners did not respond by putting their hands up. Tim seemed to not pay attention and shook his head from side to side a lot during the lesson. He was prompted by the teacher aide to stop.)*

Miss Honey: *Quieten down, boys and girls! Let's put our hands up, no shouting out. (Some learners told their news stories as they put their hands up. I observed that the visually impaired ones were not very eager to put their hands up for a turn. They mostly had their heads down as they listened.)*

Miss Honey: *Tim, can you tell me what you did on the weekend? (Tim was quiet.)*

Miss Honey: *Did you go to the park or did you play with your bike? (Tim hung his head and spoke softly. The teacher repeated what he had said to the class.)*

Miss Honey: *Thatho, are you with us? Let's hear your weekend news, sweetie. (Thatho was facing the other way and not the teacher. He replied that he had been to a party. Leeya heard this and shouted, "I like cake!")*

Miss Honey: *Leeya, we must remember that we put up our hands if we want to say something and wait for your name. (Leeya dropped her head as if to show she was sorry and put her hand in the air. The teacher then allowed her to speak. She spoke well and showed more confidence than the other two visually impaired learners and the teacher praised her.)*

Miss Honey: *Let's look at what day it is today. (The learners all shouted out answers. Teacher reminded them about putting their hands up again. The learners had a stick-on chart with the days of the week on Velcro strips. The teacher called on one of the sighted learners in the classroom to put the correct day onto the board. He chose Monday and the class clapped. The visually impaired learners could not see what day of the week he had put on.)*

Miss Honey: *What do you think the weather is today? (Learners again shouted out. The teacher called on a sighted girl and she answered, "Sunny". The teacher praised her and put the 'sunny' sign up on the weather chart. The blind learners could not see how these pictures reinforced association with the word.)*

Miss Honey: *Tim, can you tell me what we need to wear when we are playing outside in the sun? (Learner was shy and softly said he wore a sun hat. Teacher praised him and then asked another sighted learner what she would like to eat when it was hot outside. The learner replied, "Ice-cream". All the learners made "Ooh" and "Aah" sounds, even the visually impaired ones.)*

Miss Honey: *Okay, now today we will look at the letter p. Who can tell me what words begin with letter p? (The teacher chose some learners who suggested some appropriate words. She then showed the learners flash cards of all the p words they would be learning about. The*

cards had words and pictures. The visually impaired learners were given a Braille book by the teacher aide and it was turned to the correct page for them. The learners followed the words on the page as the teacher went over the flash card words with learners. The teacher pointed out the beginning sound p in the words, and also the words ending in the sound p. This was sometimes difficult for the blind learners to follow as they had to feel the word and could not see the teacher pointing out the letter as they sounded it out. The teacher then asked the learners to make some sentences with each word. The sighted learners could see the pictures so they could also use visual cues to understand the meaning of the words. Some sighted learners took turns making sentences. However, Thatho, a visually impaired second language speaker, had some difficulties.

Miss Honey: *Thatho, please give us a sentence with the word lap. (Thatho, who could not see the picture, said, “I ate a lap”. This showed that he did not understand the meaning of the word ‘lap’. The teacher then got up from her place and went over to Thatho and bent down to face him.)*

Miss Honey: *Thatho, this is your lap. (She took both his hands and placed them on his lap so he could feel what his lap was. Thatho then found it easier to make a sentence with the word lap. The sighted learners had a picture of a seated boy and an arrow pointing to his lap.)*

The learners were then asked to go to their places and the teacher then gave the learners a worksheet to complete on the phonic sound p. The worksheet was for the sighted peers and had a picture for each word that they could colour in. They were building three letter blends on the worksheet. The teacher aide sat with the group of blind learners and helped them firstly to sound out each word and then they Brailled the words. They did not have any pictorial aids. While the learners were busy with their worksheets, Miss Honey called groups of learners to practise letter formation of the letter p. Learners first practised the direction

with their fingers and then on little white boards. The teacher aide then walked around the room to help others while the blind group was on the carpet with the teacher. She gathered their group around her and then she used Braille cell blocks.

Miss Honey: *Which dots are the letter p? (The blind learners sat on the carpet and had the blocks in front of them with little bowls filled with Braille sticks. Thatho and Leeya were having no difficulty identifying the Braille letter p. However, Tim had some difficulty.)*

Miss Honey: *Leeya, can you please call out the dots that Tim needs to put his sticks into? (Leeya called out the dots and Tim took some time, but he eventually chose the correct dots to indicate letter p.)*

After this activity, the learners wrote in their handwriting books and did two rows of letter p. Thatho and Leeya went back to Braille these letters as well. However, Tim continued to do some extra Braille letters with his teacher as he it seemed that he needed extra Braille work. After this, the teacher collected the books and cleared their desks. The teacher then did some art work with the learners. She showed them all a paper plate pig. The blind learners listened as she explained what to do. The learners then started their art work. The blind learners were assisted by the teacher aide who worked individually with each learner as she held their hands to finger paint the paper plate. My time was up so I left the classroom after I had greeted the teacher.

4.4.2 Lesson Observation Two

Mrs London

Classroom environment: *The classroom was rectangular in shape with windows on both sides. The room also had a stock room for any books or materials for teaching. The classroom walls were colourfully decorated with posters pertaining to Grade 2, such as alphabet freeze charts, verbs, punctuation marks, repeated addition, and hygiene. I also noticed a group star chart on the wall with groups according to different fruit. However, there was nothing a blind learner could use since there were no Braille wordings. There were 12 learners in the classroom. The two Albino learners, Mike and Benny, who were both visually impaired, were seated in the front of the classroom, closest to the board and with raised desks for a better view. One Albino learner, Pam, was seated in the second row as she used a telescope. The sighted peers were then seated in rows behind them. The blind learner, Mandy, had a corner near the door with a much bigger desk for her Brailleur and any books she would use. The names of all the learners appeared on their desks, but Mandy had no Braille name. The teacher aide had her desk near the blind learner. The teacher's desk was at the back of the classroom next to a reading corner on the carpet area. The classroom appeared to be well resourced with good materials such as reading books, puzzles, counting charts, language games, and other materials.*

Classroom observation: *I arrived at the classroom at nine o'clock that morning. The teacher greeted me and I sat in a corner of the classroom. The learners were busy finishing up their work in the books from the previous lesson. The teacher then asked the learners to close their books. The teacher aide began collecting books. The teacher then called groups of learners who quietly went to the carpet area. The learners quietly chose a place and sat in a circle.*

Mandy was assisted by the teacher aide to find a place in the circle. She sat next to the teacher.

Mrs London: *Thank you for coming so nicely to the carpet. Bananas, thank you for coming quietly this time. I will have to give your group a star today. Okay, let's do some counting. (Learners then started counting in 2's, 5's and 10's.)*

Mrs London: *Boys and girls, today we will be learning about breaking down numbers into tens and units. (The teacher then wrote a number 20 on the board in big bold numbers. She took out flard cards and placed them on the carpet showing a two 10 flard cards. The Albino learners seemed to cope with the big bold black writing on the flard cards and also they could see the number on the board. The teacher said the number out verbally so that Mandy could also hear.)*

Mrs London: *Put up your hand if you know how many tens they are in 20? (A sighted learner politely raised his hand and said there were two tens in 20.)*

Mrs London: *Well done. (She then showed the learners that two flard cards of 10 make 20. She took the 20 flard card out also. However, the blind learner could not see this demonstration as there were no Braille flard cards for the learner to feel.)*

Mrs London: *Who wants to choose a number for us between 20 and 30? (This time one of the Albino learners suggested, "Twenty five". Mrs London then wrote the number on the board. She asked the learners to break down the number into units of ten. Some learners were reluctant to answer so Mrs London prompted them by calling out a name. A shy sighted girl replied that there were 25 tens. Mrs London showed her the flard cards 20 and 5. She placed the 5 over the 0. The learners could now see that 20 and 5 made 25. She explained that there were 2 tens and 5 units. By this time the blind learner could not see anything and so she was*

just listening to the teacher and learners' voices to gain some understanding. She seemed to be distracted and shook her head constantly.)

Mrs London: *Let's get someone else to choose a number? (I observed the teacher aide prompting Mandy to stop shaking her head and softly telling her to put up her hand. The learner put up her hand and softly called out number 34.)*

Mrs London: *Well done, Mandy, we will have to give you a star today. (The teacher then wrote the number on the board and she asked Mandy how many tens were in 34. The learner hesitated. She said there were 10 tens.)*

Mrs London: *Mandy, try to think about the number 34. Let's break it down: the first number is the tens and the second number is the units. What is the first number? (The learner replied 3 and the teacher agreed. She put a flard card on the floor to show 30.)*

Mrs London: *Mandy, how many units are there? Pick your head up, darling, so we can hear you. (The learner hesitated.)*

Mrs London: *Who would like to help Mandy out? (A boy put his hand up and answered 4. The teacher showed a 4, covering the 0 to make 34. The blind learner, however, could not see this reinforcement of the concept using the flard cards.)*

After doing some more examples, the teacher then asked the learners to go back to their seats. She handed out their maths textbooks and asked them to turn to a specific page. All the learners, except the blind learner, had a textbook in front of them. The Albino learners had their textbooks on a raised desk. The teacher aide took her seat next to the blind learner whilst the teacher stood in the front of the class. The teacher explained the worksheet in the book telling the learners that they had to break down the numbers into tens and units, like she

had just explained on the carpet. While the learners were busy with the worksheet, Mandy was assisted by the teacher aide who orally told her the numbers she had to break down. She used her Braille to Braille the answers. The teacher then called small groups of learners to the carpet to further test their understanding of breaking down numbers. She used flard cards to do this while other learners worked independently to complete the worksheet. She then explained to learners who were done to complete a dot-to-dot worksheet on counting in 5's and 10's when they had finished their work. She left this in a basket, explaining that this was an extended activity. The blind learner did not get called to the carpet to work in a group. When she had finished her work, the teacher aide handed a Braille number chart to her and they did bonds of 15 as an extended activity, because she could not do the dot-to-dot activity. My time was then up so I let the teacher know and left the classroom.

4.4.3 Observation Lesson Three

Mrs Summer

Classroom environment: *The Grade 3 classroom was rectangular in shape with big windows on both sides of the classroom. The walls were a cream colour and had a few posters at the back. The teacher also had posters of different Braille alphabets and numbers on the wall. I also noticed a poster on different 2d shapes that had been raised using bottle caps on the wall. The classroom had a 'smiley' chart with each learner's name. Next to it was also a 'learner of the week award' with a learner's picture. These reward charts also had Braille names and words underneath the words so it was for the visually impaired learners as well. There were curtains on the right hand side of the classroom as there was a playground right outside the window. In this class there were 14 learners. The learners were all seated in rows. The blind learners, a boy Ahmed and a girl named Londeka, were seated*

at the back of the rows close to the door. The sighted learners kept their bags in lockers along the left side of the room. The blind learners had a plastic rack next to each of their desks with their Braille paper on the top shelf and their reading books at the bottom. Their desks were also larger to accommodate bigger books and Brailleurs. The name of every learner appeared on their desks and the visually impaired learners had their names both in Braille and in sighted words. The teacher sat in front of the classroom near the windows. The teacher aide did not have a space defined for him personally, as he walked around to help all the learners.

Classroom Observation:

I arrived at 10h30 at the classroom. The learners had just arrived back from break and were lined up outside the classroom, waiting for their teacher with the teacher aide. The teacher arrived and opened the door to let the learners in. The learners quietly went to their lockers and put their lunches away and settled in their seats. I noticed that the visually impaired learners had also put away their lunch containers in their bags by themselves.

***Mrs Summer:** Hope you had a good break, learners. Now we are going to be writing a creative story about a picture. (She put a picture up on the board showing a park with lots of children playing. She did not explain the picture orally.)*

***Mrs Summer:** Who can suggest a title for this story? (A sighted learner put up his hand and said, "A strange day in the park." The teacher praised him.)*

***Mrs Summer:** Who wants to tell me a few sentences about what they see in the picture? (A few learners put up their hands. These were all sighted learners as the blind learners could not see the picture to tell the teacher what it was about yet. Sighted learners orally explained what they saw in the picture.)*

Mrs Summer: Now I want Ahmed to tell me what happened before the learners got to the park? Why are they there, Ahmed? (The boy told the teacher he thought the children were on an excursion with their teacher and they had come to the park by bus. The teacher praised the learner.)

Mrs Summer: Who wants to tell me what happens that makes it a strange day in the park? (Ahmed put up his hand and was eager to answer. He stated that he thought they had found a mysterious bag in the park while the children were playing, and that the bag contained a treasure map. The learners were delighted at his answer and all began to make “Ooh” and “Aah” sounds.)

Mrs Summer: Well done! That sounds very interesting. Who knows what will be the ending of the story? (A sighted peer put up her hand and said she thought it led to the ice-cream cart and the teacher bought all the children ice-creams. This was again met with cheers and laughter. The blind learners also giggled at the learner’s comment. Londeka seemed to be listening and laughing; however, she did not participate by answering during the lesson.)

Mrs Summer (laughing): Okay, settle down learners. Today each of you will use your imagination and write me a creative story. Do not forget the beginning, middle and ending of the story. You must also give your story an interesting title.

The teacher aide handed out the writing books to the sighted learners. The aide also assisted a learner who was using a computer to type as he had no use of his hands. The blind learners put their own Braille paper taken from a basket next to their desks into their Brailers. The teacher sat beside them and quietly discussed the picture again with the learners. She then asked the learners to write the story. I observed that she asked Londeka questions about her story and she prompted her thinking by assisting with language as it appeared that she was a second language learner.

While the learners were busy with their stories, the teacher then listened to some group reading. I observed how the sighted learners used phonics and had bright, colourful pictures to assist them with their reading. Learners who needed help with words for their sentences put up their hands. The teacher aide helped learners with their words. The sighted learners each had a small book that they used as their personal dictionary. They asked the teacher aide to write words in these books for them. It appeared that the blind learners did not have this personal dictionary and relied on the teacher or the teacher aide for help. I observed them putting up their hands and waiting when they needed help with words.

Mrs Summer: *Boys and girls, when you are done, read your story to make sure your sentences are correct and they have the proper punctuation. You can then draw a picture for your story if you like. (Some learners continued with their writing piece while others who had finished were given a word search worksheet or puzzles to complete.)*

Mrs Summer: *How is it going, Ahmed and Londeka? Would you like to read me some of your story that you have Brailled so far? (Ahmed was confident and read his Braille writing piece well. Londeka was shy; however, she had written a good story. The teacher praised the learners' work and made a few corrections to their sentences orally.)*

Mrs Summer: *Ahmed, do not forget your capital letter and full stops, please. Londeka, the girl is in the park, not on the park, okay?*

(The teacher then asked the two blind learners to read from their books for her while others were busy with a word search. The Braille books were big, square books with tiny little Braille dots covering the pages. I listened and watched as the learners felt the words and read. The boy read well at his level and sounded out words he didn't know while reading with expression. The girl battled with some words; she sounded them out but besides phonics, she had no other clues like the sighted learners had for decoding words. The teacher assisted and

had a normal reader in front of her. Once the learners had finished their reading, the teacher aide played a guessing game with the blind learners as an extended activity because they could not do the word search.)

4.4.4 Discussion of classroom observations

Research has shown that proper seating arrangements are important for visually impaired learners (Davis & Hopwood, 2002). Motitswe (2012) argues that classrooms where learners can move freely and access resources are more conducive to learning than cramped learning spaces. During my observations, I noted proper seating of learners in Mrs London's and Mrs Summer's classrooms. Their learners were seated closer to the door so they could move freely around the classroom space. This also allowed greater independence of the learners because there was no need to always assist them with mobility, which is something that teachers mentioned during the interviews that they tried not to do. However, in Miss Honey's classroom the visually impaired learners were seated in a far back corner, away from the other learners. They found mobility around the classroom difficult and from my observation they were assisted by the teacher aide and lacked independence such as not being given the freedom to take out their own books. The isolation could be due to contextual factors like the loud Braille noise which the teachers did mention during the interviews. However, this isolation could lead to visually impaired learners not interacting socially with their peers. This lack of social skills was mentioned during the interviews by Mrs London. Previous research has found that these learners' dependence on adult assistance may actually hinder involvement with their peers (Roe, 2008). Conversely, Mrs Summer's learners showed greater independence as she had a rack of all their belongings close to their desks, therefore they could take things they needed easily without help. The teacher aide also did not sit near them but moved around to support other learners as well. This could be due to how their

seating had been arranged by their teacher. However, it could also be indicative of the fact that the younger learners required more assistance than the older Grade 3 learners.

Research by Mckenzie and Davidson (2007) highlights the importance of having areas in the classroom that allow visually impaired learners to be involved in learning, such as a Braille reading and writing corner. I observed that all the classrooms had different learning areas such as a reading corner in Miss Honey's classroom. However, her reading corner did not have any Braille books, which means that it was not appropriate for visually impaired learners. Mrs London also had an area for books and puzzles but also did not have any resources available that a visually impaired learner could use. During my visits to these classrooms, I also noticed that the posters on the walls of Miss Honey's and Mrs London's classrooms could not be accessed by the visually impaired learners. The walls were all decorated attractively with colourful, informative posters and art. However, all these resources seemed appropriate only for the normal sighted Foundation Phase learners and lacked appeal for visually impaired learners. None of the posters were Brailled. Mrs London had three Albino learners who could see enlarged posters; however, her blind learners could not utilise any such material. The teachers also used rewards charts that the learners could not feel or touch, therefore these charts did not engage the blind learners as they could not see their rewards accumulate like the sighted learners could. The teachers in the study could have been more creative with resources such as labelling actual objects with Braille words, as suggested by Batir (2008).

However, Mrs Summer's classroom showed great use of posters that were appropriately designed for her blind learners to feel and touch as some posters included Braille signs. The teacher also seemed to be resourceful in that she made a poster of shapes using recyclable

materials such as bottle caps to raise the shapes so that visually impaired learners could touch them. The visually impaired learners also had Brailled names on their desks, which was not the case in the other two classrooms. The teacher also made use of Braille letters and 'smileys' on the rewards chart that the blind learners could feel and therefore also be proud of their achievements in the classroom. Mrs Summer's ability to create a more positive learning space that would be appealing to her blind learners may have been indicative of her greater experience, as suggested by Burden (1980).

The teachers all showed that they involved the visually impaired learners in lessons by engaging them in questioning and answering processes. The teachers did not seem to have difficulties with redirecting learners they felt had been "drifting off", as Mrs London had mentioned during her interview. However, Mrs London relied on her teacher aide to redirect the blind learner's attention during the lesson rather than prompting her herself. Miss Honey, who was in her first year of teaching, also seemed to have some passive learners but was able to redirect them effectively when she found they were not paying attention. During my observation, the visually impaired learners tended to get easily distracted by noises and constantly tended to shake their heads. The learners also hung their heads while they spoke, which showed that they were not confident to reveal their facial expressions, which made it difficult for sighted learners to engage with them. However, it appeared that the teachers were trying to encourage the learners out of these habits and they quickly redirected their attention when they witnessed these behaviours. All the teachers engaged the learners appropriately and also made use of interactive learning strategies rather than feeding their learners with information. They allowed the learners to engage in discussions and to assist each other. This was seen when Mrs London asked a peer to assist her blind learner instead of just correcting the child herself. Also, Mrs Summer showed great involvement with her learners. Instead of

explaining what her picture was about, she asked the learners who could see to first explain to the visually impaired learners what they saw, thereby allowing the learners to engage with one another. She then involved the visually impaired learners in the discussions. Miss Honey also involved her visually impaired learners in the discussion of news during the lesson. It was clear that the teachers were knowledgeable about interactive involvement of learners in the learning process.

However, the teachers did encounter some difficulties in certain areas where they could not include the visually impaired learners. The teachers therefore mainly used discussions and question and answer techniques as teaching strategies for their visually impaired learners. Miss Honey did show she had difficulties with her line of questioning towards a blind learner when she asked if he rode his bike that weekend. One can assume that blind learners would not participate in this type of activity. Therefore the teacher has to sometimes be aware of the questions she directs towards these learners. All the teachers also used group or peer work during their lessons; however, they did not include the visually impaired learners in group work with their sighted peers. Mrs London did not involve her blind learner at all during her group teaching in her Mathematics lesson. The learner worked only with the teacher aide. Miss Honey and Mrs Summer allowed the visually impaired learners to work in a group, but they did not mix these learners with their sighted peers, thereby emphasising the perception that these learners need to be isolated. This may indicate that the teachers were not fully aware of the concept of inclusion because they were still separating sighted and visually impaired learners in the classroom. These findings clearly demonstrate that teachers still require more training on curriculum and assessment matters so that they are better equipped to accommodate diverse learners adequately in their classrooms, as suggested by Ngcobo and Muthukrishna (2011).

During my observations, only two teachers engaged in assessing the visually impaired learners in their classroom. Miss Honey and Mrs Summer both assessed their learners' understanding during the lesson. Miss Honey orally assessed the learners' understanding of the letter p when she worked with the group during letter formation. The learners therefore were assessed after they had worked with the teacher aide. Miss Honey also assisted the weaker learner after he had experienced some difficulties and she extended his learning by doing more letters with him. Mrs Summer assessed the learners' writing by asking them to orally read out the work that they had Brailled. She then corrected the work and made them aware of their mistakes as they were doing their work. She also assessed their reading during the lesson by listening to their reading ability. The use of oral assessment was mentioned by the teachers in the interviews and questionnaires. Mrs London, however, did not engage in assessing the learners' understanding after she had taught the lesson. She did not attend to the blind learner at all as the teacher aide was assisting this learner all the time. She only assessed the Albino learners because they were part of the groups she was assessing during her Mathematics lesson. Mrs London should have assessed the blind learner by including her in the group work session during the lesson. According to Burden's (1980) theory, as a third-year teacher she should have shown more knowledge of different teaching techniques and ways of assessing her learners. Conversely, it appeared that the first-year teacher was more comfortable with this aspect. The learner-teacher ratio in Mrs London's class also allowed for greater time with her learners, therefore the teacher could have spent more time with the blind learner. Mrs London's lack of assessment skills was quite surprising, as she had expressed herself strongly in favour of the inclusion of visually impaired learners in lessons during the interviews.

The teachers also had difficulties with the types of resources that they used during the lessons. Mrs London used flard cards during her lessons on place value and this did not

involve the visually impaired learner. The flard cards were numbers printed on small flash cards and were used to help the learners break down and build numbers during a Mathematics lesson. However, these cards were not Brailled for use by the blind learner. All the teachers did mention in the interviews that Mathematics teaching was the most difficult to adapt for these learners. During the interviews, Mrs London also mentioned her frustration with adapting flard cards for her learners. She did try to involve the learner by using oral questions, but this still proved to be a challenge. She also used a dot-to-dot worksheet that the blind learner could not do. She had to do extra bonds with the teacher aide alone, which I did not think was a very well thought-out activity for extended work. The teacher could have planned to involve her in a game with her peers on the carpet, thereby involving her with others as well. Miss Honey had made resources such as pictures for her learners; however, these were not applicable to visually impaired learners. I felt that she could have used songs and dance to make learning more fun for her young learners, especially for teaching days of the week or weather. However, she did show good planning skills by ensuring she had Brailled the words for learners as she used flash cards for her sighted learners. Mrs Summer had a picture during her writing activity, which was a challenge for her visually impaired learners. However, by engaging with their peers, the learners were able to still grasp the concept and have fun. This showed how the teacher was able to facilitate learning even with limited resources. She also had an extended activity which was a word search puzzle for her sighted learners that the blind learners could unfortunately not do. However, Mrs Summer, unlike Mrs London, could have planned ahead of time and created a guessing game that the learners could have played together with the help of the teacher aide while still gaining English concepts.

It was clear that appropriate resources and available materials for teaching visually impaired learners created a big problem. According to Davis and Hopwood (2002), tactile and kinaesthetic materials are important in a classroom. For example, Weeks and Erradu (2013) suggest that teachers should have resources that appeal to all learners such as puppets, embossed diagrams, and games. It was surprising to see that teachers who had planned ahead of time failed to plan better resources and activities that would be appropriate for visually impaired learners. This was particularly interesting as even the first-year teacher had planned better resources than the teacher who was in her third year. The first-year teacher clearly showed great initiative, similar to an example of a teacher in the DoBE (2011) who sought advice from a local society for the blind to create a space that was sensitive to her learners.

Another important observation I made was with regards to disciplining the learners. The more experienced teachers seemed to be better able to manage the discipline in their classrooms. Their learners instinctively understood what was expected of them. This corroborates Burden's (1980) theory that suggests that cumulative experience leads to more knowledge of the teaching environment. As teachers grow in experience, they want to establish good classroom environments and positive relations with their learners (Burden, 1980). However, first-year teachers often battle to understand the teaching environment such as learner characteristics, behaviour and discipline limits (Burden, 1980).

During my visits to the classrooms, I noticed that the more experienced teachers had no difficulties with settling their learners down for lesson time. For instance, Mrs Summer and Mrs London experienced no difficulties when their learners took turns during lesson time. However, Miss Honey, a first- year teacher, seemed less able to settle the learners down for

their lesson. When I walked into the classroom, I also noticed that her learners had poor structure and routine and were less aware of what was expected of them. Moreover, the teacher was still planning with her assistant what was required for the day. However, there were some contextual factors at play. I did arrive in the first lesson and the learners had not yet settled down while she was busy talking to her assistant. But it was obvious that, during the lesson, she also battled with discipline and distractions when the learners had to take turns. However, her learners were younger than those in the other grades and they were possibly still adapting to classroom rules.

Miss Honey did not seem to have any system or rules in place when the learners rushed to the carpet area, pushing one another for a seat. Mrs London managed this better in that she called each group one at a time to the carpet area, thus showing more experience in this instance. Miss Honey also had poor application and failed to follow through with the rewards chart that I saw in her class. She could have used this during her lesson for managing discipline among the learners. Mrs London showed that she used this system much better by telling the learners that she would reward them for coming to the carpet area in a disciplined manner. Mrs Summer's classroom had a relaxed atmosphere and she did not have any discipline problems. I noticed that she was able to have fun and was humorous with the learners in the classroom. In general, the small classes made it pleasurable for the teachers and discipline was not a big problem for them.

4.5 Document Analysis

According to Creswell (2012), document analysis involves collecting private and public records from participants in the study. When analysing documents, it is important to explore how they were produced and also how they are used in context (Flick, 2006). This data

generation tool is discussed in more depth in Chapter three. For the purposes of this study, teacher files were used for document analysis to triangulate the information provided in the other sources of data generation. The reason for this is that the teachers stated that they used the CAPS curriculum for the Foundation Phase; however, this curriculum does not contain specific information on teaching visually impaired learners. During the interviews and in response to the questionnaires, the teachers stated that they just used their own knowledge and experiences of working with visually impaired learners to compile lessons and assess their learners accordingly. The teachers' files included a teacher journal that contained a section with weekly lesson plans, an assessment section, a section with learner profiles, parent interview records, and a teacher IQMS (Integrated Quality Management System) section.

The DoE (2003) states that a lesson plan is a detailed plan of what to teach. Such a plan should include aspects like lesson objectives, prior knowledge, assessment of learners, resources needed, and adaptations for diverse learners. I found that the teachers in the study all had weekly lesson plans in their files. The teachers all used thematic lesson planning as each week stated a different theme at the top of the page with the date for that week. For example, Miss Honey's theme was farm animals in the week that I went to observe her lesson and this was evident when she focused on 'pig' to teach the letter p. The teachers' lesson plans were, however, very brief. Each had a table that highlighted the different learning areas in the CAPS curriculum such as Mathematics, Home Language and Life Skills. These learning areas were further broken down into the different sections under them, for example under Home Language there were listening and speaking, writing, handwriting, and reading. The teachers then indicated in small blocks under each section which learning activities were

going to be covered for that day. For example, in Mrs Summer's lesson plan the teacher had indicated "*creative story about a picture*" in the writing section.

The teachers did not have detailed lesson plans in their files as required by the Department of Basic Education, because an aspect such as the objectives of the lesson was omitted. Moreover, no mention of integration in the lesson plans could be traced. However, I did observe how Miss Honey integrated visual art into her language lesson during the observation, whereas her lesson plan simply stated that she would do "*pig art work*" under visual art that day. The teachers also did not state which resources would be required for these lessons, although they did use resources in their lessons.

The assessment strategies that would be employed in the lessons were also not mentioned in the lesson plans. However, the teachers did have a separate section for the assessment and objectives that were required for each term. In this section I found that the teachers had mentioned a more in-depth list of objectives that were required for each term. by the learners. In this section of their files the teachers seemed to give a more detailed outline of the assessment that was required for each term. A list of different assessment strategies for learners who worked at a lower level was found in Mrs London's and Miss Honey's files. This corroborated their comment during the interviews that some of their visually impaired learners were working at a slower pace and at a lower level than the other learners.

I found it very interesting that the teachers also had a reflection section in their files. In this section they seemed to reflect on their lessons and they outlined briefly what needed to change in their previous lessons. They wrote briefly each week what learners had found

difficult and what they needed to change. For example, Miss Honey recorded that a visually impaired learner had battled with some of the Braille letters and therefore she would spend some extra time on that. Mrs Summer wrote that she had experienced difficulties when teaching her visually impaired learners fractions and that she needed some advice on how to teach this area from the Braille unit. Mrs London noted that her visually impaired learners required more assistance with using the number line. It was clear that the teachers showed some indication of reflection during and after their lessons.

This reflection section was where the teachers mentioned what had worked and had not worked for their learners. However, in the actual lesson plans there was no mention of adaptations for visually impaired learners. The teachers had indicated during the interviews that there was no separate curriculum for their visually impaired learners and therefore they did not have separate lesson plans for these learners. I think that one reason why their lesson plans were so brief was that their learners were very diverse. The learners had various physical disabilities and therefore the teachers found that this reflection section could help them with more detailed explanations of what was needed for specific learners.

All the teachers also had a section for learner profiles. This section entailed a detailed profile on each learner with a description of their various disabilities. The teachers listed their various needs in this section. It was clearly outlined what type of disabilities the learners had and what assistive devices they needed in the classroom to enhance their learning. The teachers also listed the types of therapies like speech or occupational therapy that each learner had to partake in. Mrs London and Miss Honey also had a section for learners who did not cope with the progress requirements of the grade. These were briefly listed and were taken from the curriculum. The teachers therefore showed some initiative in trying to understand

their learners and their needs. Burden (1980) theorises that, as teachers grow in experience, they become more concerned with their learners' needs and characteristics. The teachers demonstrated that they were concerned about each individual and they used teaching techniques to meet the needs of the individual learner, as posited by Burden (1980). It is important to note that the first-year teacher also made an effort to understand her learners' needs, which contradicts Burden's (1980) theory that first-year teachers tend to remain strictly within the parameters of the curriculum.

The teachers held meetings with their learners' parents in their classrooms from time to time and they demonstrated effective documentation of these meetings. The records showed what had been discussed in the meetings and also what the plan was to move forward with regards to learner progress. This indicated that there was support from the parents, as had been mentioned in the interviews. However, the records in Miss Honey's and Mrs Summer's files also reflected that some parents had not attended the meetings, which was a fact that they had mentioned in the interviews. This finding revealed that some parents were not as supportive as others.

Finally, the teachers' files contained an IQMS section with documentation from the Head of Department who had evaluated the teachers' files. There were also reports on class visits that had been conducted by the HOD. I analysed Mrs London's and Mrs Summer's reports from their first year of teaching up to where they were currently as teachers. It is important to note that a baseline evaluation had been done of all the teachers when they first arrived at the school and the feedback from the Head of Department indicated that the teachers had had difficulties adjusting to and supporting the learners' different needs. This finding would support Burden's (1980) theory that teachers experience more difficulties and challenges as

first year teachers than when they are more experienced. A single baseline evaluation had just been completed for Miss Honey because she was still in her first year of teaching and a second evaluation had not yet been completed for her. The teacher evaluation forms revealed that the teachers had been planning their lessons according to what was required by the school, because the Head of Department had not given a poor evaluation of any of the teachers. However, feedback from the Head of Department did mention that certain teachers were required to provide more detailed planning and adaptations for certain learners in their classrooms, and that such plans should be included in their files. Burden (1980) theorises that teachers in the first year of teaching experience difficulties with planning, keeping records and being organised.

A perusal of the teachers' first year evaluations revealed that the HOD had mentioned that they needed to document their reflections in more detail. This indicated that, as novice teachers, the teachers had found this requirement a challenge. This corroborates Burden's (1980) theory, indicating that as first-year teachers they battled to see what worked and what did not work for their learners, and that they were only really able improve this aspect of their work after the first year (Burden, 1980).

The HOD also provided feedback on how the teachers should set up their classrooms in order to provide better learning areas for learners such the visually impaired ones, as they battled with mobility around the classroom. This finding was evidence of the fact that the teachers received some advice and support from the HOD as novice teachers. Kutsyuruba (2009) argues that teachers' classroom performance will improve with proper supervision and constructive feedback.

The first-year teachers appeared to battle a lot with discipline management, because the feedback from the HOD included ways in which they could manage discipline in their classrooms. For example, one suggestion referred to a rewards chart such as the one observed in Miss Honey's classroom. It was evident that Miss Honey grew and developed as a teacher from the first time she entered the classroom. She took cognisance of feedback and managed to implement the support and ideas offered to her, such as using a rewards chart. However, it was clear that Mrs London and Mrs Summer showed more growth in the discipline area owing to their greater experience, as suggested by Burden (1980). Mrs London's feedback indicated that she had grown in certain areas. However, she had received some feedback during classroom visits suggesting more involvement of all learners with their peers. This seemed to be a challenge for Mrs London because she tended to let the teacher aide work with the blind learner exclusively, as observed during her lesson. Mrs Summer's last evaluation stated that the teacher was becoming more comfortable with her learners and that she understood their needs better. This was a clear indication of her cumulative experience allowing her to become more confident and willing to try new things, as posited by Burden (1980).

As part of the IQMS evaluation system, each educator had a 'growth plan' for each year to state how they were going to grow in that year. This plan included what training they would like to enhance their teaching. It is important to note that the teachers all documented that they would have appreciated training in Braille at the start of their teaching at the school. However, during the interviews and in response to the questionnaire, the teachers mentioned that they had never received any formal training from the school with regards to visually impaired learners. The teachers stated that they learnt from experience when working with

visually impaired learners. It became clear that, at some point, the school will have to provide a course in Braille to equip teachers with this skill.

Miss Honey documented in her growth plan that she would also like some information and guidance on lesson planning. She also mentioned in her response to the questionnaire that she had difficulties with planning lessons as she was the only teacher in the grade with no colleague to support her. Mrs London also mentioned in her first growth plan that she needed some assistance on how to adapt resources for the visually impaired. During the interview, Mrs London had expressed her frustration with the lack of resources that are required to teach visually impaired learners. However, the teachers had mentioned during the interviews that they shared resources and ideas and that the Braille unit was always keen to assist them. It was evident from the document review that, as novice teachers, the teachers did not know where to obtain appropriate resources from or how to adapt them; but as time passed and they gained more experience, and they began to gain support and to share. This was evident because Mrs Summer was more confident in her abilities to adapt and create resources for teaching her learners, such as the Braille clock. This finding revealed that an induction programme at the school would have been valuable to the teachers, as mentioned by Miss Honey during the interview. Such a programme would inform them who to turn to for support. According to Avramidis and Kalyva (2007), teachers who receive constructive training on special needs are better able to use proper skills to implement inclusion of their learners. It is therefore vital that teachers are exposed to ongoing training to update their skills.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings based on the interviews, the completed questionnaires, the classroom observations, and the document analysis. First, the findings based on the interviews were discussed according to four emergent themes, which provided an in-depth understanding of the teachers' experiences. This was followed by a discussion of the findings based on the responses to the questionnaire. These findings were also categorised according to the themes that emerged from the data. A discussion of the three classroom observations was subsequently presented. Finally, I presented a discussion on the documents in the teachers' files that I had analysed. The next chapter will present the study conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

STUDY SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the analysis of the data that emerged from the data generation tools employed in the study. This chapter focuses on the main conclusions that were drawn from the findings. I also provide recommendations based on the findings of novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase.

5.2 Summary of the Study

This study explored three teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase. Previous literature was reviewed to gain insight into the topic and Burden's (1980) theoretical framework underpinned the study. I chose to focus on a single case study located in a special school in the Durban geographical area. The sample included three Foundation Phase teachers who were interviewed on their experiences as novice teachers. After the interviews, each teacher completed a self-administered questionnaire. The teachers were also observed in their Foundation Phase classrooms while they were teaching visually impaired and other learners. Finally, documents in the teachers' files were perused. These documents, which included the teachers' lesson plans, were used to triangulate the data findings from the observations, their completed questionnaires, and the interviews.

In essence, it was concluded that the teachers required more support and training as novice teachers who were required to teach visually impaired learners without the benefit of special needs training. The teachers claimed that they had not been trained adequately during their studies for the reality of teaching special needs learners. The teachers stated that they would have benefited from more practical teaching experiences in special schools during their study

years to broaden their knowledge of how to teach diverse learners. The findings revealed that the teachers faced various challenges as novice teachers, such as a lack of knowledge on how to adapt their teaching to accommodate visually impaired learners in a diverse classroom, because the curriculum did not support the teachers adequately. However, they found that through collaboration with other supportive staff such as fellow experienced teachers, therapists, psychologists, teacher aides and a Braille unit, they grew in experience. The two more experienced teachers revealed that they had initially faced challenges as novice teachers, as theorised by Burden (1980). However, as they developed as teachers, they were beginning to find teaching visually impaired learners, among other disabled learners, a rewarding career choice.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendation one: curriculum support for visually impaired learners

The teachers in the study all revealed that they used the mainstream curriculum, which is generally referred to as CAPS. However, the findings revealed that this curriculum does not provide adequate support to teachers and learners on how to adapt work for visually impaired learners. The curriculum was used for all learners in the classroom despite their different and varied needs. A similar finding is reported by Gehrke and McCoy (2007), who argue that when there is no curriculum for special needs learners, the teachers are expected to adapt the curriculum using their own creativity and initiative, with little guidance offered. The teachers in this study adapted their work with visually impaired learners by utilising the support of various staff members such as the Braille unit, who provided Brailled work, and therapists, who supplemented the curriculum with skills such as fine motor skills. The school did require individual education plans (IEPs); however, such plans tended to accommodate learners who

were academically weak rather than all the learners. I therefore recommend that an expanded core curriculum be drawn up in partnership with the Department of Basic Education so as to include skills such as mobility training, social skills and Braille skills for visually impaired learners, as suggested by McDonough, Sticken and Haack (2006). Rather than utilising this curriculum in special schools only, it can be utilised in mainstream schools that are opening their doors to visually impaired learners currently and in the future, as is envisioned by the philosophy of inclusive education. This curriculum can also inform university courses in order to adequately train students who want to be educated to work with diverse learners, because their needs go beyond the current core academic curriculum. This will also ensure that mainstream schools have teachers who are aware of what support to provide visually impaired learners, as they may not have the support of therapists or Braille specialists in these schools.

5.3.2 Recommendation two: upgrading university training

The study revealed that two of the teachers had received some form of special needs training. However, they claimed that it was very basic in terms of knowledge of visually impaired teaching and more theoretical than practical. The courses did not adequately prepare them for the reality of teaching visually impaired learners. One of the teachers also had had no special needs training and had only obtained a general teaching qualification. The teachers claimed that they would have benefited from more practical teaching experiences during their studies, as they had not been exposed to any special needs environment prior to teaching. This finding corroborates the research findings of Coates (2012), who found that current teaching qualifications did not provide beneficial practical experiences in special needs teaching. The findings of the current study also revealed that the teachers did not have any knowledge of Braille, which is vital to teaching blind learners, and therefore they required support from a

team who was experienced in this area. If visually impaired learners are to be accommodated in mainstream schools, this lack of training in Braille would present a severe challenge as not all schools are offered the opportunity of specialised support teams like therapist and a Braille unit. Therefore, my recommendation is that universities firstly offer students the opportunity to do practical teaching at special schools. These students will then be exposed to teaching diverse learners. Universities should also offer basic Braille courses for students and teachers, because this will allow them to be skilled in teaching visually impaired learners, as is also suggested by (Herzberg & Stough, 2007).

5.3.3 Recommendation three: collaboration and support

The study revealed that the school had a good support system in terms of various departments such as therapists, a psychologist, teacher aides, and a Braille unit. The teachers stated that these units offered them valuable support when they needed advice on Braille or when work had to be adapted for their learners. Lehohla and Hlalele (2012) claim that this collaboration decreases work pressure and ensures that learners receive a quality education. However, according to Caspersen and Raaen (2014), novice teachers are initially not always keen to utilise this support as they are either unaware of the opportunity, or they fear ridicule or embarrassment. It has been shown, however, that through experience and as they grow as teachers, they are becoming aware of the invaluable support that various staff can offer. The teachers in this study stated, however, that they had poor support in terms of collaboration with teachers within the same grade as there was only one teacher in each grade. This made planning within the grade difficult. Despite this, the support teams within the school offered the support they needed. The findings revealed that, rather than focusing on negative critical evaluation from management and other staff, the teachers enjoyed and appreciated constructive feedback and put that to good use. The teachers also stated that an induction

course prior to teaching would have benefited them as novice teachers. My recommendation is that all schools offer teachers an induction program together with a mentor teacher to support the novice teacher, as is also suggested by Stanulis and Floden (2009). Therefore, at the start of their employment at a school, teachers should become familiar with the staff, the environment, and the needs of the learners they will be working with. This is especially important if the learners have diverse needs that must be catered for, so that the teacher is aware of these issues before the learners enter the classroom. My recommendation is that school management provides novice teachers with appropriate, constructive feedback on their teaching. Such feedback should be provided within a positive and supportive environment so as to encourage new teachers to improve their skills, as suggested by Marable and Raimondi (2007).

5.3.4 Recommendation four: ongoing training and workshops

The findings showed that the teachers had not received any in-service training on teaching visually impaired learners at the school. All the teachers in the study stated that they would benefit from Braille training because they had not been trained in Braille. Some of the teachers revealed that they had learnt through experience, but that they would like more courses on how to teach these learners. The findings revealed that the school sometimes expected novice teachers to be well skilled in teaching, simply because they held a teaching qualification. However, the teachers claimed that a qualification does not always prepare one for the reality of the classroom, especially when one is required to teach vastly diverse learners. My recommendation is that schools offer more support to both novice and experienced teachers through ongoing support and training. Schools should constantly provide opportunities where teachers can update their skills and knowledge on teaching (Stella, Forlin & Lan, 2007). The classroom environment is constantly changing and learners

have different needs; therefore teachers need to be constantly prepared to overcome new challenges. A basic course in Braille would be beneficial to novice teachers who first enter the school. Thereafter, teachers can update their Braille skills and advance their knowledge. The school can hold internal training sessions run by staff members who have already specialised in these areas. Such a system will prove to be economical as well.

5.3.5 Recommendation five: special schools as resource centres

The findings revealed that the teachers lacked training on how to teach and adapt work for visually impaired learners. However, due to the internal support system and through experience, the teachers had gained certain skills to teach their visually impaired learners. Although the teachers did not have the proper curriculum guidance, they utilised what they had and adapted work to meet the needs of their learners. The teachers learnt how to create resources for learners with impairments, such as a Braille clock. The teachers also collaborated with more experienced colleagues such as therapists and staff who had specialised in Braille to improve their knowledge. However, not all schools are fortunate enough to have such a specialised team that works together to provide a quality education in different areas for their learners (DoE, 2008). Therefore, my recommendation is that special schools become resource centres for other schools in their community, as suggested in White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). The special school can pass on their experiences and challenges as a way to motivate mainstream teachers who need to cater for diverse learners in their classrooms. The special school can also provide novice teachers from other schools with training and support on how to cater for special needs learners in inclusive settings.

5.4 Implication of future studies

This study was limited in that it focused on only one special school within one geographical location. I also focused on only three teachers who were the only teachers in that phase located at the study site during the time of data generation. Future researchers could therefore broaden their studies to include more teachers from various special schools in different districts. It would also be interesting to explore novice teachers' experiences with other special needs learners such as autism or hearing impaired learners. Researchers could also explore novice teachers' experiences of learners within other phases, such as the intermediate phase.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided a summary of the findings and recommendations were made. The study explored novice teachers' experiences teaching visually impaired learners in the Foundation Phase, and it was a case study of one special school located in the Durban geographical area. The findings revealed that although more training and support were required by novice teachers as they grew in experience, they were able to adapt their teaching to provide a quality education. Through collaboration with more experienced teachers and support from staff such as therapists and teacher aides, the teachers were able to extend their knowledge to meet their learners' needs. The teachers viewed teaching visually impaired learners in a positive light and found it rewarding to teach this diverse group of learners. I therefore recommend that all schools should make every effort to provide a supportive environment for novice teachers and ensure that training is ongoing in order to update teachers' knowledge and skills, which will lead to more positive experiences in schools.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A1: Letter to participants in the study



Dear Participant

My name is Vanusiya Moodley. I am a MEd (Masters) student in Early Childhood Development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that I am undertaking as part of my degree.

A brief description of the study follows:

Title: *Novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase: A case of one special school.*

Key features of the project: In this study I will seek to explore novice teachers' experiences teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase. You have been selected to participate in this study because you teach visually impaired learners in the foundation phase. Please note that the study is in no way out to ridicule your work practices. However your participation will be appreciated in order to understand novice teachers' experiences in teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase. This research will allow me the opportunity to learn more about how others in my school are working with these learners and therefore enhance the quality of my own teaching.

I require you to participate in interviews that will be about 30 minutes and occur at a time and place convenient for you. I will be emailing you questionnaires for you to fill in at your convenience. I will also with your permission be looking at documents such as your lesson plans and teacher files. Thereafter I will also be observing you in your classrooms during a lesson and time that is convenient for you. The interviews will be audio-taped and all transcripts and notes collected will be kept in a safe place only accessible to my supervisor and me. Once the study is completed the tapes and transcripts will be disposed of. I will be careful to use the information that you supply in a manner that will ensure anonymity and confidentiality. In order to protect your identity I will use a pseudonym in my transcripts and in the research report. Participation is voluntary. All information provided is for research purposes only and will not be used against you. If you are uncomfortable at any time you are at liberty to stop the interview and withdraw from the study without negative consequences. Your involvement is for academic purposes and there is no financial benefit. The results of the study will be made available to you.

I hope that this research will add to the understandings of experiences of novice teachers' teaching visually impaired learners.

You are kindly requested to fill in the attached consent form which acknowledges the permission granted by

you to participate in this research. For further information I can be contacted on 0746013567 or vanusiyamoodley@gmail.com. My supervisor Ms. Blanche Ndlovu can be contacted on 0312603670 or ndlovubl@ukzn.ac.za. You may also contact the HSSREC Research office through Mariette Snyman on 0312608350 or snymanm@ukzn.ac.za.

Yours sincerely

Vanusiya Moodley

Informed Consent Declaration

I _____ (full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project and I consent to my participating in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research study at any point without penalty.

Permission for audio recording of interview: Please mark with 'X'

Yes	
No	

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

Appendix A2: Letter of request to Department of Education



Letter to Department of Education

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Vanusiya Moodley. I am a MEd (Masters) student in Early Childhood Development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus. I request permission to conduct my research study at one of your schools in your district. I have consulted with the principal and he has shown interest in my study.

A brief description of the study follows:

Title: *Novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase: A case of one special school.*

Key features of the project: In this study I will seek to explore novice teachers' experiences teaching learners with visual impairments in the foundation phase. I will be requesting permission from foundation phase teachers that teach visually impaired learners to participate in interviews, complete questionnaires and be observed during lessons. I will also be analysing documents such as teacher files and lesson plans. Over a two month period I will be conducting my research and once completed the information will be accessible to the school.

I hope that this research will add to the understandings of novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners.

For further information I can be contacted on 0746013567 or vanusiyamoodley@gmail.com.

My supervisor Ms. Blanche Ndlovu can be contacted on 0312603670 or

ndlovubl@ukzn.ac.za. You may also contact the HSSREC Research office through Mariette

Snyman on 0312608350 or snymanm@ukzn.ac.za

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Vanusiya Moodley

Appendix A3: Letter of request to principal of school



Vanusiya Moodley

29 Blue Jade

50 Summit Drive

West Riding

Sherwood

4091

Tel: 074 601 3567

E-mail: vanusiyamoodley@gmail.com

23 June 2014

The Principal

Dear Principal

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE SCHOOL

My name is Vanusiya Moodley. I am a MEd (Masters) student in Early Childhood Development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood campus. I hereby seek your permission to conduct my research study in your school.

The title of my study is: *Novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase: A case of one special school.*

Key features of the project: In this study I will seek to explore novice teachers' experiences teaching learners with visual impairments in the foundation phase. I will be requesting permission from foundation phase teachers that teach visually impaired learners to participate in interviews and complete questionnaires and be observed during lessons. I will also be analysing documents such as teacher files and lesson plans. Please note that participation is voluntary. All information provided will be kept confidential. The information will be stored in a safe place and disposed of after five years. Pseudonyms will be used to conceal the identity of teachers and your school. You are free to withdraw from this study if you feel uncomfortable without negative consequences. The study will not cause any financial burden or physical harm to your school.

I hope that this research will add value to the understandings of novice teachers' experiences of teaching visually impaired learners.

You are kindly requested to fill in the attached declaration and consent form which acknowledges the permission granted to undertake this research in the school. For further information I can be contacted on 0746013567 or vanusiyamoodley@gmail.com. My supervisor Ms. Blanche Ndlovu can be contacted on 0312603670 or ndlovubl@ukzn.ac.za. You may also contact the HSSREC Research office through Mariette Snyman on 0312608350 or snymanm@ukzn.ac.za

Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Vanusiya Moodley

Informed Consent Declaration

I, _____, the principal of the School hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project and I consent to the school’s participation in this research study. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw the school’s participation at any point without penalty.

Signature

Date

Appendix B1: Interview schedule

Semi Structured Interview Schedule for participants

1. What Grade in the foundation phase do you teach?
2. How long have you been working with visually impaired learners?
3. What types of visually impaired learners do you currently teach?
4. What training have you received prior to teaching at this school?
5. What training have you received while teaching visually impaired learners?
6. How do you adapt the curriculum to support visually impaired learners?
7. How are assessment techniques adapted for these learners?
8. How do you involve visually impaired learners when teaching a lesson?
9. How have you adapted LTSM to support the teaching and learning of these learners?
10. What assistive devices are require to teach these learners?
11. What challenges did you face in your teaching of visually impaired learners?
12. What school/staff support have you received as a teacher teaching visually impaired learners?

13. What support or training do you think should be available for novice teachers teaching visually impaired learners?
14. Do you have any further comments on the teaching of visually impaired learners?

Appendix B2: Questionnaire

Semi-Structured Questionnaire for participants

1. What grade in the foundation phase do you teach?
2. How many years have you been teaching visually impaired learners?
3. What training have you received prior to teaching at this school?
4. What training have you received while you were at this school regarding teaching visually impaired learners?
5. What types of visually impaired learners do you have in your class?
6. Is there any curriculum used that is different from the mainstream curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) for these learners?
7. How do you adapt the CAPS curriculum to meet the needs of these learners in the foundation phase?
8. Are there any challenging areas in the curriculum when teaching visually impaired learners?
9. What challenges have you faced in planning lessons for the visually impaired learners?
10. How is assessment done for these learners?
11. What assistive devices are used to support the teaching and learning of visually impaired learners?
12. How have you adapted learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) to support the learning and teaching of visually impaired learners?

13. What kind of staff/school support do you receive with regards to teaching visually impaired learners, if any?
14. What has been your biggest challenge in teaching these learners?
15. What training do you think should be provided to support novice teachers teaching visually impaired learners in the foundation phase?
16. Please add any other comments you wish about your experiences of teaching visually impaired learners?

Appendix B3: Observation Schedule

Observation Schedule used during class observation.

1. Classroom arrangement and organisation
2. Assistive devices and learning and support material used in the lesson
3. Number of learners in classroom
4. Inclusion of visually impaired learners during the lesson
5. Teacher engagement with visually impaired learners
6. Adaptations of lesson for visually impaired learners
7. Adaptations of Resources used for teaching and learning
8. Assistance by the teacher aide or other staff during the lesson
9. Involvement of visually impaired learners with their peers