TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN THE SIZABANTWANA PRIMARY SCHOOLS SUPPORT PROJECT

by

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DECLARATION

I, Lungisile Agness Mantshongo, declare that

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my daughter, Zoleka Sithuthukile Sokhela, for inspiring me to support learners with barriers to learning.

To Sizabantwana Primary Schools' Support Project members, your work is not going unnoticed.

ABSTRACT

Professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning is one of the challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa. This research study explored teachers' experiences of their professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning. The study was conducted with a group of primary school teachers who belong to the Sizabantwana Primary Schools' Support Project in the Pietermaritzburg area in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. A qualitative design and methodology were employed. Eight teachers from the Sizabantwana group were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. Reports, artefacts and records were also collected and analysed. This study is significant because it has been noted that teachers lack skills in identifying and addressing barriers to learning. It appears that this gap is due to inadequate and inappropriate professional development strategies in teacher education for inclusion. Understanding teachers' experiences in identifying and addressing barriers to learning could assist the Department of Education to formulate and implement an appropriate professional development strategy.

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CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The democratic government has introduced many changes to the education system in South Africa. The apartheid system divided learners along racial lines. This called for a policy shift towards inclusive education. However, teachers are not sufficiently equipped to support inclusion.

According to the Education White Paper 6, "the education and training system must change to accommodate the full range of learning needs, with particular attention to strategies for instructional and curriculum transformation" (Department of Education, 2001, p.11).   The White Paper recognises that when an education system cannot accommodate and provide opportunities for diverse learners, there is a breakdown in learning. Teaching methods and the curriculum play a crucial role in promoting inclusive learning. However, South African teachers have not been sufficiently capacitated to promote the vision of the Education White Paper. The National Department of Education estimates that 300 000 children in South Africa are experiencing barriers to learning (DoE, 2001b; 2003a). Several policy documents have been developed to address this issue.

According to the Department of Basic Education Strategic Plan (2011- 2014), "An inclusive system is facilitated to include vulnerable learners and reduce the barriers to learning, through targeted support structures and mechanisms that will improve the retention of learners in the education system, particularly learners who are at risk of dropping out" (Department of Education, 2011). The Education White Paper 6 recognises that a relationship exists between learners" needs and the systems around the learner. Thus, the focus should be on supporting both learners and the system"s needs.

1.2 Focus

This study explored teachers" experiences of their professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning.

1.3 Rationale

The researcher selected this topic due to her personal interest in learner support. The researcher has been employed as a Senior Education Specialist in Special Needs Education for the past five years. In conducting training workshops on inclusive education, she has observed that teachers lack skills to identify and address barriers to learning. It appears that this gap is due to a lack of professional training to embrace learner diversity.

The existing literature on teacher development tends to focus on challenges in conceptualising inclusive education as well as teachers" attitudes to such education. Swart and Oswald (2008) suggested that workshops and courses be arranged for teachers to enable them to master inclusive education. Ntombela (2011) and Walton and Lloyd (2012) also put forward recommendations for enhancing teachers" skills to promote inclusive education at classroom level. The Department of Education has developed several documents, including the Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes (2010) and Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity (2011). However, it notes that the major obstacle is that teachers are unable to identify the barriers to attainment.

This research study is a case study of the professional development experiences of teachers in identifying and addressing barriers to learning in the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project. The study could inform the Department of Education on strategies to train teachers to enable them to identify and address these barriers.

1.4 Objectives

1.4.1 To explore teachers" experiences of professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning.

1.4.2 To investigate how these experiences influence learner support.

1.5 Critical Questions

1.5.1 What are teachers" experiences of professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning?

1.5.2 How do these experiences influence learner support?

1.6 Research Paradigm

The interpretive paradigm was selected as a framework for this study that sought to understand teachers" experiences of professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning. According to Cohen and Manion (1994, p.36), "Avenues like this one have an understanding of the world of human experience". This paradigm looks at how participants relate to their background and experiences. According to Mertens (2005, p 12), "Reality is socially constructed". This approach was appropriate as teachers were able to interpret their own experiences of the phenomenon under study. According to Creswell (2003, p. 8), "The aim of the "interpretivist" researcher is inclined to reckon what the persons who take part in the study will say". Interpretivist research aims to describe what participants are saying by interpreting their meanings and actions. A qualitative, interpretative study was chosen because the researcher aimed to understand teachers" experiences of professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning.

1.7 Literature Review

The manner in which educators have been developed in identifying and addressing barriers to learning has posed challenges in promoting inclusive education in South Africa. One of the areas that need to be addressed is the way in which teaching and learning is being transformed to accommodate diverse learning needs. The Education White Paper 6 calls for transformation of the education system that requires teachers to "accommodate" the full range of learning needs. It also sets out the mechanisms that should be put in place (Department of Education, 2011, p. 11). For teachers to be able to embrace diversity, new practises have to be developed to sustain inclusive education. This requires that teachers be trained using a variety of strategies that encourage them to embrace transformation.

Many policy documents have been developed in South Africa to encourage teachers to identify and deal with barriers to learning. The Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes (Department of Education, 2005, p.2) were "… developed to provide guidance to teachers, administrators and other personnel on how to deal with diversity in the classroom". The guidelines provide information on different learning needs as well as examples of inclusive learning programmes that can be used in special schools and full service schools. The Department of Basic Education‟s Strategic Plan (2011-2014) promotes an inclusive system by outlining mechanisms to retain learners in school (Department of Basic Education Strategic Plan, 2011). However, little progress has been made thus far.

The Draft Screening Identification, Assessment and Support Strategy (SIAS) (2014), outlines the processes that should be followed in identifying barriers and accessing support (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity (2011) outline strategies that teachers, principals, subject advisors, administrators, school governors and other personnel can use to deal with differences among learners using educational programmes. It is envisaged that, after experimenting with the strategies outlined, teachers "could create their own innovative strategies" (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p.2). However, adopting these guidelines requires attitudinal changes as well as additional human resources. Teachers need to

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be made aware that guidelines are available to support them and such guidelines should be appropriate to the context in which they are teaching.

Studies have shown that there has been a lack of sound professional development to enable teachers to implement the strategies outlined in the Education White Paper 6. According to Ntombela (2011, p.12), "Most teachers felt inadequately prepared to implement it". Teachers felt that they needed training to understand barriers to learning. Poor levels of skills and knowledge thus hamper the implementation of the Education White Paper 6.

Da Costa"s (2003) study for the SCOPE Inclusive Education Project in the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga Provinces found that there is a need for effective training to enable teachers to understand and effectively support all learners in the classroom. Extensive training programmes are required that focus on the curriculum and teaching methods that respond to individual learner differences.

According to Ntombela (2011, p. 14), "To unlearn all the teachings of the deficit paradigm and learn a new one will take years of re-training, dialogue, debates, demonstrations, practice and information sharing at school and district levels. Unfortunately, there are no short cuts". The inclusive education model advocates for a shift from the old education system of the medical model to a system of understanding barriers to learning. This paradigm change requires teachers to familiarise themselves with theories, educational practices, and issues relating to gender and disability. The key objective is for teachers to change their attitudes and values through opportunities for debate and reflection.

The Department of Basic Education notes that teachers in mainstream schools do not have expertise in identifying and addressing barriers to learning (Schoeman, 2012, p 3). They are often not trained or equipped to deal with the variety of barriers to learning that learners may experience in an inclusive environment. Thus, there is a need to rethink how teachers should be trained to be able to provide support to learners (Prinsloo, 2005).

It would appear that the conceptualisation of inclusive education has focused on theory with insufficient attention paid to practical issues. Teachers need to understand the confines that are manifested in the education context and seek ways to confront these barriers. The simplest way of teaching inclusively is to identify the barriers to learning experienced by learners and then design interventions or support programmes to address these barriers (Walton and Lloyd, 2005). In doing so, the broader context should be borne in mind; for example, poverty is a major cause of learning breakdown and dropping out of school.

The teachers that participated in Stofile, Linden and Maarman's (2011) study reported that poverty negatively impacted access and participation. Hunger and poor nutrition lead to physical and psychological conditions that prevent learners from accessing knowledge (Stofile et al., 2011). This affirms the need to study teachers' experiences of identifying and addressing barriers to learning.

1.8 Theoretical Frameworks

This study was informed by Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory (1978) and ecological systems theory. The socio-cultural learning theory highlights the interconnection between personal and group learning mechanisms. It focuses on the "mediation" of learning through providing and reconstructing abstract and tangible instruments (Vygotsky, 1978). Individual and social learning processes are interdependent. In order for someone to learn on his or her own, he or she must also be inclined to learn in a shared setting for sustainability (Vygotsky, 1978). The socio-cultural theory posits that learning takes place through social engagement in the teaching and learning situation. Learning happens through continuous action; apprenticeship learning is a good example (Gutierrez and Rogoff, 2003, p.20). Change does not only occur during shared learning activities but in individual activities like "individual sense-making" (Geisel & Meijers, 2005).

Collaboration is an essential element in developing professional development activities. Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson and Beegle (2004) cited by Engelbrecht (2007, p. 180) contend that, to nurture collaborative partnerships in inclusive schools, information must be

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exchanged; this requires responsibility; sameness; expertise; faith and honour and consciousness of other people"s way of life. These are the characteristics of an inclusive school.

The ecological systems theory assists teachers to support learners through identifying and addressing barriers to learning. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p. 45), "Ecological systems theory is based on the interdependence and relationships between different organisms and their physical environment. These relationships are seen as a whole". A relationship exists between living things and the environment that surrounds them. For instance, a learner"s learning is influenced by what is happening in the home, school, family and community. This is further influenced by the political, social and economic context that the learner is part of. When one system is affected, the other system is also affected. Bronfenbrenner"s ecological systems theory was appropriate for this study as it enables teachers to understand the way in which different systems influence one another, placing the learner at the centre of the systems. Teachers should be made aware of the interdependence between the learner, peers, family, school and the community in which the learner lives. They should acknowledge that all these components play a major role in ensuring that teaching and learning take place.

1.9 Research Design and Methodology

This research involved a case study to explore the professional development experiences of teachers in identifying and addressing barriers to learning in the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project. A case study was appropriate as it enabled an understanding of the uniqueness of this group of teachers" experiences of professional development. "A case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than by simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles" (Yin, 2009, p.72). In order to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of teachers" professional development experiences, a qualitative approach was employed using a case study design. "Qualitative research generally examines people"s words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 2).The researcher wanted to explore the ways in which teachers affiliated to the

Sizabantwana Primary Schools Project have been developed. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to obtain information using the participants" voices, and reports and artefacts.

1.10   Data Production

Three sets of qualitative data were collected. To explore teachers" experiences of professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning, reports and artefacts were collected from the archival records at the University of KwaZulu-Natal"s (UKZN) School of Psychology; these included physical artefacts, e.g., photographs and written reports. The School of Psychology is responsible for the development of the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project.

In-depth interviews were conducted to determine how teachers have experienced professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning. Eight teachers affiliated to the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Project were interviewed.   These teachers were purposefully selected for their "significant predetermined commitment to notions of inclusion and as examples of exemplary practice" (Ainscow, Hower, Farrell & Frankham, 2003, p. 229). The sample size enabled the collection of rich information that allowed for informed data analysis. According to Onwuengbuzie and Leech (2007, p. 242), in qualitative research, the sample size should be large enough to create thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and valuable information, but not so big as to create an oversupply of information or shift to generalisability. At the same time, it should not be too small, as this would hamper the achievement of theoretical saturation. The purposeful selection of eight teachers enabled sufficient information to be gathered without collecting unnecessary information that could mislead the researcher.

1.11   Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Ideas were assembled, correlated and classified (Rice & Ezzy, 2000). The emerging themes were analysed and related to the literature. Qualitative data analysis was used to interpret the meanings of the participants" views, and the reports and documents. According to Gibbs (2007, p. 3), "Qualitative data analysis is

distinguished by its merging of analysis and interpretation and often by the merging of data collection with data analysis."

1.12   Validity and Trustworthiness

Validity and trustworthiness were addressed by following a number of processes to ensure that the findings were credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable. "Trustworthiness in qualitative research is determined by four indicators - credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and it is these four indicators that reflect validity and reliability in qualitative research" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.104). The researcher asked the participants to check the findings for confirmation, congruence, validation and approval to ensure credibility. The researcher extensively and thoroughly described the process adopted. A detailed record of the processes was kept so that others could replicate them to determine the level of dependability. Triangulation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) of methods and theories was done to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Different methods of data collection were used and two theories were triangulated. Campbell and Fiske (1959) cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 195) state that triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research.

1.13   Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the UKZN Ethics Committee (Appendix B) and the Department of Education (Appendix A). The researcher complied with the standards set by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects. Schinke and Gilchrist (1993) note that these standards require that informed consent must meet three criteria: participants must be competent to give consent; sufficient information must be provided to allow for a reasoned decision; and consent must be voluntary and not coerced.   Letters of consent containing details on the study, and highlighting the teachers" voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw at any stage of the research were given to prospective participants (see Appendices C and D).

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1.14   Limitations

This study explored the professional development experiences of teachers in the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project, which required internal generalisation through purposeful sampling. The sample of teachers was relatively small and did not include schools in different backgrounds. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised to the broader population.

1.15 Conclusion and overview of the thesis

This chapter presented the study's focus area, rationale, objectives, critical questions, and research paradigm. A brief literature review was presented as well as the research design and methodology, data collection and analysis, validity and trustworthiness issues, ethical considerations and limitations of the research.

Chapter Two reviews the literature relevant to this study and discusses the theoretical and conceptual frameworks on which it was based.

Chapter Three examines the research design and methodology adopted for the study, including the sampling method, data collection methods, data production and data analysis.

Chapter Four presents and analyses the qualitative data and discusses and interprets the findings.

Chapter Five presents the study's conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

The following chapter reviews the literature relevant to this study and sets out the theoretical and conceptual frameworks on which it was based.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Introduction

Inclusion in school is about identifying barriers to learning, thereby ensuring that all learners participate to maximise their potential. Statistics (Macro Indicator Report, 2011) show that many learners either experience a breakdown in learning or drop out school. Schoeman (2012, p.2) and the Macro Indicator Trends in Schooling Report of 2011 highlight that many learners who drop out of school after Grade 9 are those who have learning problems that were not addressed during their years of schooling. Thus, the literature has examined teacher attitudes to and perceptions of inclusive education. This study focuses on professional development for inclusive education. Teacher attitudes and perceptions are only referred to when appropriate.

This chapter reviews the literature on teachers" professional development for inclusive education in identifying and addressing barriers to learning, and sets out the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpinned this study. It consists of three sections. The first reviews the relevant literature, the second section sets out the theoretical frameworks and the third defines and discusses concepts relating to inclusive education. The literature review focuses on why inclusive education is important, international developments and their relevance to South Africa and the challenges confronting teachers in implementing inclusive education. Section two discusses the socio-cultural theory and the ecological systems theory that informed this study. The third section clarifies concepts relevant to the study which are barriers to learning and learner support.

2.2 Inclusive Education

2.2. 1 Inclusive Education internationally

Inclusive education poses a number of challenges that relate to the way it has been conceptualised by different countries based on their particular history. In developed countries like the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and the United States of America (Dyson & Forlin, 1999,

p.24), industrialisation gave rise to the need to provide for learners with disabilities; this resulted in the implementation of the special education system. In the Scandinavian countries (Dyson & Forlin, 1999, p.28), the segregation of people with disabilities became a rights issue.

Several international declarations have promoted the rights of the child agenda. The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989) outlined and interpreted children"s rights. Disability has become a political issue. The Salamanca Statement (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1994) that emanated from a conference attended by 92 governments and 25 international organisations promoted inclusive education at international level. Although the main focus was on special needs education (UNESCO, 1994, p. iii), it was argued that children with special needs were part of a larger group of learners who were experiencing barriers to learning (UNESCO, 1994, pp. iii-iv). Noting that a different approach was essential, it was resolved that education systems should be inclusive.

The conference agreed that schools should "accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups" (UNESCO, 1994, p.6). Thus, all children, from all diverse backgrounds should be accommodated in schools. UNESCO (1994) argued that each and every child is unique and has a right to education; thus education systems should respond to learner diversity.

Many developed countries interpreted inclusive education as including learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. O"Gormon and Drudy explored the dimensions of inclusion in mainstream schools in Ireland; they noted that the legislation had shifted from the medical model to the social model (O"Gormon & Drudy, 2010, p.152). The medical model perceived disability as a deficit which makes a person dysfunctional in terms of the living standards set by society. In contrast, the social model accepts individual differences and makes adaptations to include all persons into society"s structures and systems. O"Gormon & Drudy (2010, p.165) found that the majority of teachers expressed the need for professional development to support learners with

special educational needs including training on learning difficulties, assessment techniques and teaching strategies.

Starcwezewka, Hodkinson and Adams (2012) conducted research on the development of inclusive education in the 20th and 21st centuries in Poland. Their findings revealed that, while teachers were not familiar with the concept of inclusion, they were well versed in integrative approaches (Starcwezewka, Hodkinson & Adams, 2012 p. 162). Teachers defined integration as including learners with disabilities. Thus, inclusion and integration seem to have meant the same thing in Poland.

Philpott, Furey and Penney's (2010) study on the need for innovative leadership in teacher education in the Canadian context recommended that on-going professional development should be characterised by six focus areas in order to empower teachers with pragmatic skills to balance the needs of their diverse classes. Canada is a multicultural society characterised by recent demographic shifts, interregional migration, growing ethnic diversity and the emergence of a paradigm of inclusion (Philpott, Furey & Penney, 2010, p. 38). The focus areas are professional development for inclusive policy; diversity; positive attitudes; evidence-based teaching strategies; collaborative teaching and meaningful teaching (Philpott et al, 2010, pp. 43-47).

Hodkinson and Devarakonda's (2008) study on perspectives and practices in India observed that government documents' use of the term "inclusive education" appears to be the same as integration. Thus, inclusive education did not take place. The study also found that there was no clear policy of teacher training that would ensure that teachers deliver effective inclusive education.

Yu, Su and Liu's (2011) paper on teacher education and inclusion in China revealed that the focus is children with disabilities (Yu, Su & Liu, 2010, p. 356). Learners with disabilities are included in regular classrooms. However, views on people with disabilities are based on the charity model; people with disabilities are pitied. Due to the large number of learners with disabilities, professional development is offered in the form of integrated pre-service and in-service teacher training (Yu, Su & Liu, 2010, p. 365).

Johnstone (2007) cited in Engelbrecht and Green (2007, p. 36) argued that the challenges of achieving inclusive education in Lesotho occur at three levels. There are on-going teacher training and policy issues at the national level. At the classroom level, there is a shortage of resources and unresolved tensions between assessment and inclusive education. There are also issues relating to class size, pedagogy and meeting the needs of students with significant challenges. Lesotho will require strategic planning and internal and external financial support to overcome these challenges.

Zimba, Mowes and Naanda (2007) cited in Engelbrecht and Green (2007, p. 46) found that there is no specific policy and legislation in Namibia to promote inclusive education. They recommended that teachers be encouraged to embrace a lifelong learning ethos and be provided with inclusive education training in the form of workshops, seminars and short courses. Much remains to be done in terms of training Namibian teachers to embrace inclusive education.

In Zimbabwe, there have been few progressive developments with regard to the implementation of inclusive education. This is due to the fact that people with disabilities are viewed in a negative light. Mpofu, Kasayira, Mhaka, Chireshe and Maunganidze (2007) cited in Engelbrecht and Green (2007, p. 70) noted that professionals in Zimbabwe, particularly those in education subscribe to Western definitions of inclusive education. Students with special needs are educated in ordinary classrooms with support and adaptations and are provided with teachers with specialist training. There is no recognition of the barriers that may affect other learners who are at risk of marginalisation.

2.2.2 Inclusive Education in the South African context

South Africa was one of the signatories of the Salamanca Statement. The manner in which inclusive education was introduced in South Africa was shaped by the complex nature of colonial education and the pre-1994 apartheid regime that violated the human rights of the majority of citizens (Stofile and Green, 2007 cited in Engelbrecht and Green, 2007). The democratic government confronts the enormous task of addressing these inequalities and disparities by transforming the education system in such a way that all learners will have access to quality education.

In South Africa, inclusive education is about accepting learners the way they are in our schools. Naicker (1999) cited in Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker & Engelbrecht (1999, p. 19) defines inclusive education as a system that is responsive to the diverse needs of learners. The Department of Education published a joint report on the findings of two bodies, the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) for public comment and advice (Report of National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support, Department of Education, 1997). This led to the development of the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001).

According to the Education White Paper 6, an inclusive education and training system acknowledges that all children and youth can learn and that they need support. Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies are required and differences among learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV or other infectious diseases should be acknowledged. The White Paper notes that inclusive education extends beyond formal schooling as learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal settings and structures. Attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricular and the environment need to be transformed in order to meet the needs of all learners. Finally, all learners should participate in the culture and curriculum of educational institutions and the barriers to learning should be identified and addressed (Department of Education, 2001, p. 5). The Education White Paper 6 therefore seeks to fulfil the constitutional responsibility set out in the South African Constitution''s Bill of Rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p.16) of basic education for all and equal access to educational institutions; and to comply with the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) that states that all learners have the right to appropriate education. This Act mandates public schools to admit learners without discrimination. The White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Department of Education, 1997b) outlines the rights of people with disabilities and makes provision for them to access rights like any other citizen. As noted earlier, the inclusive education system approach was an international move to advocate for the rights of all learners (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 1994).

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The term „barriers to learning" was proposed by the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) in recognition of the fact that a number of needs exist and that the education system should be restructured to accommodate these needs (Lomofsky and Lazarus, 2001, p. 311). According to the Education White Paper 6, the barriers to learning include negative attitudes to and stereotyping of difference; an inflexible curriculum; inappropriate languages of learning and teaching; inappropriate communication; inaccessible and unsafe built environments; inappropriate and inadequate support services; inadequate policies and legislation; non-recognition and non-involvement of parents; and inadequately and inappropriately trained education managers and educators (Department of Education, 2001).

Barriers to learning manifest themselves within the learner, the centre of learning and the education system, socially, economically or politically. They can be recognised when a learning breakdown or dropping out of school occurs (Department of Education, 2002).

Among the first steps in building an inclusive education and training system was human resource development for classroom educators (Department of Education, 2001) The Education White Paper 6 indicated that educators would be reoriented to their new roles by improving their skills and knowledge to be able to address a diverse range of needs.

However, inclusive education in South Africa has encountered numerous challenges. Engelbrecht and Green (2007, p.57) note, that, the needs include teacher capacity development generally; role-player capacity development for collaboration; addressing current teacher morale and attitudes; and the need to rethink training and development for inclusion. Hunt and Goetz (1997, p. 24) contend that the focus should be on schools, classrooms and the education system. The international research notes that there is an on-going need to identify learners" needs and appropriate strategies to address these needs (Gardner, 2003, p. 22). There is a paucity of research on what is happening in classrooms and on the different strategies adopted by the education system. Hunt and Goetz (1997, p. 24) note that such research would yield valuable information on inclusive practice. The existing literature concentrates on teachers" attitudes to

and perceptions of including learners with disabilities. Thus, disability has been regarded as the only challenge to learning.

Oswald and Swart (2008) investigated pre-service teachers" attitudes to and concerns regarding inclusive education and the situation they find themselves in when they are required to teach learners with disabilities after completing a course on inclusive education. As noted earlier, disability has been regarded as the only barrier when it comes to the "learning breakdown" and teacher attitudes when a child with a disability is placed in a mainstream classroom or school.

The other approach has been to develop ideas and materials to support schools and to prepare pre-service teachers for inclusive education. The British Index for Inclusion (Ainscow, 2001) was developed as a set of tools that would help schools to become more inclusive. The information included ranges from being able to collaborate and values, to induction and learning support policies, classroom practices and resource planning (Ainscow, 2001). The index consists of three levers of change in a school setting: practices, policies and cultures through collaborative partnerships. Ainscow (2001) further recommended that, for schools to be inclusive, many elements of the school need to change, such as the school vision and mission, culture, policies, curriculum and the day-to-day operations involving learners, teachers, administrators, parents and external stakeholders. Another important point identified by Booth (2011) in further developing inclusion is how teacher education ought to be developed. Booth (2011) considered that the inclusive development of teacher education should draw on the new edition of the Index for Inclusion by developing a framework of values that would redirect inclusive development. This suggests that it is not only teachers who need to be prepared to promote inclusion in schools; universities and colleges need to prepare prospective teachers by putting inclusive values into action in their curriculum.

Potgieter-Groot, Visser and Lubbe-de-Beer (2012) described the process of developing an in-service training programme for teachers on how to support learners with emotional and behavioural barriers in their classrooms. As this was a short term, three-session intervention, it offered limited knowledge and skills in managing learner behaviour, and did not consider the diverse needs of learners. Walton and Lloyd (2012) conducted a study with South African

university students taking a pilot postgraduate degree course in inclusive education. Their findings were based on classroom visits, support and feedback.

Only recently have studies focused on inclusive education that seeks to identify and minimise barriers to learning and the significant role of professional development in enabling an inclusive education system to work. A number of studies have highlighted the profound role of professional development in promoting an inclusive education system. Burnstein et al. (2004) recommended that teachers should engage in participatory staff development programmes where they could be systematically and intensively trained to enhance their confidence and competence. However, no details were provided on how teachers should be developed in light of shortcomings in the way they were initially trained. Ntombela (2011) citing Mathibe (2007) argues that teachers" capacitation needs to focus on imparting appropriate attitudes, knowledge, skills and values to enable them to perform at their best and to become resourceful teachers. Negative attitudes may be based on fear of change and a lack of confidence to address issues relating to inclusive education. Teachers should be developed so that they are able to provide solutions to their everyday experiences in their classrooms and to inspire positive attitudes. Teachers need to be consulted on the nature of the knowledge, strategies and skills they require to be able to address learner diversity. Skills cannot only be learnt in short training programmes; integrated, sustainable programmes are required.

Little attention has been paid to identifying problematic areas in learning. Pather (2008) found that educators were able to identify challenges within the system, but not within the learners. Mitchell et al."s (2008) study revealed that policymakers were not considering the social and educational issues that would have been projected through the struggles of vulnerable students and teachers. A study conducted by Stofile et al. (2011) showed that poverty is a crucial problem that affects all education stakeholders. Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) noted that the implementation of inclusive education is not only hindered by school processes but also by the ecological processes in the whole education system.

2.2.3 Challenges confronting the implementation of professional development for inclusive education

The democratic government has adopted many policies and laws in an effort to remove obstacles to learning. The South African Constitution and Bill of Rights affirm the right to equality and human rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). This is the supreme law of the land. Continuous monitoring and evaluation is thus necessary to ensure that learner breakdown and exclusion is prevented at all costs. Legislation plays a fundamental role in ensuring that learners who were previously excluded, for example, those with disabilities or learners from different language groups have access to equal education. However, teachers require professional development in order to support inclusion.

The Education White Paper 6 identified the factors that contribute to a range of diverse learning needs. These include physical, mental, sensory, neurological and developmental impairment, psycho-social disturbances, differences in intellectual ability, life experiences and socio-economic deprivation (Department of Education, 2001, p.17). The White Paper states that training will focus on supporting learners, educators and the system as a whole so that the full range of training needs is met. The focus will be on teaching and learning factors, and emphasis will be placed on the development of good teaching strategies that will benefit all learners; overcoming barriers in the system that prevent it from meeting the full range of learning needs; and adaptation of the support systems available in the classroom (Department of Education, 2001, p.19).

The Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) spells out clearly how teachers should be developed. Teachers will be trained in multi-level classroom instruction in order to prepare them to vary lessons according to learners" diverse needs (Department of Education, 2001). An important issue to bear in mind is that reskilling educators cannot happen in short training sessions. A paradigm shift from an individual to a systems approach will not occur by merely changing the vocabulary in a particular training session. It requires considerable time and is a developmental process that goes beyond workshops and other in-service training activities (Stofile & Green, 2007 in Engelbrecht & Green, 2007, p. 60). This means that teachers have to

be provided with a variety of professional development activities to move from the medical model approach to the social model approach.

Another issue that has not received sufficient attention is reskilling teachers to assume their new role. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (1997, p.184) the norms and standards for educators (Department of Education, 2000a) highlight the multi-dimensional character of the teacher and explain some of its key dimensions. Teachers need to be retrained so that they are able to embrace such characteristics. However, clear-cut strategies to achieve this objective are lacking.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement is the latest directive on how teaching and learning ought to be done. One of its mandates is to ensure that educators use different strategies to demarcate content (Department of Education, 2010). According to the Statement (2010, p.10), "To address barriers in the classroom, teachers should use various curriculum differentiation strategies". To facilitate the process of curriculum adaptation, Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes were developed to advise teachers, administrators and other personnel on transacting distinctiveness in the classroom. According to the Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity (2011, p .2) "The guidelines are intended to provide teachers, principals, subject advisors, administrators, school governors and other personnel" with specifications and blueprints on how to respond to student variances in the classroom over the course of study. The challenge in implementing these guidelines is that the information provided is theoretical. Theory and practice should be included when training teachers using these documents.

The Draft Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (Department of Basic Education, 2014) outlines a process to identify individual learners" needs in relation to the home and school context in order to establish the level and extent of additional support required. It includes directives to enable access to and provide such assistance in various scenarios. Through a set of forms, the protocol has to be followed in "identifying and addressing barriers to learning" that affect individual learners throughout their school career (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The requirements set out in this document call for extensive training on

barriers to learning so that teachers are able to identify them in the early stages of a learner‟s school life.

The Department of Basic Education Strategic Plan (2011- 2014) states that an inclusive system will speed up the inclusion of vulnerable learners and reduce the challenges, making use of purposeful means and processes that will improve learner retention. The cornerstone forms need to be carefully drafted and the way they will operate needs to be spelt out (Department of Basic Education Strategic Plan, 2011). Goal 26 of the Department of Basic Education Action Plan 2014-2016 towards schooling 2025 (Department of Basic Education, 2012, p.12) is to increase the number of schools that effectively implement an inclusive education policy and have access to centres offering specialist services. This calls for teachers‟ professional development to be stepped up.

Researchers have employed different research methodologies to conduct studies in this field. Engelbrecht, Oswald and Elloff (2003) investigated the stressors associated with including students with mental challenges. Teachers require a high level of training to be able to respond to learners with disabilities (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Oswald and Elloff, 2003). Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart and Ellof (2003) recommend that student teachers receive education and training both prior to employment and during the course of their employment to effectively address inclusive education (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart & Ellof, 2003).

Mayaba (2008) found that the majority of educators were not trained in inclusive education and that, while many schools have established School Based Support Teams, most are only partially effective or ineffective (citing Mabaso, 2006). Institutional-level Support Teams (Department of Education, 2001, p.48) are responsible for co-coordinating learner and educator support services that support the learning and teaching process by identifying and addressing learner, educator and institutional needs. These teams are one of the strategies adopted to promote inclusion. However, they are under- utilised in schools.

Koay, Lim, Sim and Elkins (2006) found that for educators to become more positive in their perceptions and beliefs about including learners, they need to gain more experience and

knowledge of different issues. Educators need to be aware of learners" needs and issues within their own context as once they are able to identify them they will become more accommodating of learners who experience such issues.

In the study conducted by Da Costa (2003) through the SCOPE Inclusive Education Project in the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga Provinces, the findings were the opposite of the anticipated outcome in that after the training was provided, educators felt that they required more understanding of curriculum issues (Da Costa, 2003). This suggests that teachers needed more training on curriculum barriers. These include the content; language or medium of instruction; how the classroom is organised and managed; the methods and processes used in teaching; the pace of teaching and the time available to complete the curriculum; the learning materials and equipment that are used and how learning is assessed (Department of Education, 2001, p. 19).

Pather (2008) conducted an inclusive education project through a staff workshop at a public secondary school. Data was obtained using the communicative mode and interviews. The threats that were identified were organisational, excluding specific learning demands. Pather (2008, p. 71) argues that the definition of inclusion should be re-examined in the South African context. The study examined Booth"s definition of inclusive education as covering all learner needs rather than only those with disabilities (Pather, 2008, p. 64).

Mitchell, de Lange and Thuy (2008) conducted an educational endeavour to action inclusive education on the outskirts of KwaZulu-Natal. A transformative participatory method was employed. The authors sought to use teachers" words as a means to empower them to cope with the poverty and marginalisation experienced by their learners. Teachers participated as video documentary makers, reflecting on their role of providing pastoral care to vulnerable children. The results highlighted the significance of visual aids in understanding the challenges confronting children without parents in South Africa. The way in which the teachers were connected with the community provided them with in-depth understanding of the struggles confronting community members, particularly in the time of HIV and AIDS, and inspired ideas on how to respond to the needs of the learners in their daily care (Mitchell, De Lange and Thuy, 2008, p.99). HIV and AIDS impact heavily on education as learners are orphaned; poverty and

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the number of child-headed households increase; trauma and bereavement take hold, as do chronic and infectious diseases and the discrimination and stigma associated with the disease persist.

Stofile, Linden and Maarman (2011) conducted research on how teachers perceived being poor and how this blocked entrance to education in a district in the Eastern Cape Province. They collected data by means of discussions in a representative survey group and open and closed questions to explore teachers" experiences. The study found that being poor closes pathways to education. It recommended that the Education Department consider destitution in planning educational services as well as further qualitative research to investigate how the education authorities can ensure that children from the most deprived families have same chance to enter, and to triumph in learning (Stofile et al., 2011). A critical issue that has not been addressed is how teachers can address this issue. Together with HIV and AIDS, malnutrition and orphan hood, poverty has a ripple effect on education. Starvation is a social problem in South Africa. Extreme poverty manifests in emotional, behavioural and mental health problems that require psycho-social support. A lack of such support leads to behaviour difficulties, absenteeism, high failure rates and dropping out of school.

While scholars agree that educators need to be reskilled to promote inclusive education, debate continues on how best to do so. Most South African teachers were trained during the apartheid era. Inclusive education calls on teachers to fulfil roles that they were not trained for. The reality is that the majority of teachers were never trained for the roles set out in the norms and standards for educators, i.e., learning mediator; interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials; leader, administrator and manager; scholar, researcher and life-long learner; community, citizenship and pastoral role; assessor; and learning area/subject specialist/phase specialist (Department of Education, 2000). Thus, teachers need to be retrained so that they are able to operate in the new classroom environment. Another crucial issue is that district personnel who are supposed to train teachers to fulfil these roles are themselves not competent to do so. Loreman et al. (2010, p.3) argue that teachers need to be highly skilled and motivated to become successful. This is because inclusion demands high levels of organisational change aimed at promoting effective learning.

Swart and Oswald (2008) investigated how Western Cape teachers who were cited as exemplary directed their learning journey in developing inclusive learning communities. Data was collected from five primary school educators who had learners with several barriers to learning in their schools and classrooms, using in-depth individual interviews. The study found that experienced teachers became amateurs when it came to accommodating the dynamic, diverse learning needs of learners and this influenced them to learn how to become inclusive. According to Oswald and Oswald (2008, p. 104.), "Building inclusive communities require good teaching and active teacher learning. Teachers need to be cared for and supported in caring and inclusive communities". Teachers will succeed provided that the education system offers a safety net through on-going support and consultation.

Ntombela (2011) investigated the extent to which teachers in three primary schools in two districts in KwaZulu-Natal were familiar with the content of the Education White Paper 6. According to Ntombela (2011, p. 13), "How teachers understand EWP6 will be influenced by the quantity and quantity of their experiences with this policy statement". Teachers need not to know the detailed content of the inclusive education policy but they should be empowered to know what is right, when to do the right thing and what the right practices are in order to fully understand the Education White Paper 6. Most teachers still believe that there is only one approach to teaching. The White Paper takes into consideration a wide range of barriers to learning, ranging from learning difficulties; to curriculum; and socio-economic psycho-social factors. Teachers require training on effective approaches to tackle these issues.

Gledenhuys and Wevers (2013, p.15) state that all practising educators should receive in-service training on managing inclusive classrooms through well-structured training and staff development programmes. This can be done on a rotational basis using clustering or teacher forums.

According to Oswald and Oswald (2008, p. 103), "Building inclusive learning communities requires good teaching and active teacher learning and that teachers themselves need to be cared and supported in a caring inclusive learning community. Both individual and collaborative

learning are dependent on each other for proper learning to take its course. Teachers need to propel by collaborating as teachers and teacher educators to gain new knowledge".

Another crucial issue addressed by Balfour (2008) is the problematic use of language in most South African schools. The problem is not that teachers have not be adequately trained or provided with teaching and learning materials, but that they have not been thoroughly trained to teach using one language. The majority of South African learners speak indigenous languages; thus the language of learning is a second language. Most South African learners learn in English; yet both they and their teachers belong to groups with their own indigenous languages. The problem becomes even more pervasive if teachers from indigenous cultural groups are expected to teach learners in English when they themselves have not yet mastered this language.

Potgieter-Groot et al. (2012) investigated training programmes for teachers on handling learners with affective and conduct problems. They found that teachers with relevant classroom management strategies were able to make noticeable changes in managing such learners (Potgieter et al., 2012). Walton and Lloyd (2012) contend that knowledge for inclusive education that is only facilitated using lectures and rote learning is not sufficient. They recommend that teachers use a collaborative and classroom-based knowledge of inclusive practice in order to be able to implement, reflect and theorise inclusive teaching. Teachers need to work together and talk and listen to one another in order to identify learner problems and generate solutions.

D"Aimant (2013) used the qualitative approach of personal stories to understand the specific experiences of African teachers in rural KwaZulu-Natal. The study highlighted the differences among the selected teachers. Some African teachers working in rural contexts seek to become visible agents of change despite the limitations of their contexts. Through a process of redefining and transforming their own historical destinies, they are constructing themselves to be agents of change in terms of social responsibility, social change and social justice (D"Aimant, 2013, p.59). Rural areas lack resources and services. This translates to societal barriers. When teachers seek to understand community problems and deal with such issues, they become agents of change.

A recent study by Gledenhuys and Wevers adopted a qualitative and phenomenological approach to focus on the ecological aspects that influence the way inclusive education has been advanced in mainstream primary schools in the Eastern Cape. The study found that inclusive education is hampered by a lack of preparedness on the part of role players to embrace inclusive education; the lack of cohesion of the ecosystem was also identified as a challenge (Gledenhuys & Wevers, 2013, p.14). For inclusive education to be embraced in schools, different role players need to come on board. Parents/caregivers, educators, learners, district-based and institution-based support teams and community members need to understand their roles. Parents need to be encouraged to become decision makers and contribute to their children‟s education. Teachers need to be made aware that the community and parents have a significant role to play in the development of quality education. Training should be provided for different role players.

The Millennium Development Goal of "Education for All" by 2015 will not ensure that learners with diverse needs benefit equally unless much more effort is put into teacher professional development (Moon, 2007). Matoti (2010, p. 582) found that the stresses experienced by teachers mirror the broader social and political context in South Africa, resulting in fear and uncertainty, and argued for the creation of communities of practice, so that educators do not suffer quietly on their own.

While much work has been done on professional development and the barriers to learning, more research is required on how teachers should be empowered to identify and address these barriers. Professional development using networking and partnerships ensures the development of communities of knowledge (Schoeman, 2012). Olson and Craig (2000) argue that sufficient time should be set aside for collaborative activities and freedom to reflect so that teachers become change agents of inclusive education. Communities of knowledge can be established by sharing practical and theoretical knowledge and interacting outside of school. This would provide a safety net where teachers could share their experiences in a constructive manner, engage with their stories about their teaching and offer solutions through innovative practices. Teachers have not yet been granted such opportunities.

According to Niesz (2007, p. 608), "Teachers" development should be attached to communities of practice". Traditional approaches to professional development do not recognise the time and support required to inspire changes in practice, whereas teacher networks have the potential to work through various mechanisms, namely creating a community of belonging; providing a context of dignity and respect that teachers do not always experience and providing legitimacy for ideas, actions and advocacy (Niesz, 2007, p. 608). The more teachers engage with one another, the better equipped they are with strategies to work with children and become active decision makers.

While teacher development through communities is desirable, in South Africa, there is a tendency to rather involve experts (Maistry, 2008). Although expert knowledge is indispensable in that at some point teachers will need to understand issues that will require particular expertise, the issue of how teachers can be professionally developed to teach inclusively in their day to day classroom practice has been neglected. Thus, there is a need for more theoretical and practical work that will contribute to professional development strategies that result in improved learner support.

An important point that has not been studied is the relationship between learning and change, the sense in which they are viewed as causes and consequences of each other. Peck et al. (2009) note the need to determine if change happens after learning has taken place. Change is used as a yardstick to measure the impact of learning. Teachers thus need to reflect on their everyday teaching practices and to establish whether or not they have positively impacted learners.

According to Waldron in Walther-Thomas and Bownell (2001, p.177), "The need for research is not because there is some universal best inclusive practice to be discovered (this would deny the complexity of each classroom situation) but to increase the repertoire of strategies that schools and teachers can use to ensure that diverse learning needs are met". Using a series of activities would provide a platform for "professional development strategies" that are user-friendly in many settings.

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It was therefore appropriate to explore teachers" experiences of their professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning using three sets of qualitative data. The use of reports and records, physical artefacts and in-depth interviews demonstrated validity and provided insight into the uniqueness of the group under study.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

This study was informed by the socio-cultural theory on learning and Bronfenbrenner"s ecological systems theory.

2.3.1 The socio-cultural theory of learning

The socio-cultural theory of learning was selected because it can be used to examine issues relating to adult learning and teachers are adult learners. According to Tett, Hamilton and Hillier (2006, p. 9) "The two important principles underlying the implementation of a social practice approach is that a two-way dialogue and movement is essential between formal learning and the everyday world; a process of active, expansive learning is assumed in the ways in which both teachers and learners participate in decision making". This means that decisions are made by both the facilitator and the learner. The socio–cultural theory brings about change in theory and practice by coaching, collaboration and sharing successes and challenges in everyday teaching practice. This is important in light of the gaps in implementing the policy set out in the Education White Paper 6.

A socio-cultural model of professional development therefore involves improving performance with the assistance of a more competent other (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the professional development of teachers this could be accomplished by inviting experts with relevant knowledge to address teachers on various issues that affect their everyday teaching and learning.

In thinking of professional development in terms of joint productive activity, there should be collaborative effort to legitimise it. A fundamental principle in socio-cultural theory is that professional development should avoid using jargon terminology that might confuse teachers and

rather use every day experiences. "Learning programmes that are grounded in people"s life situations are much more likely to encourage learning that has value to those that use it" (Tett et al., 2006, p. 49). Teachers" everyday experiences and discussions should be used to explain terminology and promote critical reflection.

A community of practice is part of the social learning theory. One joins a particular group to learn new things and thereby influence one another. According to Lave and Wenger (1991) cited by Tett, Hamilton and Hillier (2006, p.182), "The importance of communities of practice is that our knowledge of how our community functions is established through our developing sense of identity". Teachers begin to identify as a team working together to address particular issues. They could join or form a group to learn new practices and achieve what is set out in the policy. It is also noted that teachers can learn by individual construction and participation in a community.

According to Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005, p. 273), "individual and collaborative learning, planned and unintentional learning, are all possible as part of workplace learning for the teacher". Both individual personal development and shared learning become possible as part of professional development. "The issue of power dynamics is very crucial in adult learning in that there should be autonomy of respect between adult learners and the facilitator to ensure meaningful participation". For learning to be effective, the needs of adult learners and those of the facilitator should be mutually understood. All members should respect one another and be mutually accountable. Social learning can lead to a shift in relationships between tutors/facilitators and learners and provide opportunities for sharing power (Tet et al., 2006, p.166). This can be achieved by talking and listening to one another and identifying what is required, who has the major responsibility and sharing resources in a respectful manner.

The strength of the socio-cultural learning theory is that the individuals are part of the context in which they live. When teachers understand the context in which they teach, they are able to put policy into practice (Sainsbury & Walker, 2011). Teachers need careful planning and support to transfer knowledge into everyday classroom practice (Ainscow, 1999). This requires that time be

set aside for educators to work in teams and support one another. Ainscow (2007) states, that, inclusive practices can be realised through social learning.

2.3.2 The ecosystems theory

For teachers to be able to identify and address barriers to learning, their practices should be informed by knowledge of the ecosystemic perspective. This will assist them to develop positive attitudes and offer opportunities to understand barriers to learning at different levels. Teachers who see barriers to learning as ecological may develop a willingness to support learners rather than seeing such barriers as inherent or medical. Bronfenbrenner"s ecological systems theory looks at a child"s development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p. 51), "Bronfenbrenner states that the child"s development is influenced by other systems around the child." This implies that the child is central to the systems which they are part of. Bronfenbrenner"s theory has significant implications for the practice of teaching because teachers should be aware of events that take place at learners" homes in order to be able to address barriers to learning.

According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p. 52), "An ecological model for inclusion requires that teachers are able to analyse inclusion at the microsystem level of children, families, and classrooms; the mesosystem level of collaborations and relationships, such as those between parents and professionals; the exosystem level of organisational structures, policies, and external resources; and the macrosystem level of cultural beliefs, assumptions and values". The ecological systems theory is based on relationships between organisms and their physical environment which are dependent on each other. These relationships are seen as a whole. Educators should be able to relate to the child as a person who functions within the home, school and community systems. If one system is failing, the child will be affected in one way or another.

Poverty is an example of the replication of all systems. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p. 52), "The work with much of its focus on poverty and its effect, is relevant to us in the southern African region, probably the most influential contribution has been the

contextual framework formulated by Bronfenbrenner". Teachers" knowledge of the effects of poverty will contribute to their ability to address societal barriers.

According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p. 51), "To Bronfenbrenner, child development should be seen as happening within the four nested systems, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. These all interact with the chronosystem". Knowledge of these nested systems will enable teachers to respond to learner diversity and therefore protect learners" rights. Teachers must be made aware that when a problem exists in one of these systems, the learner may experience a learning breakdown. Systems that lead to learning breakdown are called barriers to learning and development and are those systems conceptualised by the Education White Paper 6.

The microsystem is the nearest layer because it involves the direct contacts the child experiences (Berk, 2000). Microsystems include the child"s family, the school setting, and the peers with whom children interact on a daily basis (Donald et al., 2002). The microsystem is the physical, social and psychological factors involving proximal interactions which are supposed to offer protective support to the child. According to Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2011, p. 10), "The microsystem can also become a risk factor as is evident in, for example, unsupported child-headed households, drug abuse, family and school violence and homelessness". Teachers need to understand their learners" family background so that they can work in collaboration with other professionals to support them.

At the level of mesosystems, these include children with whom the child has contact, family members and the school family (Berk, 2000).The things that happen at home or among peers affect the child"s response at school (Donald et al., 2002).The child will be at risk if, for example, he/she is from a neglected home, but can be given security and self-esteem by an attentive, caring teacher. These interactions between the teacher and the child can influence each other in one microsystem (Landsberg et al., 2011). The teacher"s role of pastoral care is very important in providing care and support at this level.

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The exosystem level involves things in the surroundings in the child‟s microsystems (Donald et al., 2002). These good or bad forces influence a child‟s life (Berk, 2000). In the South African context the issue of orphans and the way fostering of children is being handled have negative implications, leading to barriers such as emotional problems.

The macrosystems are societal components in the child‟s community, like beliefs and values that have dominant influence (Donald et al., 2002). This layer may be considered the outermost layer in the child‟s environment. According to Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2011, p. 10), "Examples of values and beliefs could include democracy, social justice, equity, equality, freedom from discrimination and ubuntu". With the mushrooming of child-headed households, it is likely that many learners come from dysfunctional families that have negative effects on a child‟s learning. The effects of the macrosystems depend on the culture of the community that the child belongs to. For example, if the culture of a particular community is that the parent should provide support to the child and the parent does not have the means to do so, the child is affected (Berk, 2000). This in turn, affects the structures in which parents function. The parents‟ ability or inability to carry out that responsibility toward their child within the context of the child‟s microsystem is likewise affected.

Chronosystems are long term interactions that have developed over time (Donald et al., 2002). A perfect example is the apartheid system and the way in which it affected and continues to affect most children in many spheres of life (Landsberg et al., 2011). Another example is the HIV and AIDS pandemic and how it has infected and affected children in a number of ways like homelessness, teenage pregnancy, etc. It is therefore important that teachers become aware of such issues so that they are able to provide sufficient support to affected learners within the school setting.

2.3 .3 Bio-ecological perspective

According to Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2011, p.11), "Brofenbrenner maintains that a person‟s development is the product of a network of interactions - cultural, social, economic, political- and not merely psychological as per the assumption that development attributes such as

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intelligence, achievement and Piagetian type stages can be measured and understood out of the context of an individual‟s life, time and society. This suggests that there is a broad relationship that is co existing between a person and his or her environment. Cultural, social, and political factors also play a major role in the person‟s development as assumed by Piaget in that it is only factors like a person‟s level of intelligence and achievement that determine a person‟s development.‟‟ Central to Brofenbrenner‟s bio-ecological perspective are four interacting dimensions that need to be considered in understanding human development (or any other kind of change) in context. These are proximal processes, personal characteristics, systems/contexts and time (Landberg et al., 2011, p.11). Teachers‟ acknowledgement of these interactions is very crucial because this is where barriers to learning manifest themselves. When teachers are aware of the ways barriers manifest themselves and their effects, they may use intervention strategies to prevent them from happening.

According to Fieldman, Gordon and Snyman (2001), barriers to learning are best understood as resulting from a complex interplay of learners and their context, including the reality of impairment or disabilities, socio-economic restraints and wider societal factors including values, attitudes, policies and institutions. Therefore, learners will experience barriers differently depending on the family of which they are part, the extent to which their schools facilitate access and participation and the resources in the communities and societies in which they live (Fieldman et al., 2001, p.146).

2.4 Concepts

2.4.1 Professional development

Professional development of teachers is based on the assumption that teaching is a profession. Since teaching is a profession, expertise should be developed (Sergiovanni & Starrat, 2002) which should be voluntary (Robins & Alvy, 2003) and be informed by the needs of teachers (Billingsley, 2005). Professional development is often misunderstood as in-service training where teachers are told (Sergiovanni & Starrat, 2002) what to do by an expert (Billingsey, 2005).

2.4.2 Barriers to learning

According to Howell (2007, p. 98), "Barriers to learning is the preferred South African term to explain why some learners do not experience learning success. This term is preferable to "special needs" which signifies a medical or deficit approach to educational difficulties and locates the problem within the learner, rather than in the system".

According to the Draft Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education (2002, p. 17), "Barriers to learning are those factors which hinder teaching and learning. These can and do occur at all levels of the system. This includes factors relating to specific individuals; various aspects of the curriculum; the physical and psychosocial environment within which teaching and learning occurs; dynamics and conditions relating to the learner's home environment including issues such as family dynamics, cultural and socio-economic background, socio-economic status and so on; community and social dynamics which either support or hinder the teaching and learning process".

According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p. 32), "These barriers are grouped into three functionality clusters: contextual disadvantage; social and interpersonal problems; and disabilities and difficulties in learning". Contextual disadvantages could include poverty, inequality, or living in rural areas where there are a lack of resources and privileges. Such barriers are a result of the socio-economic and political structures of the society. Social and interpersonal problems are barriers that occur within families, peers, classrooms, and at community and social level. Disabilities and difficulties in learning are inherent. Learners who experience such barriers are learners with special needs.

The curriculum is one of the most significant barriers to learning for learners in special and ordinary schools. In this case, barriers to learning arise from different aspects of the curriculum such as:
- The content (i.e., what is taught).
- The language or medium of instruction.
- How the classroom or lecture is organised and managed.

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- Teaching methods and processes.

- The pace of teaching and the time available to complete the curriculum.

- The learning materials and equipment used.

- How learning is assessed (Department of Education, 2001, p.19).

Curriculum barriers can be addressed by implementing differentiation in the classroom. Differentiation (Walton, 2010, p.32) refers to teaching and assessment strategies that enable all learners to access the curriculum. Activities and assessment tasks can be differentiated by using the principle of universal design, that is planning in advance for all learners and some learners may need Individual Support Plans.

2.4.3 Identification of barriers to learning

Learners who experience barriers to learning should be identified as early as possible. Early identification and immediate, appropriate support is essential to ensure that learners achieve according to their potential. If barriers are identified too late in a child‟s life, this will cause backlogs and possible learning difficulties. It can also cause emotional problems leading to the need for more extensive support, which does not always guarantee success. Thus, the earlier barriers are identified, the quicker support can be provided and the better a child‟s opportunities are to achieve and become successful in life (Nel, Nel & Lebeloane, 2012, p.48). When barriers have been identified, inclusive practices should be adopted to support these learners.

2.4.4 Addressing barriers to learning

According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p. 32), "Addressing barriers to learning requires two important thrusts. Prevention is the first thrust that is directed at transforming educational institutions and curricula to facilitate access to education for all students, irrespective of their different learning needs. Elements of social transformation that can help to prevent the occurrence of barriers to learning are also taken into account; support is by providing education support to schools, staff, parents, and students". Prevention and support cannot happen only at school level. According to the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (2000, p. 10), "Actions

should be done by various stakeholders to build the capacity of schools". This can be achieved through inter-sectoral collaboration.

In addressing disability barriers, classroom and facilities need to be adapted. Inclusive schools need to adapt classrooms and other facilities to allow access to wheelchairs and other adaptive devices (Morgan & Demchak, 1998, p. 26). According to Mayberry and Lazarus (2002, p. 84), "Technology is available in the form of assistive devices that offer learners independence and the opportunity to enjoy maximum success". Assistive devices are learning related equipment (Department of Education, 2002, p. 178) such as braille machines, wheelchairs and audiotapes. Failure to provide such devices impedes access to effective teaching and learning.

According to the Individual Disabilities Education Act of 1999, 34 CFR 300, "The individual education programmes (IEPs) which contain a description of a child's educational performance, annual goals and objective, a statement of which special education or other services a child requires and a description of instructional and assessment modifications that a child requires can be used as a strategy to address barriers to learning" (p. 347). Individual Support Plans are drawn up based on the learner's individual needs to optimise positive academic outcomes. Accommodation and adaptations are made to the learner's individual education plan.

Scaffolding (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 1997, p.111) can be achieved by providing short-term assistance when introducing a new concept and gradually withdrawing as the learner gains independence in performing a particular activity. Co-operative learning (Donald et al, 1997, p. 114) involves learners doing activities which have a single purpose in pairs or groups.

Assessment is important in addressing barriers to learning through task performance, allowing for oral instead of written responses and allowing extra time (Elliot & Marquart, 2004). In modifying assessment, spelling and handwriting are also considered (Bradley& Calvin, 1998). Assessment tasks should enable learners to demonstrate what they know and can do as opposed to what they do not know or cannot do. In other words, when teachers design learning and assessment activities, they should consider opportunities for success and challenges to accommodate all learners.

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2.4.5 Learner support

Learner support is the process of assisting a learner in such a way that there is effective teaching and learning. It is one of the strategies that teachers must engage with to embrace diversity. In order for teachers to accept the responsibility of facilitating learner support, they need to fulfil the seven roles identified by the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000, p. 2). "The roles are the teacher as mediator of learning; the teacher as interpreter and designer of learning programmes; the teacher as administrator, leader and manager; the teacher as assessor of learning; the teacher as supporter; community, citizenship and pastoral role; the teacher as student, researcher and lifelong learner; the teacher as learning area/subject/phase/discipline specialist".

2.4.5.1 The teacher as mediator of learning

The role of mediator is the first and foremost role. The teacher is responsible for mediating the most effective learning possible among all students (Donald et al., 2002, p. 18). Teachers can fulfil this role by becoming good classroom managers. The classroom should be organised in a way that facilitates effective teaching and learning. This can be done by arranging the classroom in a manner that is safe and pleasant. The classroom should be barrier free, with enough light, ventilation and resources to create conducive teaching and learning. The other factor to consider is the social aspects of the classroom. These refer to forms of discipline; and sensitivity to how communication occurs; ensuring that all learners participate in learning. The teacher should be able to address gender and class issues and inequality to ensure that there is no discrimination. Teaching and learning needs to be mediated using different methods appropriate to diverse learners.

2.4.5.2 The teacher as interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials

Teachers need to understand that learners are different. This role is crucial since they have to adapt and interpret relevant knowledge, information and skills in such a way that they design learning programmes and materials that are appropriate to the level, and specific needs of all

learners (Donald et al., 2002, p.184).This role will be executed effectively if teachers have thorough knowledge of the curriculum. Teachers should know all learners in the classroom by observing, interacting and developing learner profiles. This will assist them to differentiate their lesson plans, activities and assessment. Materials will have to be adapted for learners according to their needs.

2.4.5.3 The teacher as leader, administrator and manager

Teachers are classroom managers who are supposed to lead by example, demonstrating love, values and discipline. Leadership involves using one‟s professional insight, maturity, and influence to give purpose and direction to the teaching/learning situation (Donald et al., 2002, p. 186). Teachers should be exemplary to learners by showing consistency in terms of rules and procedures. The classroom should be organised in an orderly manner. Being a classroom manager calls for good time management and good planning. Classroom resources need to be managed effectively. Learner information in the form of reports, assessments, and individual educational plans should be readily available to parents or guardians but kept with caution to ensure confidentiality.

2.4.5.4 The teacher as assessor of learning

Assessment is the strategy that is used to ascertain the level of skill, values and knowledge that the learner has attained. Assessment procedures, appropriate to planned performance outcomes, need to be integrated into the whole teaching/learning experience (Donald et al., 2002, p.188). Authentic assessment should be used as part of learning support using multiple ways to ensure that all skills are assessed in an equitable manner (Landsberg et al., 2011). Teachers should understand the principles of effective assessment and it should be varied to accommodate all learners. Different types of assessment such as formative, diagnostic and evaluative assessment should be used to promote effective teaching and learning.

2.4.5.5 The teacher as supporter: Community citizenship and pastoral role

The teacher needs to network with the community around the school so as to be able to make informed decisions when helping learners. He/she should both prevent and address problems in the classroom through community interaction (Donald et al., 2002, p.186). Teachers should be able to identify and address barriers to learning. This role will require teachers to acquire consulting and mentoring skills. They need to know how to network and be able to create an inventory of community resources that may support learners. Understanding cultural dynamics and respecting community values is crucial. Teachers" involvement in community structures that support learners" well-being will help them to fulfil this role.

2.4.5.6 The teacher as student, researcher and lifelong learner

Teachers who are able to excel are those who become lifelong learners. They identify the skills they need to teach diverse learners and seek ways of adding these skills to their repertoire by means of further study, attending workshops, etc. They initiate change by means of collaboration, mediation and negotiation with other teachers and the community. They defend and plea for learners who experience barriers to learning (Landsberg et al., 2011). Life-long learning can be both formal and informal. Teachers" personal development is critical in that they become empowered with the latest developments in education.

2.4.5.7 The teacher as learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist

The teacher should have first-hand knowledge of the subject taught. This is also important when the teacher has to consider adapting the curriculum. Teachers should be able to change the classroom environment and their teaching strategies, and adapt appropriate technology to provide for the curriculum needs of diverse learners (Landsberg et al., 2011). This is particularly important in South Africa where many teachers were trained some time ago to teach traditional subjects and where the latest curriculum contains new learning areas and outcomes. Outcomes-based education requires teachers to become facilitators and encourages learners to construct

knowledge rather than simply reproducing it. Thus, teachers need retraining in their specialised subjects as well as training to ensure that all learners access the curriculum.

2.4.6 Collaboration

Collaboration is an important tool in schools. The starting point is mutual recognition of the expertise of all partners, together with recognition and acceptance of diverse views and backgrounds (Engelbrecht in Engelbrecht& Green, 2007, p. 184). Collaboration means working together on a particular issue that needs to be addressed. Teachers, professionals from other sectors, parents, community leaders and organisations should use this avenue to come up with a variety of skills and generate ideas to address issues affecting teaching and learning. Social issues are an example of issues that can be addressed using collaboration. These could include teenage pregnancy, HIV and AIDS, poverty, learners with disabilities who are out of school and access to resources.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the existing literature on the evolution of inclusive education**.** The significance of inclusive education research was highlighted and international developments in inclusive education and their influence on South Africa were discussed. The challenge of professional development was also highlighted. In the context of South Africa, it is surprising that the process of identifying and addressing barriers to learning has received relatively little attention in the field of professional development. Several researchers argue that there has been a problem in the way up-skilling has been geared towards the effective roll out of inclusive education. This led to much debate on which barriers are able to be identified by teachers; how knowledge is transmitted to teachers and how teachers should be developed. There is thus a need for research on the multiple ways of ensuring that teachers are able to assist learners in reaching their full potential.

The socio-cultural theory of learning and Bronfenbrenner‟s ecological systems theory were discussed as the theoretical frameworks that informed this study. The socio-cultural theory was

appropriate because the social practices approach helps learners to be more proactive in their worlds (Ted et al. 2006, p.181). Teachers need to be actively engaged in their learning to ignite their potential and make them realise that they are able to do things.

For teachers to be able to identify and address barriers to learning, their practices should be informed by knowledge of the ecosystemic perspective. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory looks at the child's development within the context of the relationships that form his or her environment. This theory has crucial implications for teachers' practice because teachers should understand the relationships that exist between their learner and the systems. They need to understand that when these systems fail to meet learners' needs, there will be a breakdown in learning. Barriers to learning; identifying and addressing these barriers; collaboration and learner support were all explored in detail in this chapter.

The following chapter discusses the research design and methodology utilised in this study.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology employed for this study. In exploring teachers‟ professional development experiences in identifying and addressing barriers to learning, an interpretive research paradigm was considered appropriate since interpretive approaches rely heavily on naturalistic methods (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) to understand human experience (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36). Data were gathered by means of in-depth interviews and documentary analysis of reports and records. Physical artefacts were also collected. This was a case study of teachers‟ professional development experiences in identifying and addressing barriers to learning in the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project. According to Yin (2009, p. 11), "A case study was used for its ability to provide a unique example of real people in real situations enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles". A case study was appropriate because the researcher sought to understand teachers‟ professional development experiences through interpreting their real life stories.

3.2 The research context

The research was conducted during 2014 in the Sizabantwana (helping children) Primary Schools Support Project. The Project was established in 1997 following requests for assistance from two primary school teachers whose learners required assessment and intervention in relation to various barriers to learning. The original aim of the project centred on developing educators‟ capacity to deal with psycho-social issues in their school communities. It was hoped that these teachers would become agents of change in their contexts, and would be available to assist other teachers and community members.

To achieve this aim a support group was established, where teachers could receive input on particular problem areas affecting learners and offer support to one another whilst implementing

interventions. This group currently has 43 members from different schools. The UKZN School of Psychology undertakes administrative tasks and provides funding for the group for professional development purposes. The group is led by its own members. Every fourth year, a project co coordinator is selected from among the teachers to lead the group.

The group meets fortnightly to discuss barriers to learning and what can realistically be done to address these barriers in their schools. Workshops are held on a particular barrier to learning and in subsequent meetings, group members continue to discuss the issue and support one another in offering learner support.

The study participants were purposefully selected (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 45) in collaboration with the project co-ordinator. They teach at previously disadvantaged schools in the Umgungundlovu District in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Due to inequality and discrimination under the apartheid system, these teachers come from schools which were previously marginalised; however, each school is unique in its own context.

3.3 Problem Statement

The purpose of the current study was to explore teachers" experiences of their professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning and how these experiences influence learner support.

The Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project was selected as a case study because, unlike other inclusive education professional development strategies, it is a teacher initiated model based on respect for the capacity and local knowledge of teachers as experts on their situation and the belief that people are able to generate their own solutions to problems.

3.4 Research Design

This research study was a case study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) of teachers" professional development experiences in identifying and addressing barriers to learning in the

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Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project. A qualitative research approach was employed in order to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of teachers" professional development experiences.

According to Gonzales, Brown and Slate (2008, p. 3), "Qualitative research provides an in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, non-observable as well as observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviours and these are well served by naturalistic enquiry". This approach was appropriate as the study explored teachers" experiences.

A research design is a plan for how one is going to execute research. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 126), "Decisions here include addressing such questions as specific purposes of the research; research questions; research focus; main methodology; validity and reliability; data required; sampling; documentary sources; data gathering and who will undertake the research". A qualitative research design was selected to explore teachers" experiences of professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning and investigate how these experiences influence learner support. Such a design enables participants" voices to be heard and probes issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting behaviours and actions (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 219). The research design aimed to answer the following research questions:

Q1. What are teachers" experiences of professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning?

Q2. How do these experiences influence learner support?

3.5 Methodology

An interpretivist approach was used to solicit the participants" views (Creswell, 2003). According to Creswell (2003, p. 8), "The aim of the interpretivist researcher tends to rely upon the participant"s views of the situation being studied and recognises the impact on the research of their background experiences". Teachers" experiences would provide insight into whether they were able to identify and address barriers to learning. Eight teachers belonging to the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project were purposively sampled to be interviewed.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 220) citing Geertz (1973), research must include " thick descriptions of the contextualised behaviour; for descriptions to be „thick‟ requires inclusion not only of detailed observational data but data on meanings, participants‟ interpretations of situations and unobserved factors". It was therefore appropriate to select teachers who belonged to this particular group to ascertain common meanings of the study variables.

Reports, records and physical artefacts were collected to ensure triangulation of data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). According to Adelman, Kemmis and Jenkins (1980) cited by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.197), "Triangulation can be a useful technique where a researcher is engaged in a case study, a particular example of complex phenomena". Reports, records and physical artefacts were used as additional sources of data with in-depth interviews being used to capture language and behaviour.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical dilemmas should be avoided and the researcher should evaluate his/her conduct. Researchers are obliged to behave in a professional and responsible way. According to Zimbardo (1984) cited by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 87), "Ethics embody individual and communal codes of conduct based upon a set of explicit or implicit principles and which may be abstract and impersonal or concrete and personal. Ethics can be absolute and relative. When behaviour is guided by absolute ethical standards, a higher-order moral principle is invoked which does not vary with regard to the situation at hand. Such absolutist ethics permit no degree of freedom for ends to justify means or for any beneficial or positive outcomes to justify occasions where the principle is suspended, altered or diluted, i.e. there are no special or extenuating circumstances which can be considered as justifying a departure from, or modification to, the ethical standard". Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department. Eight gate-keepers‟ letters of permission to conduct the research were obtained from the school principals (Appendix

C). After the principals of the identified schools had agreed to the research, the researcher visited each school to give informed consent letters to participants.

According to the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Institute Guide to DHEW Policy (1971) cited by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 78), "Guidelines for reasonably informed consent must meet the six criteria : a fair explanation of the procedures to be followed and their purposes; a description of the attendant discomfort and risks ; a description of benefits; a disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures that might be advantageous to the participants; an offer to answer any enquiries concerning the procedures; an instruction that the person is free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time without prejudice to the participant".

The letters of consent contained details on the study and stated that participation was voluntary. The aims and objectives of the research were explained verbally and in writing so that prospective participants could make an informed decision on whether or not to participate. No-one was coerced to participate. The participants were assured that the information they provided would remain confidential and that their anonymity would be guaranteed by not using their names and using codes when analysing the data and interpreting the findings. In line with Kerlinger"s (1970) guidelines cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 559), the participants were made aware that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the research. The participants signed the consent forms to acknowledge that they agreed to participate.

3.7 Data Production

Data collection was conducted at the beginning of August 2014. To determine teachers" experiences of professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning, the qualitative data collection methods employed included reports and records from the archival records at the UKZN School of Psychology, and physical artefacts, e.g., photographs. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 529), "Photographs have a central place in educational research". They can be taken by the researcher or the researched or they can be acquired or viewed by the researcher (e.g., historical photographs).

To determine how teachers have experienced professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning and how these experiences influence learner support, in-depth interviews were conducted. The researcher constructed an interview guide with a list of issues to discuss (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). These interviews enabled the participants to relive their experiences.

Teachers were interviewed individually on different days. Each interview lasted an hour and the participants were asked to respond in the language that they were most comfortable with. The responses were given in English and IsiZulu. All the interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Copies of the transcripts were provided to participants to validate the information (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 103).

The project coordinator granted access to reports and artefacts. Through document analysis the researcher carefully examined relevant documents such as the Project"s annual reports and artefacts to understand the group and triangulate the data elicited through other methods. The information generated from these reports, documents and artefacts provided a broad perspective on the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project.

3.8 Validity and Trustworthiness

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) cited by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p.180), "Trustworthiness in a qualitative research is determined by four indicators - credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability and it is these four indicators that reflect validity and reliability in qualitative research". Transferability, dependability and confirmability were ensured by using a variety of data collection techniques, namely, in-depth interviews, reports and artefacts. To ensure credibility, the researcher handed copies of the transcripts of the interviews to the participants for congruence, validation and approval. The researcher extensively and thoroughly described the process adopted. An extensive and detailed record of processes was kept in order that other researchers might replicate these processes to determine the level of dependability.

The researcher triangulated methods and theories (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) to ensure confidence in the findings. This was achieved by using different data collection methods (a combination of in-depth interviews, document review and triangulating theories). According to Campbell and Friske (1959) cited by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 195), "Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating convergence between independent measures". Since the researcher was once a member of the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project, bias was addressed by means of member checks and inferences were drawn (Yin, 2009).

3.9 Generalisation

The study explored the professional development experiences of teachers in the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project, which required internal generalisation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 220) through purposeful sampling. The sample of teachers was relatively small and did not include teachers from different backgrounds. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to the whole population.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology employed for this study. A case study design was used to explore the professional development experiences of teachers in identifying and addressing barriers to learning in the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project. The research context was explained. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight participants and records and artefacts were also examined. The ethical considerations taken into account in conducting this study, data production, validity and trustworthiness issues and generalisation were also discussed in detail.

The following chapter presents and analyses the qualitative data and discusses and interprets the findings.

CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the research design and methodology employed for this study. This chapter presents and analyses the qualitative data and discusses and interprets the findings. The data analysis focused on teachers" professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning in the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project. The data was gathered by means of in-depth interviews and a review of documents and artefacts. The data was coded in line with the key research questions and the purpose of the study.

4.2 Data Analysis

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 537), "Qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data; in short, making sense of data in terms of participants" definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities". Qualitative data analysis was done by synthesizing the reports and audio-taped interviews and identifying patterns.

The researcher prepared the data for analysis by transferring the raw data of audiotapes and reports into clearly readable form (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The interviews were transcribed and data pages were coded to their sources. In the upper right-hand corner of each page of data, the researcher included a code for its source (Maykurt & Morehouse, 1994, p.127). The first participant that was interviewed was coded with A in the top right-hand corner of the page. All transcripts from the interviews were coded up to the final participant which was H. The researcher then coded the reports according to years when they were produced. The first report was coded Sizabantwana Report, 2004. All the data was photocopied and the next step was to identify chunks of units of meaning in the data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p.127).

The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse the data collected by means of in-depth interviews and the review of reports and artefacts. According to Neuman (1997, p.421), "A qualitative researcher analyses data by organising it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts, formulates conceptual definitions and examines the relationships among concepts".

Coding (Cohen, Manion &Morrison, 2011, p. 559) of each participant was done by labelling the participant in alphabetical order according to the dates and times of their interviews, e.g., the first participant was coded with A and the last participant was coded with H.

Data was analysed using the steps suggested by MacMillan and Schumacker (2001) to develop an organising system.

Step 1: The researcher read the first data set carefully and continued to read each set. Ideas were written down. This provided ideas about individual views on the larger phenomenon of interest.

Step 2: The researcher took any data set to begin with and noted topics as interviews were read and the artefacts were studied. Each topic was written in the margin of a copy of the data.

Step 3: The researcher made a list of topics on a separate sheet, with one column for each data set and then compared the topics for duplication and overlapping meaning. Lines were drawn between the columns to connect similar topics. The researcher clustered topics that were similar, returning to the data if necessary. For each cluster of topics, the most fitting name was stated from among the original topic labels or a new one was created that better captured the essence. The researcher then wrote a provisional description of each topic. A new list was made containing three columns. The first contained the major topics identified in the dataset; the second held unique topics that seemed important to the purpose of the research despite the rarity of their occurrence; and the third column contained the remaining topics.

Step 4: The researcher looked at the topics from different angles and identified the key themes that emerged. Documents which included reports and newspaper articles were analysed and recorded under the emerging themes and patterns.

4.3 Findings and interpretation

Qualitative data was generated from eight Sizabantwana Primary School Support Project members who teach in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases. The research findings emanating from the analysis of the in-depth interviews and reports are presented in terms of the following themes that emerged: professional development strategies; professional development activities; barriers to learning identified and addressed; and influence on learner support.

4.3.1 Professional development strategies

Data gathered from Sizabantwana Project reports revealed that the teachers were exposed to a variety of strategies to support an inclusive education system. This is in line with Walther-Thomas and Bownell (2001, p. 177) who argue that the need for research is not because there is some universal best practice to be discovered, but to increase the variety of strategies that schools can use to ensure that diverse needs are met.

External support has been provided by UKZN allocating funding for teachers belonging to Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project. These funds have been used to facilitate meetings of this group of teachers once a fortnight on Thursdays after school hours. At the start of the year, each school was given a health pack to start health centres using peer education programmes. These packs contained basins, sponges, ointments, towels, soap, sanitary towels, antiseptic liquid, combs and Vaseline. Teachers were trained to train learners on promoting health and hygiene (Sizabantwana Project Report, 2004). School development support is an effective strategy to ensure that schools and teachers embrace inclusive education. In this scenario, school development support was used to develop healthy classrooms and health-promoting schools.

For teachers to be fully functional in becoming inclusive teachers, they need to be cared for and supported by creating a platform to participate in activities related to their profession. Loreman, Deppeler and Harvey (2010, p. 3) argue that for teachers to be highly skilled and motivated to become successful, they need to be capacitated to their optimal ability. Oswald and Oswald

(2008, p.1040) contend that teachers need to be cared for and supported in caring and inclusive communities. The project co-ordinator shared information from artefacts belonging to the group. Opportunities were created for teachers to establish a branch of the Southern African Association for Learning and Educational Difficulties (SAALED). Members began attending national conferences with the help of funds allocated to the project. A women's retreat has been a relaxing experience for teachers in providing self-development and debriefing every year. Guest speakers were invited to discuss members' worth as teachers and as women (Project co-ordinator).

One of the realities of poverty is that children come to school hungry and therefore struggle to learn. Poverty is a major contributory factor to the breakdown of learning and lack of access to schools in that it results in problems such as child trafficking, malnutrition, HIV and AIDS and dysfunctional households. Stofile, Linden and Maarman (2011, p. 4) recommended that the Department of Education should take the issue of poverty into special consideration in planning educational services. Teachers were able to mitigate poverty by being trained on how to start vegetable gardens in their schools. A seed scientist from UKZN assisted schools to start vegetable gardens. This initiative supported learners in that the vegetables were used to supplement the school feeding scheme and any excess was sent home with children who were identified as particularly needy (Sizabantwana Report, 2011).

The Sizabantwana Project Report (2010) revealed that training programmes were developed by the teachers themselves. Strategic planning sessions were held at the beginning of each year where Sizabantwana members would indicate what they would like to focus on for the year. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that a socio-cultural model of professional development involves assisted performance by an expert. When teachers are aware of their context, they are able to acknowledge problems in their teaching context. The teachers identified needs based on the problems they were facing in their schools. The training activities were discussed and prioritised according to teachers' common concerns. The main areas identified were medical difficulties, child abuse, substance abuse and learning difficulties. Skills were developed and supported by means of collective discussions throughout the project.

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Teachers" frustration in trying to access services was relieved by establishing relationships with local initiatives. Through collaboration with hospitals" paediatric departments, a referral letter was developed to refer learners to nearby hospitals to access immediate health services. Teachers were trained on how to use this referral letter. They were shown how to provide a clear motivation for why the child should receive medical attention, including a description of the symptoms observed and previous attempts to address the problem. As a result of this collaboration, teachers were able to identify children with eyesight, hearing and physical disabilities and they were assisted in hospitals. Other infectious diseases were treated effectively. Ear infections, skin problems and mental challenges were managed in such a way that children were able to access previously unavailable resources (Sizabantwana Report, 2011).

The teachers have an on-going relationship with teachers from advantaged schools to enhance teaching and learning in their classrooms. They are able to access teaching and learning materials for teaching numeracy, literacy and life skills from the Open University in the United Kingdom. An experienced teacher in arts and culture assisted teachers with practical demonstrations of various artistic projects that they could easily initiate in their own classrooms using recycled material and everyday objects (Sizabantwana Report, 2012). These strategies assisted teachers to be able to mediate learning programmes in their classrooms.

Another strategy used in the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project, was inviting experts to share their expertise and resources with teachers. Experts made presentations on brain development, Epilepsy, auditory and visual problems, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyslexia, substance abuse, child trafficking, bereavement, and sexual and child abuse. An occupational therapist from the Department of Education"s Psychological Guidance and Special Education Services made a presentation on the services they offer and the role of School Based Support Teams (Sizabantwana Report, 2004).

A remedial therapist from a remedial unit addressed teachers on learning disabilities and learning difficulties. Teachers were equipped with techniques to identify and assist children with learning disabilities and difficulties (Sizabantwana Report, 2007). Sizabantwana members were able to

develop individual support plans and practice active teaching methods where children were involved in their own learning.

Experts in the field of brain development taught educators how the brain affects learning and educational development, and how to tell the difference between a learner who is right brain oriented from a learner who is left brain oriented in order to design teaching styles that are best suited to their brain orientation (Sizabantwana Report, 2012).

A team from an outside organisation shared their years of experience and knowledge about HIV and AIDS and working with orphans and young children who suffer from HIV and AIDS. Teachers gained insight into how to deal sensitively with learners who either suffer from HIV and AIDS or who have lost loved ones to the pandemic (Sizabantwana Report, 2012).

Experts provided teachers with guidelines on how to deal sensitively with abused children and the warning signs of sexual, physical or emotional abuse (Sizabantwana Report, 2012).

One of the principles of the socio-cultural learning theory is that difficult terminology and concepts should not be used when transmitting knowledge to the other. Tett, Hamilton and Hillier (2006, p.49) state that professional development should avoid using jargon that might confuse teachers and rather use their everyday experiences. This was evident when teachers listened in an unthreatening way to people with problems who shared their personal stories. Students who experienced barriers to learning provided much insight to teachers. A university student who suffers from Dyslexia shared his personal story and provided guidelines and advice to teachers on how to support learners who suffer from Dyslexia (Sizabantwana Report, 2012). A Psychology student shared his personal story and answered the teachers" questions on drug abuse. The teachers learnt how to identify danger signs and risky behaviour in order to prevent further drug abuse (Sizabantwana Report, 2012).

The Sizabantwana model of professional development thus allowed teachers to be exposed to a range of professional development strategies that boosted their confidence in offering workshops

to educate other teachers on various issues relating to inclusive education. They have been trained by various experts and organisations and have now become trainers in their schools.

According to Engelbrecht (2007) in Engelbrecht and Green (2007, p. 184), "The starting point in the establishment of collaborative partnerships should be the mutual recognition of expertise of all partners, together with the recognition and acceptance of diverse views and backgrounds". The interviews revealed that a strategic planning session was held at the beginning of each year where members indicated their priority development needs for the coming year. The group met every fortnight on a Thursday afternoon and during school holidays to be professionally developed through workshops, sharing and problem solving and collaborative partnerships. Collaborative partnerships are essential elements in human resource development for creating communities where information can be exchanged between teachers and experts on inclusive practices. Participant C commented:

"Okay when we start the year, the first meeting that we have, we have to come up with the topics that we feel are challenging us. We have to decide which one needs first attention then that is planning session; after doing that the coordinator will organise the expertise. Each and every meeting is worthwhile to be there you gain something, when you go to school you have something to tell to other teachers; thus this is helping the whole school in such a way that the grade teachers get information to help in their classrooms."

Shared problem solving was another common professional development strategy. Teachers stated that they were able to generate solutions to curriculum issues since curriculum workshops like Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements organised by the Department of Education last only a week. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2010, p, 10) provides direction on how teaching and learning need to be done and mandates teachers to use various curriculum differentiation strategies. Furthermore, the Guidelines to Respond to Learner Diversity (Department of Education, 2011, p. 2) recognise that the elements and procedures of curriculum differentiation are complicated and demanding on teachers. Opportunities for shared problem solving thus need to be created in order to promote effective teaching and learning and curriculum and assessment practices:

"Eh... mhlambe kwi (perhaps on) in service training ikakhulukazi (mainly) we have workshops but sometimes though i (a) workshop ebithatha mhlambe (that takes maybe) a week, like when we were workshopped in CAPS it just takes a week, we need thina njengothisha ukuthi sisizane (us as teachers to help each other). That is when Sizabantwana engena khona (fits in) because we know that we will sit down, share ideas Nokubona ukuthi (and in seeing that) you need classroom support you can even ask a teacher from another school ukuthi akusize (to assist you)" (Participant B).

"Mh the one that we use most is shared problem solving. Eh.... as we are a group of teachers, we are at the same profession. We are experiencing the same problems. We found that the problem that was giving you a headache and someone has tackled it and when you go back you apply what you have learnt and you find that it is working like wonders. Problem solving is superb for us and we do have collaboration in that we work together" (Participant C).

Both the project reports and participants" experiences confirmed that collaboration was an effective strategy. Teachers stated that they were able to work with organisations in their communities to address societal and intrinsic barriers. The socio-theory of learning theory argues for the sharing of power and decision making between teachers and learners with joint, productive activities. According to Tett, Hamilton and Hillier (2006, p.166), social learning can lead to a shift in relationships between tutors/facilitators and learners and provide opportunities for sharing power. In this particular group, social learning occurred because teachers joined the group to learn new things and to experience collaborative learning.

"In most cases we get NGOs, we get police to come to schools to address issues, the speech therapist they come to us, they help us with learners with speech problems. The Paeds, Paediatric doctors they come to us and they address all these things"(Participant B).

The hospital referral system was of great help. During 2012, teachers made four referrals and all were successful, with the teachers receiving reports from doctors and psychologists which were

of help to the learners. One of the learners attended a therapy session with the psychotherapist (Sizabantwana Report, 2012).

The programme helped the teachers to understand who the children they were teaching were. Experts conducted workshops to help them deal with issues that they did not understand (Sizabantwana Report, 2012).

4.3.2 Professional development activities

Most of the participants reported professional development activities through their experiences as group members. They indicated that they have been developed in remedial skills; learning difficulties; HIV and AIDS including ARV treatment; Epilepsy; Autism; bereavement training; auditory and visual problems; Dyslexia; child abuse; substance abuse; sexual and physical abuse and art therapy. The activities reported by participants concurred with the Sizabantwana Project reports for 2011 to 2012 that support was provided by professional experts like remedial therapists, medical doctors, speech therapists and psychologists to identify and address physical, learning and psychological barriers. These experiences are reflected in the participants" voices:

"Sizabantwana has helped us by inviting professionals who help us identify children"s problems. They invited teachers from Cl because they have remedial classes there. And also invited some of people that deal with children who emotional, physical and other problems that they encounter at home but everything has been through Sizabantwana"(Participant G).

"Again through Sizabantwana sikwazile uku (we were able to) identify learning difficulties Sikwazile uku (we were able to) offer usizo (help) like abantwana abane (children who have) poor eyesight, kukhona ukubona ukuthi lomntwana (there are instances where you can see that) maybe uyabona ukuthi akaboni kahle, hawu lomntwana akasiyo lento obuyicabanga (you can see that the child cannot see clearly, oh this child is not what you thought he or she is) emotional stress uyambona mhlambe (maybe you see that) they are sleepy in class mhlambe (maybe) they are being sexually abused uzobona mhlambe (maybe you will see)

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the way she walks uyabona ukuthi unenkinga ye...(you see that the child has a) hearing problem. So nalapho (with that we are able to identify a child who is not intelligent) it"sjust that he"sgot a barrier to learning. So sisizakala lapho ukuthi (we get help in that way) eyesight how to help them, emotional abuse, epilepsy, umaedla (if the child is on) chronic medication how to help labo bantwana (those children" (Participant A).

"Mh....mh...ukusiza abantwana abama (to be able to help children who are) slow learners Nokukwazi ukubona ukuthi lomntwana uyi (and to be able to identify that this child is a) slow learner, lona une (this one has) Autism, lona une (this one has) Dyslexia. Ngimsize kuleyo (to be able to help the child in that particular) area yakhe, azizwe(and feel) confident elapho (there) in that particular problem that she is facing"(Participant E).

"The workshop that we attended was to address issues whereby the learner is twelve years, She is taking pills not knowing that she is HIV positive. They tackle issues on how parents are going to disclose to learners that they are HIV positive, because most of the learners do not know that they are HIV positive, once they reach the age when they are fourteen to fifteen they become sexually active and they transmit the disease" (Participant C).

The ecosystems theory states that the child"s development is influenced by other systems around them. This has implications for teaching and learning, in that teachers should be aware of the causes of learning breakdown. According to Bronfenbrenner, the child"s development happens within four nested systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the chronosystem (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p. 51). Teachers" understanding of ecosystemic perspectives will help them to identify barriers so that they are able to support learners at all these levels.

4.3.3 Barriers to learning identified and addressed

It was found that, as a result of their exposure to various professional development strategies, the participants were able to identify and address barriers to learning in their context. Most of the teachers highlighted poverty as a barrier. According to the Education White Paper 6 (Department

of Education, 2001, p. 5), the common barriers to learning and development in South African society include general socio-economic factors (such as poverty); other factors that place learners at risk (such as violence; discrimination against people who are seen as „different"); inflexibility in the curriculum and in educator training so that the diversity of learning needs is not adequately addressed; lack of recognition of the important role parents can play in supporting the teaching/learning process; inadequate provision of support services to schools; language and communication blocks in the curriculum, the medium of instruction and in the teaching process; and disabilities and learning impairments that require specific support.

Most of the barriers identified in the White Paper were highlighted by teachers. They were aware of socio-economic factors and highlighted the level of poverty in the communities they served. HIV and AIDS-related issues mentioned by teachers included learners who were taking medication but were not aware that they were HIV positive. Many learners are orphans; some have foster parents and others live in child-headed households. Most were mourning lost family members and needed support to process their emotions.

Sexual abuse was also cited as one of the factors that put the child at risk of emotional problems. Again, teachers were capacitated on the processes to follow when reporting cases of sexual abuse:

"Ya, my school is situated, what I can say it is not a semi-rural but I can"teven describe it but the community around the school is poor community, most of the parents are illiterate, they don"twork, we see that when we call meetings during the day that everybody is attending. We could see that parents are not working, it also add to socio economic barriers because most of them they don"t have learning support material. In poverty we have been developed how to tackle issues where a child comes hungry or we see are taking these pills for illnesses that they have. Sizabantwana has encouraged us to start the soup kitchens in the morning. We ask our staff to contribute some money for just food, tin stuff whatever educators can bring"(Participant D).

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Another participant said:

"Too many families are child-headed households so they only rely on food that they get from community. So most of the learners come to school with empty stomachs, so they tend to be tired as early as nine o'clock in the morning , so they find it difficult for them to learn" (Participant E).

Several participants mentioned HIV and AIDS as a barrier where children are either infected or affected by the disease. They highlighted that many of their learners are orphans and some are taking anti-retrovirals:

"I can say on HIV and AIDS, because we are teaching in rural areas, many of our learners are orphans. Foster parents, they are living with foster parents. Some of our learners are taking ARVs. The workshop that we attended was to address the issues whereby the learner is twelve years, she is taking the pills not knowing that she is HIV positive. They tackle issues on how parents are going to disclose to learners that they are HIV positive because most of the learners do not know that they are HIV positive, once they reach the age when they are fourteen to fifteen, they become sexually active and they transmit the disease" (Participant C).

"When we talk of grieving children we are speaking about children that have lost their parents and stuff like that. So those children are grieving. We have been given expertise and also given books that we can read to learners that have lost their parents because the emotions of children that have lost their loved ones, especially parents eh...eh.... ba (they are)disturbed kakhulu (very much)" (Participant H).

Another barrier that emerged was abuse at home:

"So we are teaching children that don't think like children anymore, that have problems while you are teaching in front of them. They do not hear you, they are thinking about problems that they have at home. Some of them have not had food. We have children who have been raped repeatedly" (Participant G).

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"Eh... we had a court case. This child was raped; through the skill I used in my class, the child was able to write down a composition that she was raped and she needed assistance. And after that I have to call the child and asked her about this incident and I went through the correct channels to refer the child. At the end we know that the person who the child revealed the secret will stand in the court with the case of the child. I was very happy in the end that the perpetrator was arrested" (Participant B).

On literacy barriers, one participant said:

"Coming to educational issues, learners are having barriers like eh...learners who cannot differentiate letters. I"ve been given the, I know how to identify them ukuthi umbone lo uyehluleka ubona i(to be able to see that this one is struggling with) letter, let"s sayyou are writing IsiZulu, the learner is suppose to write the word "idada" but the learner will write " ubaba" which shows that the learner cannot differentiate between "d" and "b" so to address that I have to give the learner more activities, for example dotted letters which the learner will stipulate what I am trying to stress" (Participant C).

Another participant commented:

"Now that they are proposing that all schools will be inclusive, so it means that we will transfer learners that are very severe to the special schools. Then there should be a curriculum that is going to be suited for those children who cannot go to special schools. (Participant H).

4.3.4 Influence on learner support

Teachers" positive perceptions and beliefs regarding learner support flow from acknowledging barriers to learning as they occur at the different ecosystemic levels. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p.184) state that the norms and standards for educators (Department of Education, 2000a) highlight the multidimensional roles of teachers. These roles have a major influence on teachers" provision of learner support.

It would seem that identifying and addressing barriers to learning influenced learner support in schools, with many participants making reference to classroom practice in a number of situations, for example:

"I put them according to their abilities depending on activities that we are doing and what
I have experienced is that children that cannot write, they know the answers it"s justthat
they cannot write it down and I"ve tried giving them the same questions that the other
children have written, but asking them and they were able to answer me even though
they will not use English, but the fact that they gave me the answer that I needed"
(Participant G).

Participant G explained how she mediated learning through differentiating the curriculum by differentiating assessment. According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p. 184), the role of mediator is the first and foremost role of a teacher. The teacher needs to mediate the most effective learning possible taking into consideration differences in learners" abilities and their learning styles.

The role of supporter: community, citizenship and pastoral role (Department of Education, 2000a, p. 1) was evident in supporting a learner who had emotional problems due to the loss of both parents. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p.186) argue that the teacher needs to network with the community around the school to be able to make informed decisions when helping learners. The teacher achieved this by networking with an organisation that was tackling bereavement issues and was provided with a kit of books on dealing with loss to read to learners.

"I,,ve got a child in my class. This child lost both of her parents, father and mother.
She is also aggressive. She beats other children; she ducks from one corner to another in
class and her work is not up to standard, but I"mtrying through the kit that I"mtalking
about. I am telling you, I read to her these books. Now she is trying a bit to get better"
(Participant , H).

According to Donald, Lolwana and Lazarus (2002, p.186), the teacher must prevent and address the problems experienced by learners in the classroom by interacting with the community. This

means that teachers" ability to prevent the breakdown of learning can be developed through networking and collaborating with community stakeholders. It was evident that teachers were establishing networks with communities and NGOs. A participant said:

"In my school, I have taught teachers on how to adopt a learner to their home or buy
uniforms for the child. That is the best programme. Even in the community we have
taxi drivers who come to school, check for uniforms, learners who need uniforms and
they donate uniforms, even businessmen in our community will come and ask for maybe ten
learners to help them" (Participant B).

Another participant reflected how her experiences had influenced learner support. Teachers are expected to improve their skills and knowledge so that they are able to teach inclusively. According to the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001, p. 46), the key understanding required by all teachers is differentiating the curriculum, assessment and classroom methodologies so as to address the diverse learning and teaching requirements of all learners in South African classrooms. This requires that teachers are exposed to learning platforms where they can be assisted to develop new classroom methodologies. Participant C"s comments show that she was capacitated by a speech therapist to tailor make the content that was taught:

"I've got a learner who has a very problematic speech. When I talked to the parents
they said it took her long to talk. Then a speech therapist visited us and taught us that we
have to sit the learner down and read simple stories and let them tell a story. I have seen the
change and gradually she has improved and I am happy that I made the difference"
(Participant C).

Another participant commented on the training that they received as Sizabantwana members:
"Like in bereavement, through the training eh... I did the counselling with the learners and I
thought it was successful because I did from the first up to the end. I got the certificate and
my school was very happy for that. It went well, learners I could see their attitudes change
towards learning in general. When I talked to their class teachers, they said that they see

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improvement" (Participant D).

Participant B reflected on how they facilitated the sharing of resources and ideas:
"Yes again, we have, NGOs intervened on this. We have in service from bereavement
Centre. Ch... Advocacy Centre intervened. X hospital helped us with doctors. I know
we share problems as we gather as a group. We talk about our problems and it"s easy
because when the other teachers have encountered the problem, she will tell you how
to handle that problem. It becomes easy to share everything."(Participant B)

The same participant affirmed how these professional development experiences have influenced learner support:
"I can say that I am an expert. Now that I can identify the child from grade one, the child will
come and I know how to assess the child, to see the shape of the body and you target the child;
you try to support the child, you try to support the child and develop communication with parents
of the child" (Participant B).

4.3.5 Recommendations on further professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning

While this was not the focus of the study, the participants suggested that they need to be capacitated to support learners with severe disabilities and that they requrire professional development strategies that will enhance their ability to identify and address barriers to learning. his could be achieved by training teachers to use their skills in line with the Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes (Department of Basic Education, 2010) which offer valuable information on how to develop learning programmes for learners with severe disabilities. All the teachers that participated in the study cited the need for curriculum differentiation workshops. Their view was that teachers should engage in forums where they can share ideas.

The teachers also maintained that there has been a lack of professional development and that there is a need to involve as many teachers as possible in all schools. Another concern raised was the limited time provided through one week workshops. Stofile and Green (2007) cited in

Engelbrecht and Green (2007, p. 60) argued that a paradigm shift from an individual to a systems approach cannot occur by changing vocabulary in a single training session. It requires considerable time and is a developmental process that goes beyond workshops and other in-service training activities. This means that teachers need continuous classroom support in order to fully develop the attitudes, skills and values they need to effectively implement inclusive education.

As one participant stated:

"Workshop is there just for a week and they can"taddress all problems. But you can through
these forums which we form as teachers, collaborate as teachers in neighbouring schools
and help each other" (Participant A).

4.4 Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore teachers" experiences of their professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning. An important finding is that teachers belonging to the Sizabantwana Primary Teachers Support Project were able to identify and address some barriers to learning.

The participants" experiences highlight the socio-cultural theory. Teaching and learning should become meaningful by engaging in normal day-to-day activities. (Foreman, Minnick and Stone,1993). This means that teaching and learning activities and joint problem solving should focus on the authentic issues and problems encountered in participants" daily practice. This particular group of teachers engaged themselves on issues that were affecting teaching and learning. Both as individuals and as a group, they learnt to address learning difficulties; child abuse; poverty; learning disabilities and chronic illnesses.

The "community of practice" was reflected in participants" experiences, as they shared their problems and solved them using group members as resources. Shared problem solving resulted when individuals who have overcome learning challenges like Dyslexia and drug abuse told their stories and offering guidelines to address those challenges. Teachers from previously advantaged

schools capacitated the participants in subject-related activities like remediation of language and mathematics problems; arts and brain development. Furthermore, Sizabantwana members were able to go back to their schools and transmit what they had learnt by training their fellow teachers.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991) cited in Tett, Hamlton and Hillier (2006, p. 182), "We join a community and learn more about it and how to behave within it through legitimate peripheral participation. Thus, by participating in community activities, teachers are inclined to identify themselves as members of the group. This is achievable when members commit and believe in joining the group or community of people. Teachers were able to collaborate with community members to address issues of poverty.

The participants" reflections and Sizabantwana reports showed that establishing partnerships with doctors, speech therapists, NGOs and other organisations enabled the teachers to identify and address barriers to learning. Partnerships are the cornerstones of an inclusive school community (Sands et al., 2000).

The participants" experiences confirm that they were able to identify and address barriers to learning caused by socio-economic factors such as poverty. Other factors that place students at risk such as drug abuse were also identified. Disabilities and learning impairment were identified and referred for support, while HIV and AIDS was a major concern as it exacerbates poverty and results in dysfunctional families.

The participants" reflections on their teaching practice showed that they are aware that the child"s learning is influenced by other systems. Bronfenbrenner"s Ecological Systems Theory provides the theoretical framework for understanding why the general challenges of development cannot be separated from the more specific challenges of addressing social issues and barriers to learning (Donald et al., 2000, p. 57). The teachers were able to identify barriers to learning at all levels proposed in the ecosystems theory. They regarded learners from different viewpoints: in the family, amongst peers and in the school setting. They were able to understand that problems

at home will affect children at school. The participants highlighted microsystems where learners experience barriers such as poverty, orphan hood, child-headed households and drug abuse.

According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002, p. 51), "Microsystems are systems, such as the family, the school, and the peer group in which children are closely involved in continuous face-to-face interactions with other familiar people. This system should support the child"s feeling of belonging, love and support, and subsequently serve as a protective factor." Thus, the child is central to the levels of the ecosystem. A learning breakdown in any of the levels of the system has a ripple effect on the child. If the child has functional support structures within the school, family and peers, that child will have a safety net. However, the microsystem can also become a risk factor as is evident in, for example, unsupported child-headed households, drug abuse, family and school violence and homelessness (Landsberg et al., 2011). Thus, when the child comes from an unsupported family, school and peer background, a learning breakdown is likely.

At the level of mesosystems, the participants were able to involve community members like businessmen to donate uniforms for learners who needed them. The teachers used the resources available in the community to make learners feel that they were equal to other learners at the school.

Unemployment, inadequate health services, the curriculum and overcrowding in classes were also identified as barriers by the teachers who participated in this study. These are the systems within the exosystem level. The exosystem level includes other systems in which the child is not directly involved, but which may influence, or be influenced by the people who have proximal relationships with him or her in his or her microsystems (Donald et al., 2002, p.53). Teachers were able to collaborate (Engelbrecht in Engelbrecht & Green, 2007, p.184) with NGOs and experts to understand and solve problems.

Disabilities and learning impairments that required specific support were identified by participants. The barriers identified included speech problems, eyesight problems, intellectual impairment, learners with Dyslexia, learners who are autistic and those that experienced

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difficulty with language and mathematics. It is important to note that many of the health risks associated with poverty result in physical, cognitive, or sensory impairments that are likely to cause specific learning needs and barriers to learning (Donald et al., 2002, p. 285). The participants stated that they were able to address the identified barriers to learning by adopting strategies; providing technical support through collaboration with relevant organisations; and curriculum differentiation and assessment modification. This confirms the statement in the Education White Paper 6 that the most important way to address barriers arising from the curriculum is to make sure that the process of learning and teaching is sufficiently flexible to accommodate different learning needs and styles (Department of Education, 2001, p. 20).

In most cases, participants" experiences influenced learner support. In order to accept responsibility for facilitating learner support, they needed to fulfil the seven roles spelt out in the norms and standards for educators.

The participants provided learner support; for example, they collaborated and established networks with learners, parents, and the health, welfare and justice departments. They were able to identify barriers to learning and develop strategies to address them. Strategies that were used to develop teachers included support for school development; developing training programmes; partnership programmes; establishing relationships with local initiatives; involving experts; shared problem solving, and training the trainer models. Teachers were developed and went on to develop their schools, thus increasing the number of schools that implement inclusive policies and have access to centres that offer specialist services (Department of Basic Education, 2012, p. 27). They were able to identify and address learning difficulties; counsel bereaved learners; organise experts to support learners; plan preventative strategies on child abuse, drug abuse, malnutrition, HIV and AIDS; and share and solve problems.

These functions are set out in the Draft Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education (Department of Education, 2002). Each school should establish an Institutional-Level Support Team whose functions include: Identifying school needs and barriers to learning at learner, teacher, curriculum and school levels; developing strategies to address these needs and barriers to learning; focussing on the in-service training of teachers in the identification, assessment and

support of all learners, including those who experience barriers to learning; establishing networks that promote effective communication between learners, teachers and parents as well as with NGOs and the welfare, health and justice systems; facilitating the sharing of resources and encouraging teachers to share ideas; and planning preventative strategies (prevention of child abuse, drug abuse, malnutrition, HIV and AIDS etc.). This leads to the question of whether these teachers are members of the Institutional-Level Support Teams in their schools or whether such systems are in place and who should be members of such teams.

The findings of this study suggest that professional development strategies should focus on collaborative practices and shared problem solving. Professional development should take place at the right time, with the right people, doing the right thing.

4.5 Conclusion

The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data. The findings indicated that most participants were able to identify and address barriers to learning. The participants" voices, and reports and artefacts indicated that professional development activities covered learning, speech and hearing difficulties, bereavement training, Epilepsy, ADHD, Dyslexia, HIV and AIDS, curriculum differentiation, abuse, the effects of poverty and Autism.

Participants were exposed to various professional development strategies including training workshops, strategic planning, and collaboration and shared problem solving.

The teachers that participated in this study stated that their professional development experiences influenced learner support to the extent that they were able to identify barriers to learning at all levels and develop strategies to address them.

The following chapter presents conclusions, the limitations of the study and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Training teachers to be able to deliver on the mandates of the Education White Paper 6 has been a problem since the inception of this policy in 2001. Teachers and scholars have expressed concern about teachers" capacity to cater for different needs in inclusive classrooms (Loreman et al., 2010, p.7).

This study explored teachers" professional development experiences in identifying and addressing barriers to learning in the Sizabantwana Primary Schools Support Project. It was guided by the following research questions:
What are teachers" professional development experiences in identifying and addressing barriers to learning and how do these experiences influence learner support?

Chapter One set out the research problem, the rationale for the study, its objectives, critical questions and the research paradigm. It also presented a brief literature review and discussed the research design and methodology, data production, data analysis, validity and trustworthiness, ethical considerations and the study"s limitations.

Chapter Two reviewed the literature relevant to this study and discussed the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpinned it. Chapter Three presented the research design and methodology adopted, while Chapter Four presented an analysis of the qualitative data, and interpretation and discussion of the findings. This chapter presents the study"s conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

Using in-depth interviews, documents and artefacts, this study sought to determine the participants" professional development experiences in identifying and addressing barriers to learning and how these experiences influence learner support. The results of the study revealed

that this group of teachers was able to identify and address barriers to learning through the professional development strategies that were conducted.

5.2 Professional development strategies

The Department of Basic Education has noted that teachers are not able to identify and address barriers to learning (Schoeman, 2012). This has resulted in the department seeking new strategies to develop teachers. The community of knowledge formulated by Olson and Craig (2000) offers one possibility. Communities of knowledge will facilitate shared problem solving, thus ensuring learner support in classrooms. This approach was evident in that teachers were involved with various experts, organisations and institutions in sharing knowledge. They also generated their own solutions as they collaborated with other teachers. Another strategy was school development support where schools were provided with health packs and seeds to establish vegetable gardens.

The findings from the in-depth interviews, documents and artefacts indicated that the professional development strategies employed supported school development, by offering training programmes and train the trainer activities, and involving experts in shared problem solving, workshops and collaboration and partnerships. The benefits of collaborative partnerships include the enhanced psychological and physical wellbeing of learners, their parents and the wider school community, and improved professional skills among teachers and support professionals (Engelbrecht in Engelbrecht & Green, 2007, p.184). The community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) was evident as the teachers collaborated. Wenger (1998) suggested that, while communities are composed of diverse individuals, by collaborating, they influence one another‟s functioning within the community through mutual engagement, a sharing experience.

5.3 Professional development activities

The study found that teachers were trained in activities that would assist them to identify and address barriers to learning. According to the documents, in-depth interviews and information gathered using artefacts, teachers were capacitated through on-going workshops to develop skills in inclusive practices. Based on the needs of teachers and respect for the capacity of teachers and

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their local knowledge as community members, this enabled them to generate their own solutions by means of shared problem solving. Teachers collaborated with organisations, institutions and NGOs to access training to address issues affecting teaching and learning. Through partnerships, they were able to access teaching and learning materials and trained on promoting health, establishing vegetable gardens, addressing learning disabilities and learning difficulties and assisting children and families infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

5.4 Influence on learner support

The norms and standards state that in order for teachers to effectively facilitate learner support, they need to fulfil the seven roles spelled out: the teacher as mediator of learning; the teacher as interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials; the teacher as leader, administrator and manager; the teacher as assessor; the teacher as community member and pastoral caregiver; the teacher as student, researcher and lifelong learner; and the teacher as learning area/subject/discipline/ phase specialist.

It can be concluded that the participants were able to meet the expectations of the norms and standards because they provided learner support through collaboration and establishing networks with learners, parents and various stakeholders; identified barriers to learning and developed strategies to address these barriers; developed and planned preventative strategies, were leaders in their schools as agents of change; and became lifelong learners through professional development experiences within the Sizabantwana Project.

5.5 Implications for theory

According to the Draft Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education (2002, p 129), "Barriers to learning is a new theory of knowledge that must be imposed on any framework of thinking that relates to teaching and learning". This means that this theory should be acknowledged by all teachers and should be incorporated when they mediate their learning programmes and manage their classrooms. Structures, practices, assumptions, models, theories and attitudinal changes are preceded by philosophical shifts. Thus, certain changes need to take

place in relation to the conceptualisation of the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2002). Based on the findings, it is evident that the participants were capacitated on inclusive education practices to help them identify and address barriers to learning. In addition, teachers were able to offer their own workshops to educate their fellow teachers on inclusive practices. This is in line with goal 26 of Action Plan 2014 where the aim is to increase the number of schools that effectively implement an inclusive education policy and have access to centres that offer specialist services (Department of Basic Education, 2012, p. 27).

Teachers understood the relationships among the micro, meso and macro level systems. The socio-cultural theory of learning can be used in professional development as it views teaching and learning as social rather than individual activities. According to Tet, Hamilton and Hillier (2006, p. 12), "Learning programmes that are grounded in life situations can encourage participation by responding to issues that are derived from people"s own interest, knowledge, expertise and experience of the world. This is much more likely to encourage learning that has a value to those who use it".

5.6 Recommendations for professional development

The recommendations put forward by the participants may assist in facilitating teachers" professional development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning. They recommended that departmental officials hold discussions with teachers on a regular basis and include teachers when planning professional development activities. According to Ntombela (2011 p.13), "It is difficult to change teachers" thinking about their work if they do not have adequate opportunities to engage with the proposed innovation - individually and collaboratively". Teachers should be exposed to a wide range of opportunities in terms of their own personal development and as a group of people working together.

According to the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education 2001, p. 29), "The norms and standards for the education and training of educators, trainers and other development practitioners include competences in addressing barriers to learning and provide for the development of specialised competencies such as life skills, counselling and learning support".

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This was echoed by the participants who stated that they not only need to be empowered to identify barriers but require training on appropriate support strategies to address such barriers.

According to Ntombela (2011, p. 13), "Teachers" experiences and understanding of any policy, inclusive education included are determined by the nature of the professional development they are exposed to". Teacher development should be well planned, sustainable and on-going. The participants recommended that the Sizabantwana model of professional development be adopted by the Department of Education. The fact that, they were able to identify and address barriers to learning, suggests that this is a workable professional development strategy.

5.7 Limitations

Forty three schools were involved in the project, but only eight participants were purposively selected. Since the sample size was relatively small, it is difficult to generalise its findings to the broader population.

All the participants were primary school teachers, teaching in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases. It would have been interesting to explore the professional development experiences of teachers working in high schools.

Another limitation was that the researcher was once a member of the group which might have elicited more positive responses and caused bias.

5.8 Conclusion

Professional teacher development in identifying and addressing barriers to learning has been a challenge. This calls for the Department of Education to consider using alternate professional development strategies such as shared problem solving; collaboration; involving experts to access specialist services; school support; providing opportunities for teachers to attend conferences and involving teachers to determine their needs when developing training

programmes. The findings of this study suggest that professional development strategies should involve planning and consultation with teachers.

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