

ABSTRACT

In 2001 the Department of Education formulated policy that makes provision for learners with mild to moderate barriers to learning to be taught in mainstream primary schools. This policy became known as White Paper 6: Special needs education. The premise of this policy is to eventually convert all mainstream primary schools into full service schools that will cater for the full range of educational needs. The policy however created a dilemma for mainstream primary schools as the majority of them never received any training in special needs education. Most teachers therefore do not have the required knowledge and skills to adapt the national curriculum (NCS) and assessment methods so that it will accommodate the learning needs of all learners. Teachers thus experience the policy regulations as complex. This is a phenomenological study located within the interpretive research paradigm. Qualitative research methods namely phenomenological interviews were employed to gather data that could expound on and give an in-depth understanding of the experiences of teachers who are confronted with a diversity of educational needs. The investigation took place at a mainstream primary school that has a substantial history of catering to the educational needs of learners who experience problems with their learning and addressing physical disabilities such as hearing problems, autism and ADHD. The fact that the study focused only on one school served as a major limitation. The findings of the study can therefore not be generalized to other educational settings. WP6 is however national policy therefore the findings of the study could be valuable for gaining understanding of the intricacies of inclusive education. The data revealed that teachers are finding it difficult to implement inclusive education. This complexity is caused by a myriad of factors which impact negatively on the experiences of teachers such as high learner numbers, diversity of learning abilities and styles, a heavy workload, behavioural problems, language problems, challenges related to the curriculum and assessment and inefficient support services. However, despite lacking the prerequisite knowledge and skills for effective inclusive education, teachers tried their utmost to reach all the learners.

Key words: White Paper 6, inclusive education, mainstream schools, barriers, challenges.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter the researcher introduces and gives a broad background to the study in order to make the context of the study known. The research problem is outlined followed by the main research question and the sub questions. The objective with and the rationale for undertaking the study is explained. Inclusive education is a new concept for South African teachers therefore an explanation is given of why the study is significant for all role players in education. Key concepts are defined in order to elucidate the context in which they are used in the study. Some assumptions are made known and the study is delimited. An overview of each of the chapters is given followed by a summary of the actual chapter.

1.2 Background to the study

Mainstream teachers' professional training has always focused on catering to the educational needs of average to above average learners perceived to be 'normal', therefore they did not apply any differentiation strategies or different teaching methods in order to address the educational needs of learners who might have specific learning needs (Eloff and Kgwete 2007). Mainstream schools as organisations therefore never experienced any pressure to change in order to accommodate learners with diverse learning needs (Engelbrecht *et al* 2007).

After 1994 the new government initiated steps to break with the past. In a system that had been fragmented along racial lines and in which children who experienced physical, intellectual or emotional barriers to learning were more often than not excluded from the typical school and classroom, this challenge meant essentially one thing – building an inclusive education system (DOE 1997).

After a long process of policy development (which started in 1996), the National Department of Education published the policy framework on inclusive education in the form of Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training

System in 2001. This policy lays the foundation for the establishment of an inclusive education and training system for South Africa. The aim of the policy is to effectively address the diverse learning needs of all learners in mainstream educational settings, regardless of learning or physical barriers (DOE 2004).

In order to facilitate effective learning, teachers are now obligated to transform the National Curriculum Statement (NCS)¹ and the inclusive policy framework (White Paper 6) into one educational offering that takes into account the needs of all learners in the classroom and facilitate successful learning (Meijer *et al* 1995). The belief is that, as teaching and learning in general is about addressing the educational needs of each learner in a classroom, the principles of OBE should be well suited for inclusive education, which entails the offering of quality and relevant educational opportunities to all learners in mainstream classrooms (DOE 2001).

The inclusive policy thus effectively requires teachers to change their methods of delivering the curriculum which implies that they should change their classroom practice. Teachers are expected to create educational opportunities in an enabling environment for all learners and make it possible for learning to occur, especially for those who experience barriers to learning (DOE 2001).

Research conducted in the East London region, and elsewhere in the country reveal that teachers are finding the implementation of the inclusion policy challenging (Eloff and Kgwete 2007; Moore 2008). Mainstream teachers seem to be under the impression that they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to affect the major changes and adaptations to classroom practice which are needed to fully accommodate learners with special educational needs (Eloff and Kgwete 2007; Moore 2008; Pottas 2005). These feelings of inadequacy are exacerbated by the misconception that schools are going to be filled with learners with severe disabilities needing specialized skills and technological devices such as Braille machines (DOE 2001), which the majority of mainstream teachers know nothing about.

¹ The official curriculum implemented in all South African public schools from grade R to grade 12.

The fact that the education transformation process is having a huge impact on how teachers experience their profession is well researched (Eloff and Kgwete 2005; Engelbrecht *et al* 2007; Walton *et al* 2009; DOE 2010). The focus of this study is on the real experiences of mainstream primary school teachers in inclusive classrooms; striving to deal with the day-to-day practicalities and challenges of building an inclusive education system while coping with rapid and far-reaching curriculum reform, new assessment and language policies which are introduced concurrently with the inclusive education policy.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Inclusive education is national policy therefore all primary schools in the Eastern Cape have to implement its regulations (ECDOE 2007). Mainstream primary teachers are thus duty-bound to provide quality and relevant learning experiences to all learners in their care irrespective of their ability, disability, culture, race, gender, language and socio-economic status (DOE 2001).

The inclusive education policy requirements have created a dilemma for mainstream primary school teachers within the East London District because they are implemented without any focus on the empowerment of teachers in the form of in-service training. Teachers are also confronted with large numbers of learners with diverse educational needs, whereas they have to cope with little or no support in the classroom (Engelbrecht *et al* 2007; Eloff and Kgwete 2007; Nel 2011). Some of these learners need specialized teaching methods, an adapted curriculum and assessment criteria, greater teacher attention and all sorts of support systems (Donald *et al* 2006; Poon-McBrayer and John Lian 2002).

Teachers in mainstream primary schools are thus confronted with a problem because they now have to change their instructional methods and assessment practices in order to meet the diversity in educational needs without receiving any professional development.

1.4 Research questions

Teachers appear to be challenged by the implementation of inclusive education, therefore the major research question that this study will be guided by is, **“What are the experiences of mainstream primary school teachers who teach learners with special educational needs?”**

The following **sub-questions** will support the main question:

- What particular experiences encourage positive inclusive education?
- What are the teachers’ experiences in adapting the curriculum?
- What aspects of their experiences do teachers find challenging?
- What are the implications of the experiences of teachers for inclusive education policy in schools?

1.5 Research objective

The main objective of this study is to investigate the experiences of teachers who teach primary school learners (grades 4 to 7) with diverse educational needs in order to provide an account of the current situation in mainstream primary classrooms. The aim is not to propogate against inclusion but rather to enhance the existing knowledge base and understanding of inclusive education in South Africa, inform current education practice and in the process contribute to the development of an effective inclusive education policy.

1.6 Thesis statement

The following statement forms a fundamental basis for this research. “While a policy of inclusive education has been accepted in South Africa, putting it into practice requires many substantial changes and developments in society, in schools, and in support services” (Donald *et al* 2006).

The researcher maintains that if all learners are to have full access to the curriculum, the education system has to be able to respond to and accommodate different learning needs. Bringing about the necessary changes will be fraught with challenges. It is also going to entail the development of an integrated system which will provide a broad support network to teachers.

These are critical points, especially since there are a limited number of skilled personnel available in the country (Engelbrecht *et al* 2007). The researcher therefore contends that if mainstream primary school teachers are left without any training, knowledge and expertise in inclusive education practices and the necessary support structures are not put in place, they will find it difficult to effectively implement the inclusive education policy requirements.

1.7 Rationale

The aim of White Paper 6 is to ensure that educational provision for learners with special needs is largely integrated over time into what are currently considered to be ordinary or mainstream schools (DOE 2001). It however seems as if mainstream teachers are finding the inclusive policy requirements challenging. These challenges are consistently raised in studies across South Africa (DOE 2009; Eloff and Kgwete 2007; Hay *et al.* 2001; Moore 2008; Pottas 2005) and this illustrate the need for investigating how teachers experience inclusive classrooms where they are confronted with diverse learning needs.

1.8 Significance of the study

There is currently a strong focus by the Education Department and other stakeholders in education on the challenges faced by teachers in general and their need for professional development and support in the classroom.

The lived experiences of teachers, the main implementers of educational policy in classrooms, are the major focus of this study. Teachers are the ones who bear the responsibilities as learners with special educational needs are mainstreamed (Scruggs and Mastropieri 1996). By affording teachers the opportunity to share their experiences, the study should give them a platform to voice their concerns regarding inclusive education. The study could therefore reveal important information regarding the intricacies and challenges involved in teaching learners with special educational needs. The insight gained from the research could therefore be a resource for teachers who find themselves in similar situations.

After analyzing the findings of the study recommendations will be made that could contribute to the facilitation of successful inclusive education in schools in general. The study could also stimulate dialogue on the subject of inclusive education and thus make a contribution to the education transformation process currently taking place in South Africa. In this way it could also contribute to the emerging research base in inclusive education practice in the country.

1.9 Assumptions

As this is a qualitative study focusing on the experiences of primary school teachers in an inclusive educational setting, it could be assumed that by nature, people are rational beings, and this rationality would help them to be open and frank as they retell the stories about their experiences in inclusive classrooms (Brown *et al* 2008). Based on the diverse experiences of the respondents the study should therefore yield thick descriptions of the current situation in the classrooms.

It could also be assumed that a diverse spectrum of learners with special educational needs are being taught by teachers who, although qualified, have had little or no formal training in special educational needs. This lack of training could result in these teachers experiencing great difficulties in inclusive settings where they have to address diverse educational needs.

It could thus also be assumed that the teachers need further in-service training in order to develop their skills so that they can effectively address the educational needs of learners who experience barriers to learning.

Based on the possibility that the teachers are lacking the necessary skills and knowledge, it could be assumed that the education provision for learners with special needs is inadequate. This could be a further disadvantage for these learners and create even more educational barriers. It could also jeopardize the success of the vision to create inclusive schools and therefore the creation of an inclusive society where all human beings are valued and given the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

1.10 Delimitation of the study

This study focused on the experiences of ten teachers from a mainstream primary school in East London who teach learners with special educational needs. The school is an ex model c² - school that has LSEN status. This implies that the school is registered with the Eastern Cape Department of Education as one that addresses special educational needs including physical disabilities. The research participants comprised three teachers from the Foundation Phase (grades 1, 2 & 3), five from the Intermediate Phase (grades 4, 5 & 6) and two from the Senior Phase (grade 7). The study will therefore not focus on high schools or on any other type of school.

1.11 Definition of central concepts

Investigation: The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1982) defines an “investigation” as a systematic inquiry into a specific issue or phenomenon. In the context of this study it refers to the role of the researcher in explicating the main research problem and the sub-questions.

Experiences: This refers to the respondents’ practical interaction with learners with diverse educational needs. It stems from what the respondents do and observe and their resultant feelings, perceptions and needs (Adapted from The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1982).

Mainstream primary school: This refers to an educational institution where children receive the first stage of compulsory education, known as primary or elementary education. In South Africa it encompasses the offering of formal education to learners from grade R to grade 7 by implementing the National Curriculum (ELRC 2003).

² In 1992 all previously advantaged white schools were declared model c schools. These schools were given broad powers such as the collection of compulsory schoolfees.

Learners with special educational needs (LSEN): In the context of this study this term is applied broadly to include all learners who experience difficulties with their learning. The needs could be of a medical (cognitive and sensory), pedagogical, societal or systemic nature (DOE 2004).

Inclusive education: An education system that is responsive to the diverse needs of learners by giving them the opportunity to benefit and take part in all activities within mainstream classrooms (Engelbrecht *et al* 1999).

Specialized education: Refers to all forms of assistance rendered to learners who require additional educational assistance (Engelbrecht *et al* 2007).

Special schools: These schools cater for learners with special needs which are usually based on some disability. Educational practices at these schools are based on the medical model approach to disability (Engelbrecht *et al.* 1999).

Education Support Personnel: These are professionals responsible for providing support to learners and the education system and include service providers from a number of disciplines who have different kinds of knowledge and levels of skill. Personnel may include special needs teachers, sign language interpreters, social workers, doctors, nurses, psychologists, therapists, HIV/AIDS counselors, career counselors, nutritionists, child and youth workers, traditional healers and community workers (NCSNET/NCESS 1997).

Empowerment: The process of providing people with the opportunity and necessary resources to enable them to believe and feel that they understand their world and have the power to change it (Carl 2002).

1.12 Brief overview of the chapters

The study is structured in five chapters outlined as follows:

The foregoing chapter contains the introduction and overview of the study. It lays the groundwork for the research project and includes the statement of the problem, the research questions, the research objective, the thesis statement, the rationale for undertaking the study and the significance thereof, assumptions underlying the work, the delimitation of the study and the definition of central concepts. The chapter ends with a brief summary.

Chapter two contains the review of the literature which provides a more detailed context for the research project, i.e. it explores the phenomenon of inclusive education, factors related to it and what is currently known about the experiences of teachers in inclusive settings. The theories that underpin the research are expounded. The researcher identifies and reviews previously published works on the topic of inclusive education and critically engages with this body of knowledge. This provides background information to which the findings of the research may be related, and should validate support for recommendations emanating from the study. The chapter is concluded with a summary.

Chapter three gives an overview of the methodology and details the research design and the data gathering instrument. It is a qualitative study which falls within the interpretive paradigm. The phenomenological research design applied in the study is explained and justified. Research protocol is discussed in detail and the chapter ends with a brief summary.

Chapter four contains the presentation of the empirical data gathered through phenomenological interviews. The data is then analysed and interpreted. Throughout this process subconclusions are identified. The chapter ends with a summary of the main findings.

In chapter five certain conclusions which pertain to the research questions are arrived at, explicating the challenges involved in inclusive education. Based on the conclusions valuable recommendations are made regarding the enhancement of the experiences of teachers in inclusive settings.

1.13 Summary

This chapter laid the groundwork and provided a framework for the study. It made known the researcher's intentions and why conducting the study is worthwhile. A broad background of the topic is given and the problem statement contextualized to inform and to explain to readers what prompted an investigation into the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms. This also introduced the thesis of the study. The research questions and the sub questions which guided the study were stated and the objectives of the study clarified. The researcher is a teacher and thus has a vested interest in the outcome of the study. The aim is thus to give all stakeholders an indication of the challenges that teachers face in inclusive settings. The rationale for undertaking the study and the significance thereof was explained and the assumptions underlying the work made known. The study has been carefully delimited to point out exactly what the focus will be. Central concepts were defined and operationalized in order to avoid any misunderstandings. A brief overview of each chapter has been given in order to give the reader insight into the contents of each chapter and how the researcher went about conducting the study. The next chapter presents the conceptual framework and a review of the related literature.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the researcher introduced and gave a broad overview of the research. This chapter examines the relevant literature on inclusive education and focuses the attention on teachers and the complexities they encounter in addressing diverse educational needs in inclusive classrooms. Local as well as international sources are consulted in order to get a broad perspective of the issues involved in inclusive education.

The focus is first on the major theories that underpin the study. The main theories are Social Constructivism, Kurt Lewin's Field Theory and ecological systems theory. This provides a detailed theoretical framework which serves to contextualize the study. This is followed by a broad discussion of the development of inclusive education. The concept of inclusive education is defined and its implications for teachers discussed. International conventions such as the Salamanca Statement and the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, together with laws that hold significance for the role of the teacher in inclusive education, are reviewed.

This is followed by an exposition of the development of inclusive education in South Africa. A detailed analysis of White Paper 6, the guiding document for the implementation of inclusive education in South African schools is given. An attempt is made to tease out the complexities relating to the implementation of the inclusive policy. Two approaches, the Health Promoting School's concept and Whole School Development that could facilitate the movement towards more inclusive schools are suggested. This is followed by a discussion of guidelines that could counteract the challenges involved in inclusive education. The objectives and the efficacy of the support systems postulated in WP6 are juxtaposed with the challenges that teachers face in inclusive classrooms. In order to get a balanced perspective the chapter is concluded with a discussion on opposition to inclusion followed by a brief chapter summary.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This section solidly embed the study in the theoretical framework that underpins it and which made it possible to elucidate understanding of the phenomenon of inclusive education as experienced in inclusive classrooms by the respondents. This is a phenomenological study that is conceptualized in terms of Social Constructivism, Kurt Lewin's Field Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. A discussion of these theories ensues.

2.2.1 Social Constructivism

This is a phenomenological study that investigated the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The views shared by the teachers are supported by the Social Constructivist theory, strongly influenced by Vygotsky's (1978) work that states that we construct our world as a result of the social experiences we have had and shapes our reality as we see it (Leatherman 2007).

The underlying assumptions on which social constructivism is typically seen to be based are reality, knowledge, and learning (Pavlović 2011). Constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge (epistemology) that argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. The theory therefore suggests that knowledge is a human product constructed in a social and cultural context and is then appropriated by individuals (Bruning *et al* 1999; Cole 1991; Eggen & Kauchak 2004; Ernest 1999; Gredler 1997 as cited in Nilson 2010). Individuals therefore create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live in. According to social constructivists, the process of sharing individual perspectives, which is called *collaborative elaboration* (Meter & Stevens 2000 as cited in Nilson 2010), results in people constructing understanding together that wouldn't be possible alone (Greeno *et al* 1996 as cited in Nilson 2010).

This theory is therefore congruent with the interpretive paradigm which enables researchers to understand the world of human experience (Cohen *et al* 2000). Interpretivism assumes that knowledge of reality is gained through social constructions such as language and shared meanings (Cavana *et al* 2001), within

which this study is located. Naicker (2000) argues that the interpretive theorist attempts to understand reality. The researcher sought to gather data from teachers that could be interpreted in order to gain a better understanding of their experiences; he wanted to understand their lived reality. In order to achieve this phenomenological research design was adopted to describe the experiences as they are lived in phenomenological terms, i.e. to capture the "lived experience" of the respondents (Ross 1999).

Constructivism also links with the interpretive ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed by humans through their action and interaction (Andrade 2009; Mingers 2001). According to Berger and Luckmann (as cited in Pavlović 2011) social constructionism has its roots in phenomenology. As constructivists, all phenomenologists agree that there is not a single reality; each individual has his or her own reality. This is why the researcher interviewed the respondents individually in order to gain insight into their unique experiences of inclusive education.

A social constructivist viewpoint is that the instructor and the learners are equally involved in learning from each other (Holt and Willard as cited in Nilson 2010). In the case of this study phenomenological interviews were used to gather data, therefore the researcher and the respondents were equally involved in the research process. This is affirmed by Groenewald (2004) who argues that these types of interviews are reciprocal: both researcher and participant are engaged in the dialogue. The researcher thus became the vehicle by which the respondents' realities were revealed; thereby gaining deep insight (understanding) into the complex world of the lived experience from the point of view of those who live it, in other words the teachers.

According to constructivists, this mutual understanding is the product of the respondents' and the researchers' intersubjectivity (Shunk 2000; McMahon 1997 as cited in Shuford *et al* 2006). This holds true for this study because knowledge of the phenomenon of inclusive education was gained from the shared data of the respondents' experiences which was interpreted by the researcher in order to come to certain conclusions about the phenomenon of inclusive education.

The social construction of reality is an ongoing, dynamic process therefore it has the propensity to change (Shuford *et al* 2006). This means what "inclusive education" is and what it means could shift from one generation to the next. It is for this reason that the researcher maintains that the lived experiences; the social reality of teachers in inclusive classrooms, as well as their mindset towards inclusive education, could change if they were to receive adequate professional development and the necessary support systems were put in place.

2.2.2 Kurt Lewin's Field Theory

Another approach for conceptualizing the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms falls within Kurt Lewin's field theory. This theory emphasize that a person's behavior (B) can best be understood by studying the interaction between his/her personality (P) and environmental pressures (E) (Neill 2004). In simple terms this relates to the interaction between an individual's personal characteristics and the social situation (environment) in which he/she finds them in. The individuals would thus be the respondents of the study and the environment the school as an inclusive setting.

This research study's objective was to get insight into the experiences of teachers in mainstream inclusive classrooms. Their responses thus represented and revealed the dynamics of their interaction with their environment or social situation, namely inclusive classrooms. There is thus a definite correlation between Lewin's Field Theory and Constructivism, which argues that knowledge is a human product constructed in a social and cultural context and is then appropriated by individuals, such as the researcher, who was seeking to gain understanding (knowledge) of the respondents' experiences.

This theory can be used as an insight inventory asking participants to describe how they experience their world at work (Neill 2004). Applied to this study we could argue that the research could help the respondents to better understand their involvement in inclusive education, and by explicating the challenges that they face, understand how these factors impact on their mindset towards inclusive education, including their behaviour towards LSEN.

Kurt Lewin is regarded as the father of social psychology because of his pioneering work in the study of human behaviour (Van Wager 2008). He viewed the social environment as a dynamic field which impacted in an interactive way with human consciousness. This simply means that a person's psychological state is greatly influenced by ones surroundings. Adjust elements of the social environment and particular types of psychological experience predictably ensue. In turn, the person's psychological state influences the social field or milieu (Jones 2008).

This thinking holds relevance for this study as the South African education system is in a process of transformation. Inclusive education is a new concept for teachers therefore the environment in which they work has changed. They now have to accommodate learners with diverse educational needs in mainstream classrooms. This change is experienced as complex because of a myriad of factors such as lack of professional development, lack of appropriate support systems, diversity of educational needs, and heavy workloads, to name but a few (Walton *et al* 2009). The teachers seem to be overwhelmed by these challenges which have resulted in stress and feelings of frustration, despondency and helplessness (Potterton 2010).

In the field (or 'matrix') approach, Lewin believed that for change to take place, the total situation has to be taken into account. If only part of the situation is considered, a misrepresented picture is likely to develop (Jones 2008). This holds relevance for the development of an inclusive education system in South Africa in general but also at the local level, namely the school where this research took place. One could argue that the perceptions held by teachers, whether positive or negative, result from their conditions or their experiences in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, as mentioned in the thesis statement of this study, the researcher maintains that if the challenges that teachers face are not taken into account and reacted upon, the development of an effective inclusive education system could be jeopardized.

This brings us to another aspect of Lewin's theory that could be relevant to this study. Lewin was even better known for practical use of his theories in studying group dynamics and solving social problems. He sought to not only describe group life, but to investigate the conditions and forces which bring about change or resist change in groups. To do this he applied a principle that he termed force field

analysis. This principle provides a framework for looking at the factors (forces) that influence a situation. It looks at forces that are either driving movement toward a goal (helping forces) or blocking movement toward a goal (hindering forces) (Miner 2005). In the context of this study, this analysis could be applied to identify the factors that promote positive inclusive education as well as those that the respondents find challenging. In the process it could also assist the Department of Education to become aware of these 'forces' and devise strategies to improve the development and implementation of inclusive education in schools. The dynamics of such a strategy could be encapsulated by the ecological systems theory.

2.2.3 Ecological systems theory

Each day in the classroom presents a new challenge for teachers and as they grapple with the complex and multifaceted demands that face them, the enormity can, at times, feel overwhelming (Donald *et al* 2011). These scholars therefore suggest that for teachers to conceptualise the many levels in the schooling system that they have influence over, and that, in turn, influence their teaching, they should develop their understanding of the interaction of all the ecosystemic systems in education – the child, school, family, peer group, local community, wider community and the broad social system.

As this is a study focusing on gaining insight into the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms, it will be guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which defines complex "layers" of environment (society), each having an effect on the other. The Department of Education (2001) also propagates a systemic and developmental approach to understanding the intricacies of inclusive education.

Ecosystemic theory has demonstrated considerable potential as a comprehensive framework for organizing knowledge of human behaviour, thereby facilitating understanding of human experience in its varied contexts (Maddock 2000). The theory is also known as the ecosystemic perspective which integrates both ecological and systemic theories (Donald *et al* 2006). This paradigm is also referred to as the social-contextual or social-ecological model (Swart & Pettipher 2005) and aligns itself to the interpretive research paradigm of the study which is concerned with human interaction and understanding (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999).

The main concern of the ecosystemic theory is to show how individuals and groups at different levels of society are linked in dynamic, interdependent, interacting relationships or systems which are interdependent, operating much like an ecosystem (Donald *et al* 2006). According to Maddock (2000) there should be a total interdependence of all systems. In the context of this study these systems include, amongst others, the immediate home/family, the community, religion, the school, society, the Department of Education, Education Support Services, and other cultural forces (Davidoff & Lazarus 1997).

From the ecological and systemic perspectives the different levels of systems in the whole social context influence one another in a continuous process of dynamic balance, tension and interplay (Engelbrecht *et al* 2003). Each sub-system has the capacity to influence other sub-systems, therefore there is tension between power and control in ecosystems which reflect the need for ecosystemic functioning that produces higher order equilibrium to assure its survival (Maddock 2000). Changes or conflict in any one sub-system will ripple throughout other sub-systems (Paquette and Ryan 2001). This correlates with Kurt Lewin's Field Theory which argues that if elements of the social environment should be adjusted, particular types of psychological experiences will predictably ensue (Jones 2008).

However, when relationships within the whole system are in balance, the system can be sustained. This is referred to as 'ecological balance'. On the other hand, when there is a major discord or disturbance, the relationships and interdependence may become so distorted that recovery as a whole is threatened (Donald *et al* 2006; Maddock 2000).

This change effect could be applied to the South African education system which is in a process of being transformed into an inclusive education system. The researcher maintains that inclusive education is a social phenomenon; therefore the inclusive education system is going to have to be developed as an integrated interdependent system where different spheres in society collaborate to ensure its success, hence the ecosystemic perspective (Davidoff & Lazarus 1997). Teachers play a significant role in this equation; they form a crucial sub-system within a

‘macrocosm’ (the education system) because they are the ‘primary consumers’ of policy; they form the basis of the education system and are responsible for realising the objectives of the inclusive education policy, White Paper 6 (DOE 2005a; Engelbrecht and Green 2007).

Analogous, ecological balance as it applies to this study could be explained as such. If the inclusive education system was effectively functioning, adequately resourced and fully supported by all sectors; especially if teachers were adequately prepared for inclusive education, there would have been ‘ecological balance’ and the inclusive education system would have functioned optimally. If however the systems are not functioning in “equilibrium”, as seems to be the case in the East London district, effective inclusive education could be compromised (DOE 2009).

2.3 Inclusive education

2.3.1 Conceptualizing inclusive education

Inclusive education is a response to a global social concern which grew out of an increased emphasis on human rights (Inclusion International 1998; Smith *et al* 2005; Stubbs 2008; Thomas and Vaughan 2004). It differs from previously held notions of ‘integration’ and ‘mainstreaming’, which tended to be concerned principally with disability and ‘special educational needs’ and implied learners changing or becoming ‘ready for’ or deserving of accommodation by the mainstream (Foreman 2008; Mitchell 2004; Thomas 2007).

In a South African context inclusion is about the promotion of quality education for all learners, in inclusive and supportive centers of learning (DOE 2001). Simply put, “Inclusive education is about the educational needs of all learners” (Slee 2001). Potterton (2003) defines this environment as one which respects the rights of all learners to fully participate in all activities of the school and models the characteristics of a fully democratic society by promoting the full personal and academic development of all learners irrespective of educational or physical barriers, age, race, gender, culture, religion, disability or HIV status.

In the context of this study, the term is broadly applied to refer to the educational needs of all learners, especially those who experience difficulty with their learning in mainstream classrooms. For the researcher, special educational needs are synonymous with learning needs. The nature of these needs could be physical, cognitive, academic, or behavioural (DOE 2001; Beattie *et al* 2006). Inclusive education should therefore as far as possible take place in the regular school (DOE 2005a; Foreman 2005; Stubbs 2008; Thomas and Vaughan 2004).

In South Africa's model of inclusive education special provision is made for learners who require more intensive and specialised support in special schools (Potterton 2003). This implies that there will be no 'dumping' of learners with severe disabilities in mainstream schools, as some people, including some of the respondents of this study, assume.

However, in order to realise the vision of inclusive learning environments the researcher maintains that it is critical for the teachers who are responsible to make it happen to be adequately empowered with the necessary skills and knowledge; otherwise the ideal will not succeed. This perspective is supported by most of the literature on inclusive education. Two international conventions that focused strongly on the empowerment of teachers is discussed next.

2.3.2 International Conventions

The movement towards inclusive education is informed by various historical events focusing on wider social concerns and human rights. These events focused strongly on the rights of LSEN to be educated in mainstream classrooms, but also on the provision of the necessary support to teachers to affect such an education. Following is a discussion of two of these international conventions that hold great significance for this study.

2.3.2.1 The Salamanca Statement

At the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand (UNESCO 1990) much emphasis was placed on inclusive education. It is at this conference where the idea of "Education for all by the year 2000" was adopted. This led to the

World Conference on Special Needs Education under the banner of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization held in Salamanca Spain in June 1994 where inclusive education was a key point of discussion (Ainscow 2000; Foreman 2008; Stubbs 2008).

At this conference a resolution was adopted which became known as the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education. The statement reflects the 'new thinking' in special needs education and promoted the concept of the fully inclusive school (Stubbs 2008). Inclusive education was endorsed and proclaimed as a policy by UNESCO and recognized by 92 countries (including South Africa) and 25 international organizations (Ainscow 2000; Foreman 2008).

One of the main resolutions of the Salamanca Statement, article 7, holds significance for this study. This article calls for the delivery of quality education to all through appropriate curricular, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resources and partnerships with communities. However, for this to be achieved, it calls for a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school (Stubbs 2008). This legalizes the call for adequate empowerment of teachers in order to implement inclusive education policy requirements effectively and sustain such a policy.

2.3.2.2 The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In 2006 the very significant Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities took place. This convention focused strongly on the empowerment of teachers. In terms of the delivery of quality education to LSEN it was resolved that:

- Appropriate measures, including facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication should be developed.
- The learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community should be facilitated.

- Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual
- In order to help ensure the realization of this right, governments shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.

The provision of these services to learners with special educational needs is hampered by the lack of training that teachers have received for implementing inclusive education; the lack of effectively functioning support services and the lack of an integrated approach to inclusive education. Signatories to the various international conventions are legally obliged to provide teachers with all the necessary support to effectively implement inclusive education.

2.4 Inclusive education policy development in South Africa

2.4.1 The work of the NCSNET / NCESS

The actual process of developing an inclusive education and training policy for South Africa began in October 1996 when the first Education Minister in democratic South Africa, Sibusiso Bengu, appointed the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) to investigate and make recommendations on how the South African education system could be made more inclusive in order to cater for the needs of all children, including those with diverse educational needs (DOE 1997).

The NCSNET / NCESS released its final report highlighting the challenges regarding inclusive education in South Africa in February 1998. In the report it was recommended that the education and training system should promote education for all and foster the development of inclusive and supportive centers of learning that

would enable all learners to participate actively in the education process (DOE 1997).

This report put strong emphasis on effective development programs for educators and support personnel and stated that other relevant human resources would also have to be provided. The report actually advised that the policy would fail without proper empowerment of teachers to implement inclusive education. This call was repeated in WP6 (DOE 2001) as well as in the National Policy Framework for teacher Education and Development in South Africa (DOE 2007).

2.4.2 White Paper 6: Special Needs Education

After analyzing the comment on Consultative Paper No.1 on Special Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DOE 1999) and the draft Education White Paper 5 Special Education; Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DOE 2000), the Department of Education made known its response to the challenge of special education in the form of White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System in 2001.

White Paper 6 (DOE 2001) is the guiding document for the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa. The Department's approach to inclusive education is geared to promote the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution (GCIS 2010). The vision of the policy is therefore to remedy past injustices and discriminations by promoting the principles of human rights, social justice, equity and equality. In order to realise this vision special education needs would form a crucial component of a non-racial and integrated education system (DOE 2001).

The policy purports a move away from the medical model which focuses on intrinsic barriers to a system that focuses more on extrinsic barriers such as the school, teachers, pedagogy, curriculum and other societal factors (DOE 2005; Engelbrecht and Green 2007).

The policy makes provision for mainstream schools (as far as possible), to accommodate learners with diverse educational needs and cater for their educational needs, but also for full service³ and special schools for learners with moderate to severe disabilities (Potterton 2003). South Africa is thus taking a broad approach to inclusive education, defining it as, “Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners” (DOE 2001; Mitchell 2004). This approach is supported by (Foreman 2008) who argues that inclusion is a concept that extends well beyond education to society itself. This implies that an integrated system of inclusive education has to be developed where all spheres of society are working together in the best interest of LSEN.

2.5 The rights of teachers in inclusive education

According to Martin (2005) regular teachers have certain rights in special education. He argues that teachers have the right to know everything educationally relevant to a child. If the key to serving the learner appropriately is teacher training, then the teacher has a right to receive any training deemed necessary. Children with disabilities have a right to be in regular classrooms. This right is balanced with the right of teachers to have the ability to teach such children.

Learners thus also have the right to receive any related services to improve the quality of their learning. If these services are not provided, it violates the rights of teachers, learners and parents. Teachers are not just viewed as subordinates; they are professionals with rights to ask for referrals, for evaluation and reevaluation, for meetings with parents, education officials, support specialists and any other entity involved with the education of the child.

Masondo (2010) also refers to rights of teachers which include amongst others:

- The right to take part in professional development activities as a recognized part of workload.

³ Mainstream schools that will be converted and equipped and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs among all learners.

- The right to teach in a well-resourced learning environment with physical conditions which contribute to a positive learning environment.
- The right to teach subjects that they have been trained to teach.
- The right to a manageable workload, and to refuse an unreasonable workload.

These rights make it evident that teachers' civil liberties are being violated by expecting them to teach learners with diverse educational needs and physical disabilities without giving them proper training. If doctors can be held liable for performing medical procedures without the necessary expertise, than surely teachers could be held liable for teaching children without the proper knowledge and skills. A broad network of support that aims to empower teachers in order to facilitate successful implementation of the inclusive education policy is postulated in WP6.

2.6 Support for teachers in inclusive settings

Various South African studies (Davidoff and Lazarus 1997; Eloff and Kgwete 2007; Moore 2008; Pottas 2005; Potterton 2010; Swart & Pettipher 2005; Walton *et al* 2009) indicate that teachers in inclusive classrooms are facing an increasingly demanding task and cannot accommodate all learners effectively without support. Nel (2011) argue that continuous support and assistance to teachers by others is a necessary condition for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Some of the challenges that teachers experience are viewed by educationists as crucial supports which should be provided in inclusive schools. These include professional development for teachers (Donald *et al* 2006; Davidoff and Lazarus 1997); reduced class sizes and manageable teaching loads (Walton *et al* 2009).

WP6 acknowledges the challenges that will emanate from the ideal to create inclusive schools. These challenges are mainly related to human and physical resources needed to sustain an inclusive education system (DOE 2001). Broad networks of support systems which are supposed to work as an integrated unit are postulated in WP6. However, if the findings of various South African studies on inclusive education (referred to above) are anything to go by, it seem as if the

functioning of these support structures is not up to standard. Following is a discussion of the objectives and efficacy of these support systems.

2.6.1 District-based Support Team (DBST)

The policy document makes considerable reference to a team of professionals that will function as the District-based Support Team (DBST). These teams will be at the centre of Education Support Services and should consist of a core of education support personell comprising staff from provincial district, regional and head offices and from special schools. Their main function is to provide a coordinated professional support service that draws on expertise in further and higher education and local communities, targeting special schools, full service schools and ordinary primary schools.

According to WP6 the DBST is supposed to build the capacity of schools to address severe learning difficulties and to accommodate a range of learning needs. To achieve this they have to help teachers with the development of good teaching strategies that will be of benefit to all learners by providing pre-service and in-service education and training to them.

The effective functioning of the DBST could prove to be crucial for the development of inclusive schools. However, a report by the Eastern Cape Department of Education (2009) found that Education Development Officers (EDO's) and other DBST officials lacked understanding of the policy provisions of White Paper 6, the nature of inclusive education, and the needs of learners who experience barriers to learning. They complicated matters for teachers as their expectations were often at odds with inclusive LSEN concessions and curriculum adaptation issues. There was also a lack of support and understanding of LSEN-related issues by other sections in the District and Provincial Department of Education.

These findings could indicate that district officials are uncertain about their role and/or lack the skills to perform it. This is affirmed by Magadla (2008) who argues that the department has serious difficulties implementing and managing the requisite educational programs, therefore it is crucial that it looks into ways of improving the

capacity of its personnel in order to ensure that service delivery benefits the children of the province and that their rights to education are not infringed upon.

2.6.2 Education Support Services (ESS)

WP6 states that Education Support Services (ESS) are to be strengthened by focusing on the development of competencies necessary for addressing severe learning difficulties and effectively reducing barriers to learning.

These support services will help schools with various aspects of organizational development; support teachers around all aspects of the curriculum, curriculum development, including support in particular subjects; direct learning support for learners who require it; psychosocial support for learners, teachers and parents; and medical support for learners who require it (DOE 1997; DOE 2001).

In a study conducted by Leatherman (2007) the availability of support services was a factor that teachers perceived as important in order to have a successful inclusive classrooms. The types of services considered beneficial are consultation with psychologists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and special educators (Foreman 2008; Stubbs 2008).

In terms of WP6 support services will mostly operate from outside the school as part of the DBST, which seems to be experiencing major challenges regarding service delivery. Several studies (Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Mitchell 2004; Walton *et al* 2009; Nel 2011; Torreno 2011) indicate that appropriate support from specialists is essential to making education possible for learners with special educational needs in the regular classroom. This support would enable teachers to focus more on educating children than being overly involved with other aspects of a child's special needs. The following table however illustrates how, within a period of 6 years, the availability of specialist personnel in the East London District has declined.

Table 1: Availability of support services

1996: East London only	2004: East London & Mdantsane	2005: East London & Mdantsane	2011: East London District: 350 schools
5 psychologists	1 psychologist	1 psychologist	2 psychologists
1 guidance counsellor	1 guidance counselor	2 guidance counselors	0
10 remedial staff	3 remedial staff	2 remedial staff	1 remedial specialist
7 speech therapists	3 speech therapists	1 speech therapist	0
0 HIV / AIDS staff	3 HIV / AIDS staff	3 HIV / AIDS staff	0
			1 LSEN & governance

Statistics from 1996 – 2005 sourced from Moore (2008)

2011 Statistics supplied by S. Govender (DBST member) (personal communication, October 14, 2011).

From these numbers one can ascertain that the East London District is hopelessly understaffed and in dire need of specialist staff to support the inclusive education system in the district. One could argue that it is nearly impossible to develop and support an effective inclusive education system with the 4 professionals who are available for the huge East London district which comprises 350 schools altogether. S. Govender (personal communication, October 14, 2011) mentioned that these four individuals, which include her, function as the DBST. Judging by the enormity of the task, the researcher argues if this situation is not remedied as a matter of urgency, teachers and LSEN will not receive the necessary support and will therefore always face challenges in inclusive classrooms.

2.6.3 The role of special schools

According to WP6 special schools will fulfill a very important role in supporting the development of an inclusive education system. It is envisaged that these schools, because of their expertise and resources, will become resource centers and support mainstream schools. It is taken for granted that special schools have specialized skills available among its staff and has developed learning materials to specifically assist learners with for example visual impairments. There may also be facilities for Braille available at the school.

It is envisaged that teachers at these schools, as part of their role in the District Support Team, could run a training workshop in their district for other educators on how to provide additional support in the classroom to for instance visually-impaired learners. The special school could produce learning materials in Braille and make them available through a lending system to other schools in the district. The school could also set up a 'helpline' for educators or parents to telephone in with queries (DOE 2001).

Davidoff and Lazarus (1997) assert that special schools should play a proactive role in the training and support of teachers, psychologists and other therapists. They further argue that the training of teachers should include the utilization of special schools for possible internships or practical experience. They also allude to a few strategies that may be valuable in the support of teachers in general by special school teachers. These include visits to special schools to observe and gain practical, hands on experience; peer coaching; activities such as co planning, study groups, problem solving and curriculum development; development of workshops and conferences and giving guidance to teacher support teams.

However, according to the respondents of this study, the special schools in the East London district did not fulfil any of these functions. A respondent whose child is attending a special school mentioned that the teachers at this school were also complaining about lack of professional development and therefore was not in a position to serve as resources to ordinary teachers. This state of affairs was corroborated by Govender, a member of the DBST (personal communication, October 14, 2011) who stated, "The teachers at special schools are also facing huge challenges. The support that they give to teachers is incidental - it is neither structured nor coordinated. The schools do not have enough resources to be resources".

2.6.4 Institutional Level Support Team (ILST)

White Paper 6 (DOE 2001) refers to a group of educators stationed at schools who are expected to establish a committee referred to as the Institutional Level Support Team (ILST). The main purpose of this committee is to support the teaching and learning process in the implementation of an inclusive education system (DOE 2005a).

The ILST will have to inform all stakeholders when dealing with learners with special educational needs. This includes playing a role in the admissions process, assigning learners to suitable classes and informing the DBST that the learner will require the relevant support. In addition, the ILST must evaluate and monitor the progress of the learners. This team is considered the first port of call when barriers to learning are encountered. It is supposed to look at ways of minimizing barriers to learning within the school and to develop strategies to meet the needs of those learners who have been identified by the class teacher as experiencing barriers to learning.

The idea is that district support teams will provide the full range of education support services, such as professional development in curriculum and assessment, to the ILST. This support, as well as support from the community, is viewed as crucial for the effective functioning of school-based support groups (Engelbrecht and Green 2007).

The great challenges experienced by ILST's are exposed in a report on the status of inclusive education compiled by the Psycho Social Section of the East London District (DOE 2009). The report states that there is lack of buy-in and lack of cooperation from colleagues with regards to the development of ILST's because they regard it as extra work. This resulted in difficulty motivating fellow educators in implementing practical lessons for LSEN. ILST coordinators were also pressurized to handle all administration and referrals. The dual role of the ILST coordinator as actual teacher versus coordination led to further stress. Principals and Education Development Officers (EDO's) did not play a supportive role and lack of direction from them made the implementation of LSEN programs difficult.

Walton *et al* (2009) points to the fact that in most independent schools in South Africa the functions of the ILST coordinator are performed by a qualified special needs coordinator. This person is trained in some aspect of learning support; either a special needs teacher, or even a psychologist or other therapist. This person is supported by other teachers, usually qualified remedial teachers. In light hereof the researcher argues that it is unfair to expect ordinary teachers to perform specialized functions without the training and support necessary to perform such functions. The difference in significance is even evident in the job descriptions, i.e. special educational needs coordinator vs ILST coordinator.

2.6.5 The role of teacher aides

For classroom teachers, assistance in the classroom is a key element of any resource package to support the inclusion of LSEN (Foreman 2008). In light of the challenges teachers face in inclusive classrooms it could be argued that the availability of teacher aides in the classroom could go a long way towards successful inclusive education.

Teacher aides are probably the most widely used human resources available to support the day-to-day inclusion of students with additional needs (Foreman 2008). They play a significant role when collaborating with class teachers to deliver teaching and learning to learners with special needs in regular classrooms (Walton *et al* 2009).

Their roles are diverse, ranging from providing assistance in academic subjects, teaching functional life skills, assist with the teaching of vocational skills in community settings, collect and manage data, support learners with challenging behaviours, facilitate interaction with peers, provide personal and intimate care, engage in clerical tasks and prepare teaching/learning materials (Giangreco *et al* 2005).

When teachers and teacher-aides develop good working relationships, they share information and learn new skills together and provide learning for all learners, including those with special needs. A study by Nalder (2000) found that when primary school teachers worked collaboratively with their teacher aides marked

improvements were made in reading skills for learners with reading difficulties. A study conducted in the UK by the schools inspectorate identified real benefits when teacher assistants provide sufficient educational support to both the teachers and learners with special needs. It was found that the majority of teachers in primary schools value assistants' support highly and appreciate the benefits of having another adult in the classroom. These classroom assistants were improving the quality of pupils' learning because they were now spending more time helping children with literacy and numeracy (Ofsted 2010).

A negative aspect is that several studies indicate that most teacher aides have not received proper training in the field of special education to assist learners with different educational needs and therefore lacked the prerequisite knowledge and skills to provide effective assistance to teachers in the classroom (Florian 2008; MacArthur *et al* 2005; Norwich and Lewis 2005; Wallace *et al* 2006).

In America teacher aides must have a high school diploma or some college degree which includes related coursework in child development. All teacher assistants receive on-the-job training to learn and understand the class materials and instructional methods used by the teacher. Teacher assistants must also know how to operate audiovisual equipment, keep records, and prepare instructional materials, as well as have adequate computer skills (US Bureau of Labor 2010).

In Britain, the Department of Education and Skills, together with teacher unions and other bodies, are now working together to raise the profile of teaching assistants by increasing their numbers and improving their opportunities for training and career development (Ofsted 2008). The South African government is also realising the importance of teaching assistants in the classroom and has earmarked funds for their employment as well as for their professional training where they do exist (DOE 2007).

2.6.6 The role of parents

Much research has been conducted about the significance of parental involvement in education. The research overwhelmingly shows that if parents are actively involved in the education of their children, it does not only positively affect learner achievement, but also contributes to better quality education (Beattie *et al* 2006; Rodriguez 2005; Thurston 2011). Bronfenbrenner (as cited in Mitchell 2004) also believed that intervention strategies involving parents were more effective in improving children's academic performance than those not including parents.

Cummins (as cited in Rodriguez 2005) argue that when educators involve parents in their children's education they develop a sense of self efficacy that communicates itself to their children resulting in positive academic consequences. Mitchell (2004) opines that where inclusion is common practice and mainstream schools offer services to LSEN, parents develop positive attitudes towards inclusion. The involvement of parents of children with or without disabilities is thus a significant factor that could contribute to the development of effective inclusive education programs (Donald *et al* 2011).

The researcher supports the notion that parents have an important role to play as equal partners in an effort to effect quality inclusive education. Parents are the first educators of all young children (Rodriguez 2005). They know more about their children than any other individual and this information could be helpful to teachers and the school (Beattie *et al* 2006). Parents also have expert knowledge that could allow teachers to draw accurate and appropriate conclusions about their educational needs (Rose and Grosvenor 2001).

Parents also play a central role in their children's developmental and educational activities and can therefore offer insight into the child's abilities and needs (Mitchell 2004). In a study by Swart and Pettipher (2005) all the participants stressed the role of the parent community at the school and the educators' relationships with the parents of children with disabilities.

Many teachers do see parents as a valuable resource while others prefer them not to volunteer to assist in the classroom (Foreman 2008; Stubbs 2008). In a study conducted by Eloff *et al* (2000) teachers actually indicated that they found the lack of contact with parents stressful. In light of this it could be expected that parents in the classroom would be the least stressful issue for teachers during inclusion. Teachers also indicated a real need to work as partners with parents to the best interest of the learner.

Parents can also play a role by scrutinizing the impact of system-level factors, including administrative and organisational variables, curricula, adequately trained administrators, teachers and related personnel, and the availability of special education and related services on their children's education and development (Florian 2008). South African parents could be unaware of the important role they could play in ensuring (demanding) that the teachers who teach their children are qualified and that the necessary support systems are put in place to support teachers in order to ensure quality education for their children. If they were to insist on these services they could help facilitate the experiences of teachers and the development of inclusive education as a whole. The literature thus proves that it could well be in the best interest of teachers to involve parents as partners in education as there are many benefits in such a relationship.

Regardless of all the support systems available to sustain the inclusive education program, teachers experience inclusive education as complex (Donald *et al* 2011; Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Moore 2008; Stubbs 2008; Walton *et al* 2009). This complexity could be the consequence of a myriad of factors, starting with the perceptions of teachers themselves.

2.7 Challenges associated with inclusive education

It is evident that inclusive education has brought about many challenges that teachers have to contend with. Besides the extrinsic environmental challenges of heavy workloads, high learner numbers, diversity of educational needs, behavioural problems, stress and challenges related to the curriculum, the researcher maintains

that teachers will also have to face the intrinsic challenge of a paradigm shift and attitudinal change if their experiences in inclusive classrooms are to improve.

2.7.1 The need for a paradigm shift

The inclusive education policy (WP6) is built on the premise that all learners, regardless of their learning needs, will have access to quality education via the new National Curriculum (NCS) and Outcomes Based Education (OBE) which is a learner-centered and activity-based approach to teaching, learning and assessment (DOE 2004).

The belief is that, as teaching and learning in general is about addressing the educational needs of each learner in a classroom, the principles of OBE should be well suited for inclusive education, which entails the offering of quality and relevant educational opportunities to all learners in mainstream classrooms (DOE 2001).

Inclusive education is however a much more complex and problematic concept which requires major shifts from old to new educational paradigms (Feng 2008; Lazarus 2006; Naicker 2001; Potterton 2010). We have to accept that most teachers have had their methods and approaches formed at a time when schooling was divided into 'mainstream' and 'special sectors', each inhabiting its own world of professionalism and career development (Ainscow 2000; Evans 2007). Teachers therefore have established ways of teaching and assessing learners and are attached to their own thinking. This is why the fundamental changes that teachers are required to make in order to facilitate inclusive education are experienced as a crisis which is making additional demands on them. Many teachers feel unsure and threatened by inclusive education because they view it as something new; something they are not trained for and therefore not equipped for (Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Foreman 2008; Moore 2008; Nel 2011).

Since teachers are the people who make learning possible, their own attitudes, beliefs and feelings with regard to what is happening in the classroom is of crucial importance (Lazarus 2006). Attitudes are closely related to one's opinions and are based upon previous experiences (Nel 2011). Attitude is an important dynamic that

has long been acknowledged as one of the key factors influencing the effectiveness of inclusive education (Beattie *et al* 2006; Frost 2002; Nel 2011; Torreno 2011; Westwood as cited in Engelbrecht and Green 2007). Studies conducted by Engelbrecht & Forlin (1998) and Swart *et al* (2001) (as cited in Eloff and Kgwele 2007) indicate that the attitude of a teacher is a more important predictor of successful inclusion than the teachers' training.

Educators who aim to develop inclusive practice thus have to interrogate their own understanding of diversity, their assumptions and beliefs and be sensitive to cultural diversity (Vayrynen 2005) and develop an in-depth understanding of inclusion and its embedded values that differentiates it from mainstreaming and integration (Swart and Pettipher 2006).

They also need to reverse their established notions of teaching and learning (Engelbrecht and Green 2007). It could be argued that a fundamental reculturing of learning and teaching is needed if we are to see significant movement towards the development of more inclusive schools (Ainscow 2000). This is going to entail a shift from disabilist theories, assumptions, practices and models to a non-disabilist inclusive system of education in South Africa, which means there has to be changes that ensure theories and practices are consistent with the human rights discourse of inclusive education (Naicker 2001).

Paradigm shifts of this nature demand major transformation and deep level change of both organisations and individuals which is difficult to achieve without the necessary support (Swart and Pettipher 2006). The researcher therefore maintains that in order for this crucial paradigm shift to occur teachers' concerns and perceptions regarding lack of professional development and support structures that facilitate such change have to be taken seriously.

2.7.2 The need for a model of service integration

In most countries of the world, *including South Africa*, human resource support systems are fragmented, disconnected, non-cooperating and uncoordinated, each addressing a single facet of human need (italics mine) (Mitchell 2004). The researcher argues that this fragmentation contribute to the inefficiency of these

systems because problems are not addressed in a holistic manner. As such, these ineffective support systems have become part of the problem that confronts special education.

The literature on inclusive education (Foreman 2008; Henderson 2010; Lazarus 2006; Stubbs 2008; Thomas & Loxley 2007; Vayrynen 2005; Walton *et al* 2009) puts strong emphasis on collaboration between different sectors of the community to effect positive inclusive education.

The researcher is of the opinion that in order for schools and the Department of Education as a whole to transform itself to such an extent that teachers will feel comfortable with the implementation of inclusive education, an integrated system of service delivery will have to be established that will focus first of all on the empowerment of teachers to address diverse educational needs within a supportive environment. In order to succeed the education system will have to function like an ecosystem; following a holistic approach, developing health promoting schools through whole school development.

There is thus a need for various departments to work together in a focused way to address barriers to teaching and learning. By collaborating with other professionals and specialists, schools can provide a transdisciplinary approach that identifies appropriate educational strategies and intervention services for children with special needs (Rodriguez 2005). This sentiment is shared by Engelbrecht and Green (2007) by stating that collaboration is critical for the development of an inclusive schoolcommunity. Already in 1997 it was strongly suggested by the NCSNET/NCESS, the body that investigated the feasibility of inclusive education for South Africa, that an integrated approach should be followed if inclusive education is to succeed in the country (DOE 1997).

This ecosystemic approach to successful inclusive education is supported by a broad spectrum of local and international researchers (Beattie *et al* 2006; Cigman 2007; Donald *et al* 2011; Eloff & Kgwete 2007; Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Mitchell 2004; Smith *et al* 2005; Walton *et al* 2009) who argue that the successful

management of special education could well depend on various sectors of society, including parents and communities, schools and their Governing Bodies, teachers and teacher unions, specialists such as educational psychologists, school councilors, psychotherapists, and occupational therapists, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), government agencies such as the National and Provincial Departments of Education, the regional and district office, social services, health, youth services, social welfare services, public works, other education related institutions, and the private sector, collaborating to create an integrated, cooperative, inter-sectoral and well coordinated model of service provision for children with special educational needs.

Parents are struggling to access certain services because of uncoordinated planning and fragmented operation. This makes it obvious that intersectoral collaboration is a challenge (Lazarus 2006; Maqhina and Stone 2011; Riekert 2011). In light of the challenges facing support service delivery in the East London district (DOE 2009) the proposition of Engelbrecht and Green (2007) that a holistic, integrated approach to understanding the problems and challenges experienced at district and site level is necessary for finding comprehensive responses to these could well be significant. Struthers (as cited in Lazarus 2006) also emphasizes the need for district support service teams to be trained to work collaboratively with all relevant role players and stakeholders.

Considering the reality of limited human and material resources in the country, it would seem as if a collaborative model of service delivery could be beneficial to schools and teachers if they are to respond positively to learner diversity (Muthukrishna as cited in Engelbrecht and Green 2007). Giangreco (as cited in Mitchell 2004) opines that schools become more effective when teachers and other professionals use collaboration to facilitate effective learning. The collaboration promotes positive learning relationships which help to address the needs of LSEN; it creates responsive classrooms; it helps with problem solving which in turn helps to resolve conflicts, and the general interaction impact on the success of inclusive school programs (Beattie *et al* 2006; Mitchell 2004). In a study conducted by the NFER (2010) in England nearly 80% of respondents named collaboration with others

as one of the main factors that support them in maintaining and improving teaching quality. Such collaboration could also help children with special needs to gain confidence and learn and develop good social relationships within the learning environment (Smith *et al* 2005).

In the context of this study it could be argued that teachers, parents as well as the learners would benefit from an integrated inclusive education system. Teachers would be able to liaise with community resources such as hospitals and clinics and procure the necessary resources to address the unique educational needs of learners. In consultation with professionals teachers would address educational barriers and in the process gain valuable knowledge and skills which could be applied to the broader learner population. The teachers would have the necessary support systems available in the classroom as well as in the community to refer LSEN and their parents to for professional help. Successful collaboration between parents and teachers, recognized as a key indicator of a quality program for learners with disabilities as it helps to develop the curriculum, instruction and social networks (Florian 2008; Foreman 2008) could further contribute to mutual understanding and facilitate better educational opportunities for LSEN. The best interests of the learners should always be the focus of such collaborative interaction but it could also lighten the burden on teachers and thus facilitate positive experiences. The onus is therefore on all stakeholders to respect and value each other in order to create an integrated system of inclusive education looking out for the needs of all learners. In order to create such a system it is obvious that a concerted effort is needed to develop all human resources.

2.7.3 Human resource development

By enhancing the skills, the knowledge and the abilities of individuals, human resource development serves to improve the productivity of people in their areas of work (GCIS 2010). Human resource development could thus pose to be a critical factor for the establishment of an integrated system of service delivery to schools.

WP6 (DOE 2001) places huge emphasis on human resource development, especially teachers, for successful implementation of inclusive education, but fails to

stipulate how this is to be approached or achieved. Human resource utilization and development are crucial aspects of inclusive education and includes areas such as staff development, training and support for all role players (DOE 2009; Lazarus 2006; Walton *et al* 2009). It entails maximizing the use of support staff, parents, the learners themselves, community resources, education administrators and various education support service personnel to build a supportive and effective culture of teaching and learning (Viljoen 2001).

Inclusive studies carried out in South Africa (Eloff and Kgwete 2007; ELRC 2009; Peel 2005; Pottas 2005; Potterton 2010; Walton *et al* 2009) strongly suggest that many teachers do not have any formal qualifications in special needs education and therefore lack the necessary skills to work in inclusive settings. The lack of training for inclusion seems not only to be a South African problem or a problem experienced by other developing countries (Abosi 1996; Kisanji 1995; Nkabinde 1997). Various international studies (Meijer *et al* 1995; Meyers-Daub 2003; Mitchell 2004; Poon-McBrayer & John Lian 2002) reveal that the empowerment of teachers to implement inclusive education policy is deficient in many countries.

Some disabilities are difficult to manage and need teachers to be specially trained in order to teach these children, e.g. specialist support such as the use of hearing aides and Braille machines is not possible without specific training (West *et al* 2004; Peel 2005). Florian (2008) opines that teachers need to know the basics of various disabilities and the learning needs of children. Teachers responsible for heterogeneous classes must also be able to identify the individual needs of each child (Rodriguez 2005).

The researcher maintains that the professional development of other role players should also be focused on if the effective functioning of an integrated service delivery model is to be achieved. This includes providing capacity building opportunities to School Governing Bodies and SMT's so that they can optimally fulfil their governance functions and support the inclusive initiatives and to parents in order to facilitate their optimal involvement in the life of the school and to strengthen their support for the teachers and the learners.

Engelbrecht and Green (2007) opine that the entire education system needs to be transformed. They argue that there is a critical need to strengthen and transform existing resources and capacities within the Department of Education so that they can contribute to the development of an inclusive system. In order to achieve this all efforts should be focused on improving the capacity of education support personnel within district support services so that they can play a central role in supporting and assisting schools to meet educational challenges. The professional development of departmental officials such as the DBST should also receive attention (Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Lazarus 2006; Viljoen 2001). This is important as it was found that officials within the East London district office are not au fait with inclusive education policy requirements and curricular concessions allowed for LSEN (ECDOE 2009).

2.7.4 Resources and facilities

The importance of proper resourcing for inclusion is highlighted in the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UNESCO 2003). This call was repeated in the United Nations General Assembly on the 4th of March 1994 where it was resolved that education in mainstream schools presupposes the provision of interpreter and other appropriate services and that adequate accessibility and support services designed to meet the needs of persons with different disabilities should be provided (Engelbrecht and Green 2007).

Many researchers (Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Florian 2008; Foreman 2008; Mitchell 2004; Stubbs 2008; Walton *et al* 2009; Potterton 2010; Donald *et al* 2011) emphasize that teaching resources and materials as well as the school facilities, are part of the contributing factors in supporting inclusive practice. Stubbs (2008) maintains that 'education for all' will not work unless there is more grassroots participation and effective allocation of resources. Magadla (2008) assert that more resources such as classrooms, laboratories, learner and teacher support material and quality instruction needs to be directed to the Eastern Cape education sector in order to solve the problems experienced and ensure that children learn effectively. When a school is well equipped with basic teaching and learning resources, it makes teachers' jobs easier and the learning outcomes of the children will improve (Walton *et al* 2009).

In a study on the stressors of teachers in inclusive classrooms teachers indicated that locating age-appropriate educational resources for the learner's ability level and securing suitable resources for the classroom was stressful. The rest of the issues pertained to the services of occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, support teachers and issues dealing with teacher aides (Eloff *et al* 2000). In a study by Swart and Pettipher (2006) other needs that the participants identified focused on time for collaboration and individual support for learners, manageable class sizes, classroom assistants and the development of effective record keeping systems. The teachers struggled to find time for inclusion related activities amongst their already busy schedules and realised the importance of time as a resource.

Another factor that impacts on successful inclusive education is the use of assistive technology (Torreno 2011). Many learners who experience barriers to learning may need to rely on technology to facilitate access and participation in the general classroom. This technology is available in the form of assistive devices. Some of these resources are sophisticated and expensive computers and word processors that offer learners independence and the opportunity to enjoy maximum success. Learners may also benefit from using digital personal organisers, multi-media such as film clips and assistive devices such as microphones and Braille translators (Walton *et al* 2009). Even if these resources were available teachers would not be able to use them because they lack the required expertise.

2.7.5 High learner enrolment

Currently the teacher-learner ratio in primary schools is 1: 40 (Collett 2010). In some schools, especially in disadvantaged schools, the ratio can be as high as 1: 50 and even 1: 60 (Magadla 2008). Numbers as high as 130 grade ones in a classroom are still being recorded (Alston 2011). The researcher maintains that no teacher, no matter how committed, qualified and experienced, can provide a relevant, meaningful education in such overcrowded classrooms.

Realistically speaking, inclusive education is going to be a daunting task if the current learner numbers in classes are not reduced. It is a misguided belief that teachers will have the capacity to deal with inclusion when they are faced with such

diversity in overcrowded classrooms (Engelbrecht and Green 2007). This is confirmed by Collett (2010) who argues that high pupil-teacher ratios put significant pressure on teachers who are unable to address multiple barriers to learning and support faced by learners in trying to achieve a solid foundation for learning.

Mainstream educators have to contend with large class sizes, multi-grade teaching, limited educational resources, challenges related to the curriculum and assessment of learners, language diversity, learners with diverse educational needs and intellectual, behavioural and other socio-economic problems (Swart and Pettipher 1999). Evidence indicates that these factors hinder the achievement of meaningful inclusion in South Africa (Muthukrishna 2002).

In a study conducted by Eloff and Kgwete (2007) teachers at a pilot full service school expressed the need for more personnel because the school was understaffed which resulted in a workload that left them overly burdened and restricted them from implementing inclusive education regulations. The teachers indicated that a high number of learners in the classroom made it difficult for them to adequately teach in inclusive classrooms. In addition their Department Heads expected them to complete a specified volume of work within a given timeframe while simultaneously assisting students who are experiencing barriers to learning. They also experienced difficulties in giving individual attention to students with slower work tempos while managing their classrooms.

The policy also states that learners should be taught in the “least restrictive environment”. This will be challenging because under the present circumstances teachers will find it difficult to address individual learner needs. Learners who need it most will not have their special educational needs addressed thus perpetuating the educational barriers. Since their educational needs would not be met, it could also lead to the negative practice of socially isolating LSEN (Mitchell 2004).

It is evident that the problems experienced by teachers in classes with too many learners cannot be ignored. If teachers have to accommodate LSEN and those with mild disabilities, reducing numbers in classrooms is going to be a prerequisite for successful inclusive education in South Africa. A measure that could facilitate the process of reducing learner numbers is the “weighting” of learners.

Weighting is applied to alleviate the burden on mainstream teachers, e.g. a learner suffering from ADHD receives a weighting of 3 which means that one such learner is equivalent to 3 learners in a mainstream classroom (EMIS 2008). This implies that if there were 7 learners officially classified as suffering from ADHD in a mainstream or special school, these learners would account for 21 learners. Table 2 (below) indicates the list of weightings given to the various barriers to learning encountered in education as supplied by Education Management and Information Systems (EMIS) 2008.

Table 2: Description of weightings

Code	Description	Weight
1	Autistic	6
2	Severe behavioural disorder	5
4	Partially sighted	5
5	Cerebral palsied	4
6	Deaf	5
7	Hard of hearing	5
8	Specific learning disabled	3
9	Mildly mentally handicapped	2.7
12	Physically disabled	4
13	Epileptic	3
17	Juvenile offenders	3
18	Place of safety	3
20	Special class	2
22	Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)	3
24	gifted	3

(EMIS 2008)

It is evident that if 'weighting' should be applied, it would clearly impact on the number of learners in a class. It would reduce numbers which could make it easier for teachers to address the diversity of educational needs they are confronted with in inclusive classes.

2.7.6 Diversity of educational needs

In a regular classroom setting it is difficult enough to meet the educational needs of each individual student. In an inclusive classroom setting, this challenge is even greater, as the diversity of learning styles and needs is presented on a grander scale (Mae 2011). In most case the teachers have to address these diverse educational needs without having the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise, usually without any support and in resource poor environments (Collett 2010; Eloff and Kgwete 2007; Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Potterton 2010; Torreno 2011).

Lambe and Bones (2006) argue that the enrolment of a child with a disability requires considerable effort on the part of teachers as some learners will require individual programs and others various levels of personal assistance. Wilton (as cited in Foreman 2008) estimates that 7% of any school population will have moderate learning or behavioural difficulties. Other researchers estimate it to be as high as 10 to 15%. Teachers also have to deal with learners who are autistic, those suffering from ADHD, visual and hearing impairment, speech defects, those suffering from incontinence, epilepsy and mildly mentally impaired learners, to name but a few. It is very possible for a teacher to have learners who suffer from all of these learning barriers in a class, as was the case with one of the respondents of this study.

Prochnow *et al* (2000) argues that if the number of children with special needs in one class is more than five than the class teacher is under pressure to plan and prepare for each individual learner. Considering the fact that there could be more than five LSEN in a class, each having their own learning barrier, it would clearly be a daunting task for teachers to address the diversity of educational needs. It would be impossible for the teacher to make the necessary curricular and assessment modifications and the teacher would not have enough time to prepare work for the

learners with special educational needs as well as the other regular learners. Foreman (2008) opines that learner specific teaching techniques facilitate the best learning. This would be complicated in a class full of learners with diverse educational needs. We could thus conclude that having too many learners with diverse needs in a class is counterproductive for effective education as it also generates behavioural problems.

2.7.7 Behavioural problems

Student behavior and the demands of classroom management are a challenge for many teachers, especially new teachers who lack experience dealing with problem students (Brown 2009). Numerous studies (Eloff *et al* 2000; Eloff and Kgwele 2007; Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Forlin 2007; Mitchell 2004; Stubbs 2008; Torreno 2011; Walton *et al* 2009) have found that teachers have the least positive attitudes towards including students with behavior issues because they find them too difficult to work with.

The following statement by Hayward (2008) encapsulates the difficult conditions that prevail in most South African classrooms and schools.

Being a teacher in certain schools is an unforgettable experience...for the wrong reasons. Teachers get stabbed, punched, pushed and spat on. Some learners display disruptive and even violent behavior that makes it impossible for the teacher to run the classroom. Aside from the physical abuse, these teachers are also verbally abused. Learners speak disrespectfully. The learners themselves mete out the same treatment to one another. Learners fight so brutally that they need medical attention. Bullying and stealing are rampant.

It could be argued that inclusive education in such environments could be a recipe for disaster and a nightmare for teachers who have the responsibility to create a positive classroom climate that supports students with learning problems (Beattie *et al* 2006). Highly challenging and confronting behaviour can have a highly detrimental impact on teacher wellbeing. It is stressful, physically and emotionally exhausting, it

undermines confidence and teachers may doubt their competence as educators (Roffey 2011).

When confronted with disrespectful, unmotivated students the efficacy of teachers could be questioned (Moore 2011). It is further argued that the apathetic and unmanageable behavior of students undermines the morale of teachers who need every available resource to promote an academic atmosphere in the classroom so that students can learn. Roffey (2011) argues that effective learning and behavior are frequently two sides of the same coin. The situation is further complicated by the norm of 1:40 learners per class which results in many learners not receiving additional support and often adds to the number of learners displaying attention seeking behaviour which in turn puts stress on the behaviour management role of the teacher (Collett 2010).

If a teacher struggles to enforce positive discipline in big, overcrowded classrooms, and does not have or is not given the means to promote positive learning, there is very little chance of effective learning; drop-out through boredom or frustration could increase and the poor behaviour could set up a cycle of animosity between staff and students (Kallaway 2009).

The researcher is not claiming that all behavioural problems in schools have been brought about by inclusive education, but Foreman (2008) argues that teachers experience both frustration and stress from attempts to meet the behavioural needs of students in the classroom, particularly where students with additional needs and behavior problems are present. This is supported by Mae (2011) who contends that behavior issues can come up in an inclusive classroom setting.

Mae (2011) argues that disabilities such as autism, attention deficit disorder (ADD) or emotional disturbance (ED) are characterized by behavioral challenges. She opines that students who struggle with their behavior might be set off more easily in an inclusive classroom, as their non-disabled peers might not understand how to relate to them. On the other hand, typically developing students can also experience behavior problems. They might not understand their disabled peers and might lash

out with name-calling. They also might feel that they aren't getting as much attention as disabled students and feel that acting out will earn them the attention they desire.

The literature on inclusive education strongly suggests that LSEN are causing disciplinary problems for teachers. This factor, together with the high number of learners and diverse educational needs significantly contribute to the heavy workload that teachers have to contend with.

2.7.8 A heavy workload

Teaching children with special needs requires a lot of commitment (Ainscow 2000). Having LSEN in a regular classroom means additional work is appended onto teachers' existing workloads (Forlin 2007). It inevitably means there is more planning and preparation to meet the needs of a diverse range of abilities. In a study by Reynolds (as cited in Mitchell 2004) nearly 82% of general classroom teachers agreed that mainstreaming created additional work.

In a report by the Eastern Cape Department of Education (2009) teachers at full service schools expressed reservations about their ability to implement inclusive education, arguing that they did not have time and that LSEN put extra pressure on them and increased their workload. They perceived LSEN programs as being over and above their workload. Prochnow *et al* (2000) however states that not all children with special needs require additional work from the teachers. He further elaborates that the nature of the disability is a factor to consider and that different disability levels give different levels of exhaustion for teachers trying to meet learner's needs. This implies that preparing work for children with mild disabilities would be less exhausting than for children with moderate and severe learning difficulties.

The workload of South African teachers has received significant attention in the past few years. In the Intermediate Phase (grades 4, 5 & 6) and in the Senior Phase (grades 7, 8 & 9) learners have to offer nine subjects namely Languages (English and Afrikaans), Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Technology, Economic and Management Sciences, Arts and Culture, Life Orientation and Social Sciences which incorporate History and Geography (ELRC 2003).

In grades 4 and 5 teachers sometimes have classroom teaching and in grades 6 and 7 they have subject teaching. In most cases teachers who have classroom teaching have to teach 6 or 7 of the 9 subjects (See Appendix G). This implies that the teacher has to prepare Teacher Portfolios, Learning Programs, Assessment Programs and assessment tasks for each of these subjects. In accordance with inclusive policy teachers also have to adapt lessons to suit the diverse learning needs of learners. Having to execute these curricular and assessment adaptations and still have marking and extra curricular duties could prove to be an overwhelming task for any teacher.

Collett (2010) asserts that teachers feel angry, confused and helpless when faced with the task of getting through the required learning programs, meeting attainment targets, as well as having to provide individualized attention to learners who have a range of learning needs. This heavy workload has been a major contributor to the high stress levels and subsequent illness of teachers (Tromin and Woods 2001). According to the ELRC (2005) many teachers have left the profession because of the exorbitant workload, high enrolment figures and behavioral problems. A recent Mail and Guardian poll indicate that 55% of teachers intend leaving the profession due to workloads that have become unmanageable (MacFarlane 2012).

The National Department of Education, being cognizant of the challenges facing teachers in the classroom, in conjunction with the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) and other stakeholders, supported the call by teachers and initiated the Teacher Development Summit (ELRC 2009). The draft report does not propose giving up on the vision and intensions of the NCS, but aims to better align the current realities of the classroom with that vision. It was found that the planning requirements of teachers have become unnecessarily complicated and appear to make little contribution to the improvement of teaching and learning attainment. On the contrary, the report states that the administrative burden around assessment and planning appear to impact negatively on teaching and contact time. It was thus recommended that the workload of teachers with regard to administrative requirements and planning be reduced to allow for more teaching time. The panel recommended the simplification and greater specification of the curriculum, and

reducing the workload of teachers, in terms of curriculum overload, as well as administrative responsibilities.

In July 2010 the Review Committee confirmed that teachers experience curriculum and administrative overload. To provide short term relief on these matters the Department of Basic Education decided to reduce the number of projects that learners have to do and did away with learner assessments portfolios. The number of Learning Areas (subjects) in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6) would also be reduced from 8 to 6 (DOE 2010). In order to further alleviate the burden on teachers who work in particularly onerous conditions it was also recommended that a resolution passed in 2007 to employ teaching assistants / support teachers at schools be implemented (DOE 2010). This could prove to be a positive step since the employ of such teaching assistants made a huge difference to the workload of teachers in Britain (Ofsted 2010). It could also help to alleviate the frustration and stress that teachers encounter due to the challenges involved in inclusive education.

2.7.9 Stress

Cosgrove (2000) argues that stress is an emotional condition that builds in a person from having increasing or ongoing pressure from related factors. Burmeister (2011) opines that stress in the workplace is the impact of working under extreme pressure and can be regarded as an effort-reward imbalance. In an inclusive school context this could imply that teachers are doing everything in their power under very difficult conditions to facilitate effective education for the learners with very little reward.

The factors that impact on teachers' sense of efficacy are well researched (Forlin 2007; Mitchell 2004; Nel 2011; Roffey 2011; Torreno 2011). A study by Eloff *et al* (2000) identified four areas that teachers experienced as the most stressful, namely administrative issues, the behaviour of the learner, the teacher's perceived lack of self competence and problems with the parent of a learner with a disability. These scholars argue that all these stressors point to the lack of effective teacher preparation to meet the needs of diverse learners in an inclusive educational approach.

Research conducted by the British Health and Safety Executive in 2000 found teaching to be the most stressful profession, with 41.5% of teachers reporting to be "highly stressed" (Harrison 2011). In a national study conducted by the Teacher Well-being Project based in the Education Faculty of the University of the Western Cape teachers identified the following factors as having the highest impact on their well-being: workload 57%, large classes 55%, school atmosphere 55%, poor physical conditions 43%, learner discipline 42% and school safety 41% (Collett 2009). In Britain 96 per cent of teachers who responded to a Teacher Support Network poll said that teaching has had a negative effect on their health and wellbeing. Stress related symptoms described in the survey include increased alcohol consumption, lack of sleep, relationship problems, overeating, under eating, anxiety, exhaustion, low self-esteem and in some cases thoughts of suicide (Harrison 2011).

Teachers generally seem to be suffering from a lot of stress due to their working conditions. The difficulties that teachers face in the classroom, together with other systemic constraints, have pushed up their stress levels and demoralized them to a great extent (Swart and Pettipher 1999; Viljoen 2001). Engelbrecht and Green (2007) argue that stress is very common for teachers because they are constantly under considerable pressure to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of all their learners. Cosgrove (2000) assert that teachers usually suffer from various stress-related psychological problems such as anger, frustration, anxiety and depression. Harrison (2011) opines that stress-related illness is widespread and more likely to end a teacher's career than any other cause. These pressures also have the potential of contributing towards teacher "burnout" (Moore 2008). Maslach (as cited in Roffey 2011) define 'burnout' as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. High work stress has also been shown to be associated with a high risk of cardio vascular disease such as hypertension (Burmeister 2011).

Studies carried out in the Western Cape indicate that teachers do experience stress when including learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, but that appropriate and quality pre- and in-service programs and the necessary support

enables them to deal more effectively with learner diversity (Engelbrecht and Green 2007). This is supported by Collett (2010) who argues that the well-being of teachers could be supported if they knew how to work with learners who have barriers to learning.

A study by Williams & Gersch (2004) reported high degrees of stress among regular and special school teachers as a consequence of the poor attitudes of children with special needs towards completing their academic work, lack of time to spend with individual learners, modifying the curriculum, planning individual education plans, shortage of equipment and resources, the non-support of specialists to provide assistance for children with moderate and severe disabilities, and the parents' unwillingness to provide assistance to both teachers and learners.

Studies indicate that teaching learners with emotional and behavioral difficulties are likely to cause pressure for teachers (Mitchell 2004; Roffey 2011; Stubbs 2008; Walton *et al* 2009). This is usually due to a lack of learner discipline and behavioral issues. In the East London district the presence of over-age learners, sometimes as old as 27 years in high schools and as old as 17 in primary schools, pose a challenge for teachers. They are of concern as they do not benefit from the formal academic program and resort to behavioral and social problems such as criminal behavior, gangsterism, sexual misconduct, vandalism and intimidation of learners and educators (DOE 2009).

Research thus emphatically proves that teachers in South Africa (and in other countries) are working in severely stressful environments. The challenges that they face are very serious and could impact on their quality of life as well as on the quality of education in the country. If teachers are experiencing so many problems and are depressed and unhappy it is unlikely that they will adapt to change effectively, therefore they could find it difficult to be positive towards inclusive education. To further complicate matters teachers have to make adaptations to the curriculum and ensure that all learning needs in the classroom are accommodated.

2.8 Challenges related to the curriculum

2.8.1 Curricular modifications and accommodations

In South Africa the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) is the official curriculum to be implemented in schools. It provides the educational program to all learners in the class regardless of who they are. The inclusive education policy however requires teachers to adapt and modify teaching and learning resources to meet the needs of individual learners. It is envisioned that teachers will be innovative and appropriately differentiate their programs (DOE 2001).

The Department of Education assumed that the principles of the NCS would be congruent with those of inclusive education. It was thus taken for granted that ordinary mainstream teachers would be able to implement inclusive education without needing further training. It was assumed that the training that teachers got for OBE would enable them to cope with inclusive education, whereas this training was very insignificant and substandard (DoBE 2010; Potterton 2010). This could be the reason why Green (as cited in Engelbrecht *et al* 2003) argues that a total re-skilling of teachers is needed whereby they can expand on the knowledge they have of the National Curriculum Statement and Outcomes Based Education.

A report on the status of inclusive education in the East London district (ECDOE 2009) found that teachers experienced problems with the implementation of the NCS as well as with the assessment of learners. It also revealed widespread confusion at all levels of the education system regarding curriculum implementation and assessment. It was also found that there is a high level of confusion amongst teachers around what they are expected to do in the classroom, which compromised their confidence of teaching.

Various studies (Eloff *et al* 2000; Eloff & Kgwete 2007; Engelbrecht 2001; Moore 2008; Nel 2011; Peel 2005) emphasize the lack of effective preparation and training of teachers to accommodate the diverse educational barriers that learners might experience. Engelbrecht and Green (2007) argue that one of the major challenges confronting teachers is making the conceptual link between inclusive education and the NCS because they view the two as separate programs that need separate

training. This is significant because Beattie *et al* (2006) argues that accommodating the unique learning needs of students with disabilities and modifying the instructional and assessment material used in the general classroom setting are essential components of effective inclusive instruction. These modifications often result in significant changes to the content or performance expectations for an individual student (Edwards *et al* as cited in Beattie *et al* 2006).

Teachers are evidently finding it difficult to restructure the curriculum and make the necessary accommodations and modifications to their teaching and assessment methods to enable all learners to experience success. This dictates that teachers should be endowed with the necessary knowledge in the areas of teaching and learning skills, curriculum development and modification and classroom organization in order to provide effective inclusive programs (Beattie *et al* 2006).

Teachers are also pressurised by departmental officials to complete the syllabus and other departmental requirements and the paperwork that goes with it further complicates matters and add to teachers' stress (Venter 2007). These officials are unaware of the concessions allowed for LSEN and thus pressurise teachers to follow their instructions regarding the delivery of the curriculum and the assessment of learners (DOE 2009). The result is that teachers forge assessment results in order to allow learners to progress to the next grade although they have not mastered a level of competence (Motala 2011). Collett (2010) refers to this as "automatic progression". Such practices of teachers could however impact negatively on the overall quality of the education system.

The challenges that teachers experience with the implementation of the curriculum and other departmental requirements clearly frustrate them and should be seen in a very serious light. If teachers are unable to affect the required modifications that are aimed at improving the quality of education that LSEN receive it could be argued that inclusive education itself is a barrier to effective learning. The curricular challenges are further complicated by issues relating to the language of teaching and learning.

2.8.2 The language of learning and teaching (LOLT)

Language diversity has been identified as a major barrier to successful inclusion (Squire 2010). Stubbs (2008) argues that language barriers are one of the main causes of exclusion in education worldwide. In a study conducted by Walton *et al* (2009) language barriers were identified as the barriers to learning experienced by the highest average number of learners.

In South Africa teaching and learning takes place through a language which is not the first language of many learners. Robertson (2002) argues that not being taught in the mother tongue inevitably poses an enormous learning handicap for a learner. Dean (as cited in Nieman and Monyai 2006) argues that when learners are not being taught in their home language the communication and mediation process becomes very complex. This places these learners at a disadvantage and often leads to significant linguistic difficulties which contribute to learning breakdown (UNESCO 2001).

The language complexity could stem from the fact that learning at school is fundamentally dependent on vocabulary knowledge (spoken and written) as it underpins children's reading comprehension and overall academic success (Gray 2005). Crawford (2005) opines that teachers do not only deal with learners who have not yet learned to read, but also with learners who have not yet learned to speak. Salisbury (2005) affirms that some students come with little or no schooling and lack basic literacy skills in any language. Such students are at particular risk of failing to thrive in their new educational environment and will require focused instruction to develop both concepts and language skills.

Language problems do not only concern English as language of instruction. Potterton (2003) refers to a learner who started her schooling in Tshivenda and had no formal schooling in Setswana. She could hardly read nor write in the language. The language barrier affected the learner as well as the teacher as both parties were left frustrated. Roffey (2011) therefore argues that misbehaviour can be a consequence of limited language because the learners do not clearly understand what is being asked of them.

Research shows that children need to begin their education and learn basic literacy skills in their mother tongue. Most children who are made to learn subjects using their second language too soon subsequently experience far greater learning difficulties throughout their education (Stubbs 2008). A program promoting mother tongue instruction in Senegal found that children who used the mother tongue as the first language of learning achieved far better results and exam passes than those who were using French as their main language of instruction. More importantly, teaching methods were more active and student-centred, and children's participation was greater in classes that used mother tongue instruction (Stubbs 2008). This however poses a challenge for South Africa because in a briefing in parliament the Department of Basic Education acknowledged that they struggled to source teachers to teach in African languages in the Foundation Phase (DoBE 2010).

It is thus important for teachers to find ways to circumvent language problems and one possible solution is code switching⁴. However this in itself could be a challenge because most teachers at former model c schools do not speak any African languages. Alston (2011) argues that an English-speaking teacher who knows no isiXhosa confronted by a number of isiXhosa speaking children in her grade 1 class who have no knowledge of English has an impossible task.

It is evident that teachers could experience major difficulties in classrooms where they are confronted by learners with diverse educational needs and where the language of learning and teaching differs from the home language. Many misunderstandings could occur which could complicate the learning process and result in lack of interest and behavioural problems. It could thus have a negative impact on the teacher as well as on the learner whose education would be adversely affected. Language issues could thus serve as an impediment to successful inclusive education.

⁴ Switching from a foreign language, e.g. English, to the mother tongue, e.g. isiXhosa.

The many challenges that teachers generally encounter in inclusive classrooms could be the reason why many educationists question the efficacy and feasibility of inclusive education.

2.9 Opposition to inclusive education

Few issues in education generate more debate, confusion, or apprehension than the topic of inclusive education (Thompkins and Delaney 2008). Therefore, in order to fully understand the issues involved in inclusive education it is important to focus on literature that does not support inclusive education.

Despite the internationalization of the philosophy of inclusive education, for a range of historical, cultural, social and financial reasons, its implementation has been uneven across the world (Mitchell 2004). Cortiella (2009) maintains that inclusion is viewed by some as a practice that is philosophically attractive yet impractical. It has also been a particularly problematic concept in developing countries where resources are limited (Eleweke 1999; Engelbrecht and Green 2007).

WP6, the inclusive education policy document in South Africa, contends that the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and Outcomes Based Education (OBE) are congruent with inclusive education (DOE 2001). This statement is questioned by the many conflicting voices on the practicality of including learners with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms without equipping teachers with the necessary skills and resources. Educationists such as Cigman (2007); Clarke (2005); Kauffman (2005); Poon-McBrayer and John Lian (2002); Rayner and Ribbins (1999) question whether inclusive education is the best way to address the education of learners who have diverse educational needs because children with specific learning needs and disabilities are a significant challenge for all, and as a general rule, demand greater attention from teachers and other professionals who have specialized skills and knowledge.

The fact that the approach neglects to acknowledge that students with significant special educational needs require individualized instruction and or highly controlled environments has resulted in strong criticism (Cortiella 2009). Fuchs (as cited in

Mitchell 2004) challenges the view that the mainstream can incorporate students with disabilities when it has so many difficulties in accommodating existing student diversity. Low (as cited in Cigman 2007) argues that children with a visual impairment have specific difficulties that require specialized help and specific kinds of assistance such as instruction in Braille and mobility skills, the provision of materials in accessible formats and a high degree of specialist teaching support.

Deaf and blind learners, although there could be nothing cognitively wrong with them, require specialized teaching for which teachers have to receive specialized training. Teachers will also have to be trained in the handling of highly technologically advanced assistive devices (Mitchell 2004); *which they know nothing about* (italics mine). Research shows significant gains measured by performance tests of deaf children who attend schools for the deaf which are not found in deaf children who attend mainstream programs (Cohen as cited in Ross 2009). He thus contends that inclusion denies many deaf students the right to be educated in the least restrictive environment due to communication barriers that may impede their education. Jim Sinclair, an autistic man, states that there are concerns within the disability community that inclusion is not always the best option for every person with every disability (Cigman 2007).

Several educationists (Cortiella 2009; Crawford 2005; Ross 2009; Thompkins and Delaney 2008; Tomsho 2007) oppose inclusion because of the complexity and the challenges that such a system induces. Thompkins and Delaney (2008) argue that inclusive education is a very complex issue as it involves an "overhaul" of the entire educational system. This could be the reason why after many years of implementation inclusive education is still posing a challenge for many developed countries. Britain is now rethinking their inclusive education policy and other countries are now uncertain as to whether inclusion is an appropriate approach for all learners with special needs (Clarke 2005).

Warnock (as cited in Cigman 2007) is of the opinion that some children with special educational needs simply fail to get quality education in a mainstream school, and no adaptation of the school can turn it into an environment in which such children can learn. Mitchell (2008) argues that a consequence of inclusive education is

deterioration in the quality of lessons. He opines that by including children with special educational needs in regular classes, the quality of their education will deteriorate since in special schools they attend classes with fewer pupils; the teachers are better equipped with teaching aids and they have qualifications in special education. He expresses the concern that with increasing inclusive education there will be less successful students, both among children with special educational needs as well as regular learners.

The policy of inclusion however states that all students should be educated in general education classrooms, and that this policy should be implemented immediately with all students. It could be argued that such a policy differs markedly from the notion of least restrictive environment (LRE) as written in the educational policies of various countries. LRE mandates choosing the least restrictive place to educate a student in which he or she can receive an appropriate education. This means that a policy of full inclusion contrasts sharply with the longstanding practice of mainstreaming, where students with mild handicaps were gradually moved into general education classrooms once their academic deficits had been remediated (Crawford 2005).

There is widespread concern in America about the attitudes and capacity of teachers and school organizations to provide appropriate educational services in regular classrooms to those who are not typical mainstream students (Thompkins and Delaney 2008). These concerns are primarily focused on the following issues:

- teacher expertise to construct and deliver appropriate educational services to those with disabilities efficiently and effectively;
- teacher and school administrator attitudes toward working with students with disabilities;
- teacher expertise to deal with inappropriate behaviors;
- the potential lowering of quality of educational services to all students; and
- inadequate material, curricular, technological, and human resources.

Thompkins (2008) warns that before a school plunges headlong into a major restructuring effort such as inclusion, the above concerns must be adequately

addressed. This could be significant because some teachers and administrators have been less supportive of the practice, saying that they lack the training, resources and necessary supplies to adequately teach disabled students within their classrooms (Ross 2009; Tomsho 2007). Parents and organizations who are against inclusion in the USA have also expressed fear that teachers, who may already feel burdened, may not be given the support necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities in general education settings (Mitchell 2004).

Deficits in China's teacher education programs resulted in schools attaching a low priority to special and inclusive education (Feng 2008). In Italy, a country with a long history of inclusion, teachers welcomed integration but the fact that they were badly prepared for the integration of handicapped children and the limited training they received resulted in regular teachers often not knowing what to do with handicapped pupils (Meijer *et al* 1995). The same problems are experienced in countries such as Hong Kong (Poon-Mcbrayer and John Lian 2002) and in the United States of America (Beattie *et al* 2006; Mitchell 2004). Cortiella (2009) maintains that some school districts in America neglect to prepare general education staff for students with special needs, thus preventing any achievement.

Ross (2009) also argues that there are not enough teachers in regular classrooms to give each student with disabilities the instruction needed for potential understanding. This could have a negative impact on all learners as teachers are forced to spend more time helping a few students whereas the majority of the class receives less attention. The academic range within such a class would be too different to be properly taught by a single teacher.

Thomas and Loxley (2007) argues that although once hailed as a way to increase achievement while decreasing costs, full inclusion does not save money, reduce students' needs, or improve academic outcomes. A poll conducted by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in West Virginia revealed that 78% of respondents thought disabled students won't benefit from inclusion, whereas 87% said other students won't benefit either (Ross 2009).

Tomsho (2007) conducted a study on the experiences of parents who have children with learning problems. He asserts that many parents are joining the dissenters and are waging a battle to preserve older policies, demanding segregated teaching environments, including separate schools. Travis (as cited in Tomsho 2007) believes that mainstreaming can actually hinder the students it is intended to help. He argues that many parents are frustrated because they struggle to get services from their local school districts while others have seen their disabled children falter in integrated settings.

Parents of disabled students are also cautious about placing their children in an inclusion program because of fears that the children will be ridiculed by other students, or be unable to develop regular life skills in an academic classroom (Cortiella 2009). This is affirmed by Kaplowitz (as cited in Tomsho 2007), a special-education teacher and big supporter of mainstreaming until she had her son who has autism and is mildly retarded. Her opinion changed when she noticed that his preschool classmates rarely played with him. He once came home from summer camp asking why the nondisabled children laughed at him. On a visit, she saw them drawing away from her son. "They shunned him and it broke my heart," she said. She and other parents fought successfully to preserve separate special-education classes. Such parental pushback prompted local school districts across the country to delay or downsize mainstreaming initiatives (Tomsho 2007).

Another main issue identified by Tomsho (2007) is behaviour. He mentions the case of a girl who, after attending a preschool program for special-needs students, was assigned to a regular kindergarten class. There she disrupted the class, ran through the hallways and lashed out at others -- at one point giving a teacher a blackeye. According to the mother of the child she did not learn anything that year. Ross (2009) argues that due to disruptive behavior, mainstreaming may cause distractions to other students. Mainstreaming may also frustrate the special education students because they may feel they are competing with the regular education students.

Inclusion can also hurt those students who are considered "gifted and talented." Gifted and talented students do not benefit from mainstreaming because they are held back by the pace of the curriculum. Gifted and talented programs utilize large

amounts of independent study and curricula that allows for more specialized, challenging assignments which prepare these types of students for bigger and better challenges. Mainstreaming is the opposite of this. It is an absolute disservice for these gifted students to be treated like everyone else (Ross 2009)

For some children the disability does not affect their academic skills, but does prevent them from feeling comfortable in a big classroom setting with upwards of 35 students and only one teacher available to help them all (Tomsho 2007). He asserts that some LSEN could perform academically very well had they been placed in a smaller setting with an educator who had special training and experience for how best to reach them. Similarly, Cortiella (2009) argues that a child with serious inattention problems may be unable to focus in a classroom that contains thirty or more active children. Ross (2009) argues that where classes are bigger, there are more ability levels which results in not enough time being spent reviewing a concept for students who require review, repetition, and or instruction at a slower pace. Students may also not feel comfortable asking questions, in fear of the judgments from classmates.

Crawford (2005) bases his dissent on the fact that full inclusion of an extremely wide range of abilities into general education classrooms makes direct systematic instruction nearly impossible. He further argues that given the diversity in the classroom, teacher-led, whole-group or small group instruction simply becomes impossible. In addition, once full inclusion is implemented, teachers are forced to change their teaching methods to more child-directed, discovery-oriented, project-based learning activities in which every student works at his or her own pace. He opines that these methods have never produced high levels of achievement anywhere it has been tried.

The opposition to inclusive education highlights very pertinent points that should be taken into consideration. It would be unwise to ignore those who think differently because they may perceive issues that others fail to notice, and thus make a real contribution to the movement towards inclusive education.

2.10 Summary

The purpose of the literature review was firstly to solidly entrench the study in its theoretical framework in order to elucidate understanding of the phenomenon of inclusive education as experienced by the respondents of the study. The three major theories are Social Constructivism, Kurt Lewin's Field Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. These theories have it in common that people are social beings who construct their own knowledge through their interactions with others. This was beneficial to the researcher as it gave him opportunity to get a thorough understanding of the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in mainstream inclusive classrooms.

The background was set by focusing on the development of inclusive education and conceptualizing inclusive education. Two international conventions that hold great significance for this study have also been discussed. These include firstly the World Conference on Special Needs Education from which emanated the groundbreaking document called the Salamanca Statement (Ainscow 2000; Foreman 2008; Stubbs 2008). This is followed by a discussion of the very significant Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that focused strongly on the optimal empowerment of teachers who work in inclusive environments.

The review focused on the impact of inclusive education on teachers and the rights of teachers in inclusive settings. A broad study is made of the development of inclusive education in South Africa starting with the work of the NCSNET / NCESS and various discussion documents which resulted in the formulation of the policy document White Paper 6: Building an inclusive education and training system in 2001. This policy compels teachers to accommodate learners with moderate learning needs in mainstream classrooms. South African literature however suggests that teachers are challenged by the inclusive education policy requirements (Chetty 2003; Collett 2010; DOE 2009; Donald *et al* 2011; Eloff and Kgwete 2007; Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Forlin 2007; Moore 2008; Nel 2011). The fact that inclusive education is a complex endeavour is also well established by international literature (Harrison 2011; Henderson 2010; Leatherman 2007; Mae 2011; Mitchell 2008; Nilson 2010).

The literature on the topic of inclusive education highlights the fact that teachers all over the world experience the same challenges with regards to inclusive educational practices. These include lack of knowledge and skills in addressing various learner challenges; challenges in modifying and adapting the curriculum and assessment techniques to suit the different learning styles of learners; lack of knowledge of other individualized and adaptive learning approaches; lack of time for collaborative planning; teaching learners in a language other than their mother tongue; lack of support and resources; heavy workloads; high numbers of learners with diverse educational needs and behavioural problems which lead to stress. Besides the fact that teachers need professional development and support they also appear to be in need of a paradigm shift which could lead to a change in attitude towards the teaching of LSEN. The consistency with which these challenges are mentioned across South African studies highlight the need for further exploration because they could have a negative impact on the successful implementation of inclusive education.

The literature review exposed the fact that educational transformation aimed at the inclusion of learners regardless of disabilities or diverse educational needs holds serious implications for schools. It is evident that mainstream schools will have to be transformed in order to become fully inclusive and accommodate the diverse learning needs of learners. This holds implications for the management of schools; curriculum planning; assessment practices and staff development opportunities (Thompkins and Delaney 2008). A whole ethos of inclusion will have to be created, with the main focus on the empowerment of teachers and the development of the necessary support systems.

The literature actually reveals factors that could facilitate an effective inclusive education system for South Africa. It is evident that successful inclusive education explicitly calls for a model of service integration whereby all sectors of society would collaborate to sustain the system (Mitchell 2004; Beattie *et al* 2006; Donald *et al* 2011; Engelbrecht and Green 2007; GCIS 2010). The importance of effective collaboration is emphasized in all studies on inclusive education. The optimal development of all human resources is also a crucial factor.

The literature also reveals that if the systems that are supposed to support teachers in inclusive classrooms as postulated in White Paper 6 were in place and functioning effectively they could play a significant role in facilitating positive experiences for teachers in inclusive classrooms and in so doing contribute towards the attainment of the objective of an inclusive society.

Having studied the literature on inclusive education the researcher concludes that people in general are sensitive to the needs of learners who experience difficulties with their learning and that even those who hold opposing views are actually more concerned about the practicality of inclusive education to adequately address the diverse educational needs that LSEN bring to the classroom.

The literature review highlights the fact that inclusive education is a very complex system that cannot be approached in a haphazard way. It comes with a lot of challenges and is going to entail visionary leadership and lots of planning; fostering holistic and integrated support provision through intersectoral collaboration. As Engelbrecht *et al* (2006) points out, "Inclusive education can only be implemented through an ongoing process of trial, reflection, development and collaboration".

The researcher maintains that listening to the voices of teachers is an absolute crucial aspect of successful inclusive education. Their concerns will have to be viewed in a serious light since failing to do so could jeopardize the development of an effective inclusive education system in the country.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the literature on inclusive education and the challenges that this system holds for teachers. This chapter presents the research design and methodology used to conduct the study. It explains the logic behind using the selected methods and techniques for the study.

Methodology refers to the body of methods used in a particular activity or research process. It includes variables such as target population, size and description of the sample, and research instruments used. Researchers view it as the blueprint for data collection, measurement and analysis in order to achieve the objectives of the study. This chapter thus outlines important details of the study such as research paradigm and the research design that was employed to elucidate the research questions. This is followed by an outline of the research context and the method of sampling used to select the research participants. An explanation is given of how access was gained to the research site and the participants. The chapter also discusses the instrument employed for data collection and the procedure used for data analysis. There is a detailed discussion of the measures employed to ensure trustworthiness and the ethical considerations that guided the study. Finally some of the problems encountered during data collection and the limitations to the study are elaborated on.

3.2 General aim of the study

In line with inclusive education policy teachers are obliged to address the educational needs of all learners regardless of their educational needs or disabilities (DOE 2001). This represents a major shift for teachers in South African schools as most of them are not trained for this task. The general aim of this study is thus to generate empirical data and conclusions on the experiences of teachers who teach learners with diverse educational needs in mainstream primary school classrooms

with the purpose of explicating the impact of the implementation of inclusive education policy and the challenges that they face as a result thereof.

3.3 Research paradigm

3.3.1 Interpretive paradigm

All research, whether quantitative or qualitative, is based on some underlying assumptions about what constitutes 'valid' research and which research methods are appropriate. This underlying assumption, also referred to as the paradigm, is the researcher's epistemology, in other words the assumptions that the researcher has about knowledge and how it can be obtained (Myers 2009).

According to Mertens (2005) cited in Mackenzie & Knipe (2006) the paradigm influences the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. It is the choice of paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research. Without nominating a paradigm as the first step, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature or research design.

The researcher thus had to approach the study with a certain paradigm or world view in mind (Creswell 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define a research paradigm as a basic set of beliefs that guide action. It can thus be regarded as the fundamental model or frame of reference used by researchers to recognize their observations and reasoning (Babbie *et al* 2005).

This is a phenomenological study and the phenomenon under study is the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The researcher sought to gather data from teachers that could be interpreted in order to gain a better understanding of these experiences; he wanted to understand their lived reality, therefore the research project had to be located within the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm was also suitable for this study because Naicker (2000) argues that the interpretive theorist will attempt to understand reality.

The interpretive paradigm grew out of the philosophy of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey's and other German philosophers' study of interpretive understanding called hermeneutics (Mertens 2005 cited in Mackenzie & Knipe 2006). Hermeneutics involves the art of reading text or experiences in such a way that the intention and meaning behind the appearances are understood (Moustakas 1994). Schwandt (1996) considers understanding to be an intellectual process whereby knowledge is gained about an object. The exploratory and descriptive nature of interpretive research was beneficial to achieving the objective of this study as it enabled the researcher to discover what can be learned about the area of interest namely inclusive education.

This paradigm is also characterized by a concern for the individual as it seeks to understand the subjective world of the human experience and therefore enables researchers to understand the world of human experience (Cohen *et al* 2000). According to Schwandt (1994) this approach provides a deep insight into the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. This is sometimes described as trying to grasp the “meanings” of research participants’ thinking and behavior, which is exactly what the researcher intended to achieve.

Frankham (2005) argues that the search for others’ meanings explains, in part, why researchers within this paradigm will try to use methods which are non-interventionist. There is an emphasis on trying to understand people and actions in ‘natural’ settings and this is why some authors call interpretive inquiry “naturalistic inquiry”. The ultimate goal is more often profound and self-reflexive engagement with the phenomena. This engagement itself takes time and effort, to form trusting relationships with participants, for example, in order to understand the details of their life experiences and perceptions of them (Andrade 2009). From the aforementioned we could thus assume that when the purpose of a study is to understand a certain phenomenon, i.e. the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms, it would be most appropriate to work within the interpretive research paradigm.

Interpretive research assumes that knowledge of reality is gained through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents, tools, and other artefacts (Klein & Myers 1999). An interpretive researcher's ontological assumption is therefore that reality is socially constructed by humans through their action and interaction and the researcher becomes the vehicle by which this reality is revealed (Andrade 2009; Cavana *et al* 2001; Mingers 2001). Interpretivism also holds that human beings are purposive, which implies that they will consider and analyze what it is they do. Obviously, then, they will also make judgments about what it is they will say and to whom. It is for this reason that this approach to research is also referred to as the Social Constructivist or Post Positivist approach to research (Leedy and Ormrod 2005).

This emphasis on personal meanings reflects a belief in social constructionism, which is associated with the denial that there is an independent reality that can be explored 'out there'. The world is thus viewed as a socio-psychological construct where there are multiple realities forming an interconnected whole (Williams 1998). The main aim with this project was to gain insight into these multiple realities of the respondents, referred to by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) as "peoples' feelings and experiences" in order to explicate the major research question of the study which focuses on the experiences of teachers in inclusive settings.

Interpretive researchers only explore the realities of individuals as they experience the world and *obviously* draw their texts (data) from the lives of human beings (*italics mine*) (Cohen *et al* 2000). They therefore tend to rely upon the participants' views of the phenomenon being studied and recognize the impact of their own background and experiences on the research (Creswell 2002). The respondents of this study are teachers working in a social environment where they are daily in contact with learners with diverse educational needs and other teachers. The researcher therefore assumed that they would have rich but diverse experiences of the phenomenon. As this paradigm relies on actual experiences and can richly describe findings, it was most appropriate for a study of this nature and enabled the researcher to get rich, in-depth meaning of the lived-experiences of the respondents. In addition, the fact that the interpretive paradigm requires educator reflection, which

is also a characteristic of qualitative research, allowed the researcher to gain valuable insight into the challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusive education.

Another premise of this perspective is that the researcher is not and cannot be separated from the people and processes that they study. This enabled the researcher to select qualitative research methods to conduct the study.

3.3.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live (Kaplan and Maxwell 1994; Meyers 2009). The qualitative paradigm differs from the quantitative paradigm in a number of ways. The qualitative paradigm stems from an anti positivist, interpretative approach. It is idiographic and holistic in nature and aims mainly to understand social life and meaning that people attach to everyday life. McRoy (1995 as cited in De Vos *et al* 1998) further explains that the qualitative research paradigm in its broadest sense refers to research that elicits participant accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions. It also produces descriptive data in the participant's own written or spoken words. It thus involves identifying the participant's beliefs and values that underlie the phenomena.

These arguments point out that there is synergy between the interpretive paradigm, qualitative research methods and phenomenology (discussed under 3.3.3), which are employed in this study. This synergy also becomes visible in the definitions of qualitative research. According to Creswell (2002) qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding that explores a social human problem where the researcher conducts the study in a natural setting and builds a complex holistic picture by analyzing the words and giving a detailed, rich description of the views of informants.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argue that qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

There are quite a few reasons why this study follows a qualitative research approach, as opposed to quantitative research. The Interpretivist / Constructivist paradigm, within which this study is located, generally operates using predominantly qualitative methods (Silverman 2000 as cited in Mackenzie & Knipe 2006), therefore this study incorporates some of the basic characteristics of the qualitative research paradigm such as the fact that qualitative research usually involves fieldwork where the researcher has to physically visit the selected site and the research participants in order to conduct the interviews in their natural settings (Johnson & Christensen 2000).

As this is a small scale research project, two aspects of research are facilitated by qualitative research. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) opine that qualitative research lends itself to smaller but focused samples rather than large random samples. Furthermore, it categorizes data into themes as the key basis for arranging and reporting results. In this study a rather small sample of ten teachers were used to gather data from. This data was then analysed and interpreted and in the process definite themes were identified. These two aspects thus simplified the research process for the researcher.

Another motivation comes from the observation that, if there is one thing which distinguishes humans from the natural world, it is their ability to talk (Byrne 2001). As the name indicates, qualitative research is concerned with the quality of data and not the quantity, which is what the researcher had in mind. Kaplan and Maxwell (1994) argue that the goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its particular social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data are quantified.

Mcroy (as cited in De Vos *et al* 1998) concurs that the qualitative researcher is concerned with understanding rather than controlling measurement, and focuses on the subjective exploration of reality from the insider perspective as opposed to the outsider perspective that is predominant in the quantitative paradigm. As such, qualitative study is concerned with non statistical methods and small samples that

This study could therefore not follow a quantitative research approach because, as Moustakas (1994) points out, studies of human experiences are not approachable through quantitative approaches. Taylor (1998) further asserts that qualitative data is not measurable in mathematical terms but should be viewed within the context of the research topic. This enabled the researcher to gain new insights about the particular phenomenon as he discovered the problems that exist within inclusive classrooms.

Significantly, this type of research also provides a means through which a researcher can judge the effectiveness of particular policies, practices, or innovations (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). This study sought to understand and clarify issues regarding the policy of inclusive education.

The inclusive education policy requirements are experienced as complex by teachers as pointed out in various studies (Eloff and Kgwete 2005; Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Moore 2008). Qualitative research was thus suitable for this study as it enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of this complex situation (Barbour 2008).

Qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation (fieldwork), interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions and reactions. A qualitative enquiry was therefore suitable for exploring and understanding a social phenomenon such as inclusive education. As this study's focus is on the experiences of teachers who teach learners with diverse educational needs in mainstream classrooms, phenomenological interviews were used to gather data. This allowed the researcher to enter the participants' lived-world and study their lived-experiences (Brown *et al* 2001).

In order to get answers to the research questions, the researcher could not skim across the surface but rather had to dig deep to get a complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). The researcher thus had to ask broad but specific semi-structured interview questions in order to collect detailed information on the research topic (Creswell 2002). The qualitative data was recorded in the form of spoken language, thereby facilitating a true reflection of the respondents' experiences and of their attitudes and beliefs (Makubalo 2007). This means that dynamic, holistic and individual aspects of the teachers' experiences were captured which enabled the researcher to discover the main ideas and relationships related to the research topic.

Another advantage of applying this approach was that its discovery role enabled the researcher to capture the richness of the data (Gall *et al* 1996). As qualitative research involves an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the motives that govern this behaviour, the researcher then attempted to make meaning out of the information provided by the research participants (Denzin *et al* 2003).

By interacting with the respondents, the researcher gained valuable data that was useful in understanding their circumstances and experiences regarding the teaching of learners with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. This enabled the researcher to gain new insights about a particular phenomenon and discover the problems that exist within the phenomenon, in this case inclusive education.

The data collected for this study is thus presented in detail with direct quotations from the respondents' personal perspectives and experiences (Johnson & Christensen 2000). This further enhances the credibility of the study because the respondents shared their personal perspectives on the inclusive education policy and their experiences in teaching children with special educational needs.

Qualitative research does however have a few limitations. One of the major challenges in a qualitative approach is its ambiguity and lack of structure (Creswell 1998). This flexibility of qualitative methodologies is an advantage for experienced researchers but often a disadvantage for novices, who may not have sufficient

background or training to make wise decisions about how to proceed (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). Another challenge that researchers have to pay careful attention to is the matter of subjectivity in the analysis and interpretation of the data (Shenton (2004). These shortcomings had to be addressed therefore a research design such as phenomenology that counteracts them had to be selected.

3.3.3 Research design

A number of research designs fall within the interpretive paradigm. The research design however must suit the nature of the research being undertaken (Saunders *et al* 2003). Research design is described as a plan or blueprint of how you intend conducting the research (Mouton 2001). Bogdan *et al* (2003) asserts that design in research refers to the plan of how to proceed. Terre Blanche *et al* (1999) opine that it serves as a link between research questions and the implementation of the research. Most importantly, it shapes the ethical protocols within which the study is done (Kasenga 2007).

The focus of this study is to produce empirical knowledge on how teachers experience inclusive education; therefore a particular research design that would yield the best answers to the research questions had to be selected. It also had to be non prescriptive, therefore it had to be a qualitative research method (Eisner 1998). As the aim was to describe as accurately as possible the experiences of teachers who have to implement inclusive education in mainstream primary school classrooms, phenomenological research, for quite a few reasons, was the most appropriate design for this study.

With the development of post positivist approaches phenomenology has been adopted by different disciplines, including education, as an appropriate way of exploring research questions, which led to a different (*qualitative*) way of knowledge construction (italics mine) (Campbell 2000). It is both a philosophy and a research method, developed in the 20th century and dedicated to describing the structures of experience as they present themselves to consciousness (Ross 1999).

Creswell (1998) lists three reasons why a phenomenological approach may be challenging to novice researchers. As this is a phenomenological study it was very important for the researcher to be cognisant of these challenges before embarking on this type of research.

- *The researcher requires a solid grounding in the philosophical precepts of phenomenology.* Before deciding to embark on a phenomenological study the researcher made an in depth study of the available literature in order to educate himself on the basic tenets of phenomenology as research methodology.
- *The participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.* All the respondents in this study had been teaching at the school for more than ten years, therefore it could be assumed that they would have rich experiences of inclusive education.
- *Bracketing personal experiences by the researcher may be difficult.* The researcher allowed the respondents to share their experiences freely and tape recorded the data. They are given voice in the study by presenting their words verbatim in chapter four, thus minimizing the possibility of subjectivity.

The researcher selected phenomenology for a number of reasons. Groenewald (2004) argues that phenomenology offer ways of understanding not offered by other research methodologies because in contrast to the scientific method, it is both qualitative and interpretive. Another significance of this methodology is the fact that phenomenologists believe that knowledge and understanding are embedded in our everyday world; therefore knowledge cannot be quantified or reduced to numbers or statistics (Byrne 2001).

Phenomenology is also a type of qualitative research that examines and explores the essence of the lived experiences of humans (Byrne 2001; Moustakas 1994; Ross 1999; van Manen 1990). For these reasons it is powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom (Lester 1999). Van Manen (1990) asserts that phenomenological research

makes it possible to research almost any phenomenon, any lived experience, as a human response.

This study attempts to understand research participants' perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of social realities (Kvale 1996; Leedy and Ormrod 2005). What makes phenomenological research significant is the fact that it emphasizes the personal characteristics and "meaning-making" of each member, as the assumption is that everyone's reality is different depending on how they perceive situations (Hill 2010). As it attempts to understand an experience from the participant's point of view (Leedy and Ormrod 2005); it usually tries to answer the question, "What is it like to experience such-and-such?"

In this study the major research question was, "What are the experiences of mainstream teachers in inclusive classrooms?" The researcher sought to understand the experiences of teachers and was thus interested in how each one of them experienced the phenomenon of inclusive education. This translated into gathering deep information through inductive qualitative methods, in this case phenomenological interviews, and representing it from the perspective of the research participants (van Manen 1990). The multiple realities of the respondents thus gave the researcher a diverse perspective into the experiences of teachers as they implement the policy of inclusive education.

Lester (1999) argues that, adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research, enabling it to be used as the basis for practical theory, allows it to inform, support or challenge policy and action. This suited the objective of this study which was to get a better understanding of the experiences of teachers as they implement the policy of inclusive education.

Phenomenology is thus congruent with the rationale of this study which was to give voice to teachers and in the process explicate the complexities involved in inclusive education. Lester (1999) continues by stating that this approach is good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard. He further opines that this 'investigation' sometimes makes certain entities uncomfortable, particularly when the research

exposes taken-for-granted assumptions or challenges a comfortable status quo. This study is therefore very significant as it could cut through taken-for-granted assumptions, challenge complacency and prompt action by making education authorities aware of the difficulties that teachers endure as they implement the policy of inclusive education and highlight their subsequent need for training and support in their quest to address diverse educational needs. The study could thus make a contribution to the education transformation process taking place in our country.

3.4 Sampling strategies

3.4.1 Sample and sampling

After developing the research question the researcher had to identify the sources relevant to the phenomenon being studied and from these sources sought individuals who were willing to describe their experiences related to the phenomenon in question. Since this is a qualitative study positioned in the interpretive paradigm, the type of respondent needed were those who had first hand experience of the phenomenon of inclusive education. This is supported by Hill (2010) who contends that the researcher should attempt to select people who have experienced phenomena related to the study and who are willing to open up about those experiences.

Creswell (1998) also cautions that the participants in a phenomenological study need to be carefully selected to be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon otherwise it may be difficult to conduct the study. This is important because Hycner (as cited in Groenewald 2004) argues that the phenomenon usually dictates the method (not vice-versa), including even the type of participants. This statement held true for this specific study because its primary focus was the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The researcher was therefore impelled to select this particular school because it is a mainstream primary school registered with the Department of Education as one that focuses on LSEN.

This is a qualitative study therefore the researcher had to be intentionally nonrandom in the selection of data sources and select those individuals that would yield the most information about the topic under investigation (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). Random or representative sampling was therefore not preferred because the researcher's major concern was not to generalize the findings of the study to a broad population or universe, but to maximize discovery of the heterogeneous patterns and problems that occur in the particular context under study, namely inclusive classrooms (Gray 2004).

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) argues that qualitative researchers tend to select a few participants who can best shed light on the phenomenon under investigation, rather than sample a large number of people with the intent of making generalizations. Purposive sampling, considered by Welman and Kruger (as cited in Groenewald 2004) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling was therefore employed to identify the school as well as the primary participants of this study.

This type of sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight, *which was the actual objective of the researcher*, and must therefore select a sample from which the most can be learned (*italics mine*) (Merriam 1998). Another reason for selecting this method was the fact that purposive sampling through human instrumentation increases the range of data exposed and therefore maximizes the researcher's ability to identify emerging themes that take adequate account of contextual conditions and cultural norms (Gray 2004).

In purposive sampling, as the name indicates, research participants are selected for a specific purpose. The logic and power of purposive sampling therefore rests in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study (Kasenga 2007). Information-rich cases are those from which one could learn a great deal about issues of central importance for the purpose of research. This implies that respondents have to be selected whose study will illuminate the question under research (Patton 1990) cited in Johnson *et al* (2000).

De Vos *et al* (1998) and Saunders *et al* (2003) opine that the purposive sample is based entirely on the judgment of the researcher. As the aim was to select respondents who could be deemed information-rich in experiences relating to inclusive education, the sample consisted of ten purposively selected teachers from a mainstream primary school registered with the Eastern Cape Department of Education as one that addresses the educational needs of learners who experience difficulties with their learning. The sample was thus selected based on the researcher's judgement and the purpose of the research, looking for those who have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched (Babbie 2005; Leedy and Ormrod 2005). The respondents therefore fitted the profile perfectly because the phenomenon under study is inclusive education.

Because the objective of qualitative research is deep analysis rather than statistical comparison and generalization, the number of cases – people, events, settings – that are examined in a given study may be quite small: one classroom or school, two language learners, five members of a book club *or as in the case of this study, ten teachers from one school* (italics mine) (Mackenzie and Knipe 2006).

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) argue that ten respondents are more than enough to conduct a phenomenological study. Boyd (as cited in Groenewald 2004) also regards 10 participants as sufficient to reach saturation. The interviews were thus conducted in order to gain understanding of the experiences of these teachers who have to implement the policy of inclusive education and address the educational needs of a diverse range of learners. This was the main objective with the study.

Erlandson *et al* (1993) however argues that sample size is not important in qualitative research. They assert that the researcher should look for quality rather than quantity as it is more about information richness. In support, Van Rensburg (2001) states that interpretive researchers reflect an interest in contextual meaning-making rather than generalized rules, therefore, instead of surveying large groups, they rather prefer individuals or small groups, in their natural settings, to give the rich, detailed information of a qualitative nature through in-depth interviews, observations or other sources.

3.4.2 Profile of respondents

The respondents were teachers from a mainstream primary school that also focuses on LSEN. Three respondents were selected from the Foundation Phase (grades 1, 2 & 3), five from the Intermediate Phase (grades 4, 5 & 6) and two from the Senior Phase (grade 7) (See Table 3). Selecting teachers from all phases of the school to be interviewed was done purposeful because the researcher wanted to get an across the board in-depth understanding of primary school teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms.

The respondents varied in age and in years experience in the profession and thus in experience of inclusive education. Eight respondents were female and two male (See Table 3). This diverse composition resulted in an in-depth description of the experiences of the respondents which facilitated comprehensive answers to the research questions.

3.4.3 Profile of the research site

The research took place at an ex model-c mainstream school in the East London district. The school is unique as it is a mainstream primary school registered with the Department of Education as one with LSEN status. This implies that the school is recognized as one that caters for the educational needs of LSEN. It is also classified as historically advantaged since it was a “whites only” school in the Apartheid dispensation.

The school has a long history of focusing on LSEN that spans nearly 40 years. In 1965 a wing was added to the school that housed learners with partial hearing. The school still has a strong focus on learners with partial hearing but the composition of learners in the classes is now diverse. In 1991 the school became a section 21⁵ school. The name of the school is not mentioned in the study in order to ensure confidentiality.

⁵ These are schools that have the capacity to manage their own financial affairs.

At the time of conducting the interviews the school had a learner enrolment of 625 male and female learners ranging from grade R⁶ to grade 7 of which 112 have been classified LSEN. In each class there were about 40 learners with diverse educational needs and 10 or more who have been classified as learners with special educational needs. In one specific class the teacher had nine autistic learners.

The staff consisted of 20 state paid teachers which included the deputy principal, who was acting as principal at the time, and two heads of department (HOD's), one for the Foundation Phase and one for the Intermediate / Senior Phase, and 4 School Governing Body (SGB)⁷ paid teachers. Of all the teachers at the school only 4 actually had a qualification aimed at teaching learners with special educational needs.

Diverse learning needs such as autism, hearing impairment, speech problems, epilepsy, disciplinary problems and Attention Deficit (ADHD) are some of the special needs and learning barriers addressed in all the classes. The teachers also dealt with orphans and vulnerable children and learners who are HIV+.

3.4.4 Access to the research site and respondents

In terms of education protocol permission to conduct the research at the site was first of all sought from the Eastern Cape Department of Education via the Circuit Manager (Appendix A). This permission was granted as reflected in Appendix C.

The next step was to contact the school and the School Governing Body in order to gain permission to conduct the research at the site (See Appendix B). To gain access to a site, the researcher must often go through a gatekeeper, a person who can provide a smooth entrance into the site (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005; Taylor 1998). Groenewald (2004) qualifies a gatekeeper as someone who has formal or informal

⁶ Refers to the first year of basic schooling or the reception year, hence grade R.

⁷ The School Governing Body (SGB) is responsible for the governance of the school and performs their functions in terms of the South African Schools' Act (84 of 1996). This body consists of the principal, teachers and parents. In high schools learners are also represented.

authority to control access to a site; a person from whom permission is required. In the case of public schools the gatekeeper is usually the principal of the school.

However, before contacting the school, the researcher made contact with a former colleague who now taught at the research site and explained the research problem to her. Babbie (2005) call those persons who volunteer assistance key actors or key insiders. This teacher, who was one of the respondents but also acted as the key insider, then communicated the intention to do research at the school to the principal and teachers. At the time of the interviews the deputy principal was acting as principal of the school. A letter describing the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures and other details (Appendix B) was thereafter submitted to the principal and teachers for discussion. The acting principal readily granted verbal permission and was very cooperative. She basically gave the researcher freedom of the school and even made some documents available to the researcher.

The key insider was primarily responsible for the researcher gaining access to the school and to the respondents. It was not necessary to be selective regarding the choice of respondents as all the teachers at the school worked with LSEN; therefore she co-opted the respondents according to their willingness to participate in the study. The researcher however wanted a broad perspective on the experiences of the teachers and therefore voiced the request that teachers from all phases of the school should be approached to participate in the study. The researcher was introduced to the teachers in order to make the appointments for the interviews. The key insider was the main link between the researcher and the participants and remained telephonically in contact for the duration of the data gathering period and even thereafter when more information was needed.

3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Method of data collection

There are various qualitative methods through which a researcher can gather data which include interviews, observations, questionnaires, content analysis, focus groups, tests and personal constructs (Merriam 1998; Cohen et al 2000; Merriam 1998; Mouton 2001).

The researcher needed a method of data collection and an approach which would allow him to research the question and was therefore guided by Leedy and Ormrod (2005) who asserts that qualitative researchers ask general questions about the phenomenon they are studying. Cohen *et al* (2000) argues that people's words and actions represent the data of qualitative inquiry and this requires a method that will allow the researcher to capture language and behavior. Creswell (2002) supports this thinking by stating that phenomenological researchers depend almost exclusively on lengthy in-depth interviews, perhaps one or two hours in length, with a carefully selected sample of participants, all of whom have had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied.

An interview is a communication between two or more persons used for purposes such as diagnosis, education or obtaining information. It is intended to elicit descriptive and in-depth data from participants, who, in their own words, respond to questions posed by the interviewer. Interviews therefore enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view (Cohen *et al.* 2000). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) argue that interviews allow for in depth exploration of experiences therefore they can yield a great deal of useful information. Interviews therefore fit in well with an interpretive approach (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999).

The researcher wanted to venture deeper into the participants' experiences of inclusive education policy and how they experienced teaching children with special needs in regular classrooms. As this is a phenomenological study focusing on the experiences of teachers implementing the policy of inclusive education, the researcher depended exclusively on semi-structured phenomenological interviews (Groenewald 2004). The phenomenological interview is often a much unstructured one in which the researcher and the participants work together to arrive at the heart of the matter (Leedy and Ormrod 2005).

van Manen (1990) states that phenomenological interviews look more like informal conversations, with the participant doing most of the talking and the researcher doing most of the listening. It is for this reason that the researcher listened carefully as the respondents described their everyday experiences related to the phenomenon. Kvale (1996) asserts that this type of qualitative research interview has the unique potential for obtaining access to and describing the lived everyday world, therefore they provided a valuable source to understand the lived-experience of the research participants.

There are several reasons why semi-structured interviews were used. The fact that more than one person participated in the study served as a form of triangulation. Smith (2007) argues that phenomenological interviews encourage an open-ended dialogue between the researcher and the participants and may, therefore, lead us to see things in a new light. Exploring issues in more depth, the research participants thus brought a fresh viewpoint to the topic under investigation.

The researcher's epistemological position can be formulated as follows: "Data are contained within the perspectives of teachers that are involved in inclusive education", therefore the researcher engaged with the respondents (teachers) in collecting the data. By interacting with the teachers useful data was gathered that resulted in a better understanding of their experiences in their quest of making teaching more inclusive. The collected data was thus used to understand and explain the social phenomenon of inclusive education, hence the phenomenological approach. The interviews thus facilitated data gathering responsive to the main research question namely, "What are the experiences of mainstream primary school teachers who have to teach learners with special educational needs?"

Qualitative interviews were therefore suitable as data gathering method for this study because it alligns itself to the interpretive paradigm and phenomenolgy which concerns itself with understanding social phenomena and exploring the lived experiences of people, which the researcher sought to achieve.

3.5.2 The interview process

The researcher made appointments with the prospective respondents assisted by the key insider. Before going to the school the researcher contacted the key insider to confirm the appointments. The interviews were conducted at the school in the respondents' classrooms between 14:00 and 15:00. Each interview thus lasted about one hour. One interview was conducted per day on a Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. No interviews were conducted on Wednesdays because the respondents had general staff meetings on this day.

Unforeseen circumstances impacting on the researcher as well as on respondents necessitated some interviews to be rescheduled; therefore it took the researcher four weeks to conduct the ten interviews. The researcher was at the school regularly and became quite familiar afterwards and really felt at home. This was a positive factor for the researcher because the establishment of a good level of rapport and empathy is critical to gaining depth of information, particularly where investigating issues where the participant has a strong personal stake (Lester 1999).

Before each interview the researcher explained the topic, scope and purpose of the research to the respondents. Each respondent was given time to read through the informed consent form (Appendix D) and asked to share any concerns they may have before signing it.

Language is crucial to interpretive researchers; therefore interviews in phenomenological research are almost always tape recorded, as was the case in this study (Frankham 2005). Another reason for recording the interviews was so that the researcher could cite exactly what the person said, instead of trying to paraphrase (Hill 2010). This also helped with ensuring credibility of the interpretation of the data. The interviews were thus recorded with the permission of the participants. Each interview was assigned a code, e.g. Respondent 1, Mr. / Mrs. Interview conducted on 19 August 2010. The researcher explained to the respondents that the surname was only recorded for control purposes and that no names were going to be mentioned in the study. The researcher also jotted down

words during the interviews focusing on ideas and questions to be asked later on in the interview.

Semi-structured interviews were used which directed the interview more closely. The line of questioning was also more open-ended which enabled the researcher to get more in-depth information related to the research topic. An interview schedule (Appendix E) containing a few guiding questions related to the research question and overall research problem was compiled beforehand in order to stay within the topic surrounding the questions.

The schedule was designed to allow the respondents to express their experiences in inclusive classrooms and focused on the following:

- Getting insight into teachers' perceptions of White Paper 6 (DOE 2001)
- What the teachers' experiences were in adapting the curriculum?
- What aspects of their experiences they found challenging.
- The particular experiences that encouraged positive inclusive education.
- What the implications of these experiences were for inclusive education policy in schools.

Erlandson *et al* (1993) asserts that most interviews are open ended in nature so that a researcher can ask key respondents for the facts of a matter as well as for their opinion about events. Semi-structured interviews were useful as they allowed the respondents to lead the conversation and to identify what they saw as significant and tell stories in ways they wanted to tell them (Frankham 2005).

The questioning was thus kept very flexible in order to yield a rich description of the experiences of the respondents in inclusive classrooms. In order to let the conversation flow as naturally as possible the researcher did not rigidly follow the interview schedule but allowed the questioning to be guided by the responses of the respondents. The respondents actually determined the outcome of the interviews because they were very eager to talk about their experiences. They were allowed to speak freely without any interference. In some cases it was not even necessary to ask certain questions as they had already answered them in response to previously

asked questions. This facilitated effective interviews that yielded extra information that enriched the description of the phenomenon.

In order to ensure that all areas of interest have been covered, the researcher had to probe using additional questions. These 'probes' differed somewhat from respondent to respondent. According to Patton (2002) using probes is one of the key techniques in good interviewing. These probes were used to deepen the response to a question, increasing their richness and depth, and giving clues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired.

Cohen *et al* (2000) explain interviews as a means of pure information transfer and collection, a transaction which inevitably has a bias which is to be recognized and controlled. This was applicable to this study because the researcher is also a teacher therefore throughout the data collection process any preconceived notions or personal experiences that may have unduly influenced the responses of the respondents had to be suspended. Such suspension is referred to as "bracketing or epoche" (Leedy and Ormrod 2005).

After concluding each interview the respondents were thanked and given the opportunity to ask the researcher questions or to share concerns regarding the research.

3.5.3 Difficulties experienced during data collection

The researcher encountered a few challenges during the data collection period. The researcher is also a teacher therefore other colleagues sometimes had to stand in for him in the performance of his extra mural duties. The interviews were planned for after school hours in order not to interfere with the schools' or the teachers' program. The researcher thus had to rush from his school at 13:40 to get to the research site at 14:00 as teachers wanted to get home or had extra murals to attend to. Time constraints therefore resulted in only one interview being conducted per day.

As already mentioned some interviews had to be rescheduled due to unforeseen circumstances, some even more than once. The respondents were however more than willing to participate in the study, therefore the researcher had to remain patient and wait until they were available.

The researcher also encountered problems with physically gaining entrance to the school. Although permission was granted by the deputy principal to conduct the research, the secretary, who had been informed, was very uncooperative. Sometimes the researcher had to wait at the entrance gate and contact the key insider to ask her to open the gate.

Challenges were also encountered relating to the venue of the interviews. Frankham (2005) and Groenewald (2004) assert that the location for an interview must be a suitable quiet place where you are unlikely to be distracted. This was not always possible because the interviews were conducted in the teachers' classrooms. Children were playing outside and sometimes the interviews were interrupted by learners who knocked at the door to convey a message to the respondent or asking if they could fetch their books or something else from their desks.

Another problem was the fact that the caretaker of the school finished his duties at 15:00 and would come and knock at the door five minutes before the time. This resulted in the interviews being a bit rushed.

3.6 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is about telling other people the story of your research and what you have found out (Frankham 2005). The problem for many researchers with phenomenological research, as was the case with this study, is that it generates a large quantity of interview notes, tape recordings, jottings or other records, all of which have to be analysed. As a result analysis also tends to be complicated, as data doesn't tend to fall into neat categories and there can be many ways of linking between different parts of discussions or observations (Lester 1999).

The aim of analysis in this study was to offer insights into how the respondents make sense of their experiences in inclusive classrooms. The researcher was thus an instrument in the research and therefore his ability to interpret and make sense of what he saw or heard was critical for understanding the social phenomenon of inclusive education (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). As this is a phenomenological study it was thus important to bracket the researchers' thoughts and knowledge of the phenomenon in the analysis of the data. The researcher entered into the respondent's perspectives and experiences and told their story by using direct quotations (Moustakas 1994; van Manen 2004). This was beneficial as it made the respondents' voices heard and gave the study more credibility.

During analysis the researcher took note of the assertion by Smith (2007) that a good analysis is one which balances phenomenological description with insightful interpretation, and which anchors these interpretations in the participants' accounts. In order to achieve this, the interviews were recorded with the respondents' permission. The first task was thus to transcribe each interview. Frankham (2005) asserts that it is a good idea to try to transcribe every word of a taped interview because the researcher will not know what is relevant until he/she is analyzing the data and writing the account. This is exactly what the researcher did. Soon after each interview was concluded the researcher listened to the recording thereof and transcribed it verbatim in order to allow the voices of the research participants to speak (Groenewald *et al* 2004).

Qualitative inquiry is fundamentally interpretive (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). Ten one hour long interviews were conducted therefore the researcher had to wade through huge amounts of data and interpret it in order to find meaningful order. It took the researcher about a week to transcribe and analyze each interview. After transcribing the data the researcher was guided by Creswell (1998) and Lester (1999) who suggest that the transcripts should be read in their entirety a several times. The researcher therefore immersed himself in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts. The importance of comprehensive reading is emphasized by Marshall and Rossman (as cited in De Vos *et al* (1998) as

they state, “Reading, reading, and reading once more through the data forces the researcher to become familiar with the data in intimate ways”.

By the time it came to data analysis the researcher already had a preliminary understanding of the meaning of the data (Terre Blance and Durrheim 1999). The researcher had to transcribe each interview and as he did he could clearly identify the most important themes that the respondents had in common.

Qualitative researchers such as Anderson (1998) and Bogdan and Bilken (2003) assert that data analysis involves working with the data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units or descriptive themes, coding it for insights into the participants' experience and perspective on their world, synthesizing the data and searching for patterns. These patterns are called 'themes'. Themes are recurring patterns of meaning (ideas, thoughts, and feelings) throughout the text. They are likely to identify both something that matters to the participants (i.e. an object of concern or topic of some importance) and also convey something of the meaning of that thing, for the participants. Some of these themes will eventually be grouped under much broader themes called 'superordinate themes' (Smith 2007).

Creswell (1998) refer to the steps to be followed in the data analysis process as the data analysis spiral. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher applied the following steps as proposed by Creswell (1998) to the data.

- *Make a thorough study of the data by reading it over and over.*
- *Organize the data and identify statements that relate to the topic / research questions.* The researcher separated relevant from irrelevant information in the interviews. The relevant information was broken into small segments such as paragraphs, sentences and individual words.
- *Peruse the entire data set several times to get a sense of what it contains as a whole.* Possible categories were identified and underlined.

- *Seek divergent perspectives.* The researcher considered the various ways in which different respondents experienced the phenomenon. This gave more depth to the description of the experiences.
- *Identify general categories or themes and sub-themes.* The data was now classified accordingly.
- *Construct a composite.* The final result was a general description of the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of the respondents who have experienced it firsthand.
- *Relate the findings to an existing body of theory and research.*
- *Discuss the practical implications of the findings.*
- *Make recommendations.* Valuable recommendations are made on how the experiences of teachers in inclusive settings could be enhanced.

The central task during data analysis was thus to identify common themes in the respondents' descriptions of their experiences in inclusive classrooms (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). Definite superordinate and sub-themes clearly emerged in this study. As the researcher worked through each interview he identified the superordinate and sub-themes and classified the data accordingly. E.g. in this study, factors relating to the inclusive education policy emerged as a superordinate theme. It captured a variety of patterns in participants' embodied, emotional and cognitive experiences of inclusive education (Smith 2007) which was further explicated by sub-themes such as teacher's familiarity with inclusive education policy, their experiences in inclusive classrooms, the practicality of the inclusive policy and issues relating to special classes.

3.7 Measures to ensure trustworthiness

When humans are the subjects of social research, as in this study, it is very important to assure them of trustworthiness (Leedy and Ormrod 2005; Meyers-Daub 2003). There are however differing schools of thought regarding the issue of valid research, which to the researcher just seems to be a question of difference in interpretation and application of terminology.

Researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell (1998) question the relevance of the concepts of internal and external validity to qualitative designs because measurement is less precise and less accurate in the humanities and social sciences. They suggest that words such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, verification, and transferability be used instead of the term validity.

Cohen *et al* (2000) however argue that validity is an important criterion for effective research and that invalid research is worthless. They claim that qualitative data validity must be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data gathered, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher.

Guba and Lincoln (1988) proposed four criteria namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which should be addressed by qualitative researchers wishing to present a convincing case that their work is academically sound. They explicitly offered these as an alternative to more traditional quantitatively-oriented criteria and felt that their criteria better reflected the underlying assumptions involved in qualitative research. Following is a detailed discussion of how the criteria have been applied to this study in order to enhance its trustworthiness.

3.7.1 Credibility / Truth value

Erlandson *et al* (1993) argues that if any social inquiry is to have an impact on human knowledge, either by adding to an overall body of knowledge or by solving a particular problem, it must guarantee some measure of credibility about what it has inquired. They point out that valid inquiry must demonstrate its credibility or truth

value, provide the basis for applying it, and allow for external judgments to be made about the consistency of its procedures and the neutrality of its findings or decisions. Guba and Lincoln (1985) refer to these qualities as “trustworthiness”.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that a central question for any inquiry relates to the degree of confidence in the “truth” that the findings of the particular inquiry have for the subjects with which - and the context with which – the inquiry was carried out. Credibility or truth-value therefore has to be established with the individuals who supplied the data for the inquiry. This implies that the description of the phenomenon should “ring true” for the respondents of the study.

Since the purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from the participant's eyes, the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results (Guba and Lincoln 1988). This is supported by Ross (1999) who argues that the broad question that phenomenologists want answered is, "What is the meaning of one's lived experience?" therefore the only reliable source of information to answer this question is the person who experienced the phenomenon. In order to enhance the credibility of this research project, teachers, those who have the responsibility of implementing the inclusive education policy in classrooms, were the main focus of study.

Schurink *et al* (1998) cited in Groenewald (2004) emphasise the truth-value of qualitative research and list a number of means to achieve this, which have all been employed in this study. Firstly, the phenomenological research design contributed toward truth. The researcher spent extensive time on data gathering and analysis. The researcher engaged with the data and spent about three months analyzing it. The interviews were conducted by the researcher himself and the responses to these recorded, with permission from the respondents, using an audio recorder.

The researcher is also a teacher at a mainstream primary school and was therefore an ‘instrument’ in this study (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). This implies that the researcher finds him in a similar situation as the respondents; he has personal experience related to the phenomenon in question, but wanted to gain a better

understanding of the experiences of others, which actually prompted the undertaking of the study and the selection of phenomenology as research design.

The interpretation of the data could thus have been influenced by the researcher's biases and values. The researcher was thus confronted with another weakness of qualitative methodology namely the question of accurate interpretation. Yin (2003) argues that qualitative methodology lacks sufficient precision, objectivity, and rigour. Therefore, in order to gain true results, a sincere attempt was made by the researcher at viewing the reality of inclusive education from the perspective of the respondents in order to attain an understandable and sincere account of the analyzed phenomenon.

The researcher set aside any preconceived ideas and notions, in other words he bracketed himself consciously in order to understand, in terms of the perspectives of the participants interviewed, the phenomenon under study (Groenewald 2004; Leedy and Ormrod 2005). The focus was thus on an insider perspective (Mouton & Marais 1990). Bracketing during the transcription of the interviews further contributed to truth. In order to further ensure credibility transcripts of some of the interviews are included (Appendix H).

However, the fact that ten teachers were interviewed who gave multiple perspectives on the topic made it unnecessary for the researcher to involve his own biases and values in the interpretation of the data. The audio recordings made of each interview also enabled the researcher to make maximum use of the participants' words so as to preserve the integrity of their voices.

Another strategy that qualitative researchers frequently use is triangulation, i.e. comparing multiple data sources in search of common themes, to support the validity of their findings (Cohen *et al* 2000; Kasenga 2007; Leedy and Ormrod 2005). Engagement with credibility issues such as cross-validation or triangulation is very important as it is likely to increase the reader's confidence (Smith 2007). However, in a phenomenological study like this one, the respondent's "voice" is primary; therefore no triangulation was needed (Leedy and Ormrod 2005).

3.7.2 Transferability / Applicability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that an inquiry is judged in terms of the extent to which its findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents. This is also referred to as 'replication in a different context' (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). In order to assess the extent to which findings may be true of people in other settings, similar projects employing the same methods but conducted in different environments could well be of great value (Shenton 2004).

Inclusive education is national policy and various studies (Bothma *et al* 2000; Eloff and Kgwele 2005; Hay *et al* 2001; Moore 2008; Walton *et al* 2009; Nel 2011) have found that teachers experience inclusive education as complex and that they have not been well prepared for the implementation of the inclusive education policy in schools. The experiences of the teachers involved in these studies are very similar to those of the respondents of this study as discussed in chapter 4, meaning that the findings of this study could be transferable to other contexts.

Other strategies recommended to facilitate transferability have been applied to this study. As the foundation of transferability is an adequate description of the context; the search for data was guided by the processes that would provide rich detail. This required a sampling procedure that is governed by emerging insights about what is relevant to the study and purposively seeking both the typical and the divergent data that these insights suggest (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Creswell 2002). In this study respondents that have been involved in inclusive education for a substantial period of time were needed, therefore purposive sampling was used to select them.

The researcher enhanced transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research (Guba and Lincoln 1988). The phenomenon has also been described in sufficiently rich, "thick" detail (Creswell 2002; Leedy and Ormrod 2005; Shenton 2004). The researcher therefore attempted to give an in-depth description of the experiences of the teachers in inclusive classrooms that should enable readers to draw their own conclusions.

The respondents were also allowed to speak freely without any interference. The interview schedule was sufficiently flexible to allow the respondents to respond in a way relevant to their own experiences. The researcher listened intently as the respondents described their everyday experiences of inclusive education and personally jotted down important information. In order to give the study even more credibility, the respondents' words are quoted verbatim in the presentation of the data; therefore the findings are solely based on their actual words and thus their actual experiences. Moustakas (1994) asserts that first person reports of life experiences are what make phenomenological research valid. Smith (2007) concurs that key points illustrated by verbatim quotes are crucial to estimating the plausibility and transferability of a phenomenological study.

3.7.3 Dependability / Consistency

Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that an enquiry must also provide its audience with evidence that if it were replicated with the same or similar respondents in the same context, its findings would be repeated. This implies that the inquiry must meet the criterion of consistency. On the contrary, Shenton (2004) warns that this is not easy to do in qualitative research because of the changing nature of the specific phenomenon. This statement could hold true for this study as the development of inclusive education is still in its baby shoes in South Africa. With close monitoring and evaluation of the systems operational in schools and in the Department of Education and substantial investment in both human and material resources, the effectiveness of the inclusive education system could improve, thereby changing the conditions under which teachers implement the policy in classrooms.

Shenton (2004) suggests that in order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results. Thus, the research design may be viewed as a "prototype model". Such in-depth coverage should also allow the reader to assess the extent to which proper research practices have been followed. It is thus important to enable readers of the research report to develop a thorough understanding of the methods employed and their effectiveness, which have all received comprehensive attention in this study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that dependability can be communicated through an audit. To provide for a check on dependability, the researcher must make it possible for an external check to be conducted on the processes by which the study was conducted. This is done by providing an audit that provides documentation (through critical incidents, documents, and interview notes) and a running account of the process of the inquiry.

3.7.4 Confirmability / Neutrality

Lincoln and Guba (1985) opine that an enquiry is judged in terms of the degree to which its findings are the product of the focus of its inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher. The researcher thus has to trust in the confirmability of the data. This simply means that the data can be tracked to their sources and that the logic used to assemble the interpretations into structurally coherent and corroborating wholes is both explicit and implicit (Guba and Lincoln 1988).

The concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity (Shenton 2004). In simple terms confirmability thus refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others, *especially the respondents of the study* (italics mine). The steps taken to ensure that the researcher's predispositions do not influence the data or the interpretation thereof are discussed in detail under 3.7.1 (Credibility).

3.8 Ethical considerations

Anyone involved in research should be aware of the general agreements about what is ethical or unethical (Babbie *et al* 2005). Whenever humans are the focus of social research, ensuring that the study conforms to ethical standards is of paramount importance (Cohen *et al* 2000; Erlandson *et al* 1993; Leedy and Ormrod 2005; Mac Naughton 2001). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) argue that most ethical issues in educational research fall into one of four categories: protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues. It was therefore very important for the researcher to honour all these issues and focus strongly on ethical issues because the respondents are his colleagues.

Lester (1999) opines that the aim should be to be faithful to the participants, and to be aware, insofar as is possible, of biases being brought to the inevitable editing of the data. He argues further that there is an ethical issue about misrepresenting, distorting or deleting findings which have been provided in good faith by participants and refers to it as “treachery”. Researchers such as Groenewald (2004) and Smith (2007) warn that deception may be counter-productive in research because it might prevent deep insights, whereas honesty coupled with confidentiality reduces suspicion and promotes sincere responses.

The first and foremost ethical concern in any research involving humans is informing the participants in the research of the advantages and risks involved in the study and obtaining their consent to participate in the study (Thyer 2001). All entities concerned with this study were consulted and thoroughly informed as to what the research is about and what the objectives of the study were (Appendices B & D).

The researcher was guided by the opinion of Saunders *et al* (2003) regarding gatekeepers. First of all a letter (Appendix A) was drafted asking permission from the Education Department to conduct the research. On receiving positive feedback (Appendix C), permission was sought from the principal and SGB of the school to conduct the research at the site (Appendix B). This permission was granted verbally. The teachers were then approached to be respondents in the study (Appendix D). The principal as well as the teachers were assured that the day to day functioning of the school would not be disrupted because all activities related to the research would be conducted after hours at a convenient time for all involved.

The researcher developed a specific informed consent ‘agreement’ (Appendix D) in order to gain informed consent from the respondents. De Vos *et al* (1998) postulate that informed consent relates to the communication of all possible information about the research, as accurately as possible, to the research participant and is therefore a necessary condition rather than a luxury or an impediment.

The 'informed consent agreement' form was discussed with the respondents at the beginning of each interview. It was explained to them that they were participating in research which was only intended to be submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in the faculty of Education at the University of Fort Hare. The voluntary nature of research participation was explained which means that no respondent was pressured to participate in the study. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time.

The researcher explained that he was going to interview them using an interview schedule (Appendix E) and that they were free not to answer questions that they felt uncomfortable with. The respondents were allowed to share their experiences freely without any undue influence in order not to expose them to any physical or psychological harm. They were therefore not subjected to undue stress, embarrassment or loss of self- esteem (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). The researcher also promised to make a summary of the research findings available to the respondents once the study has been completed.

It should be noted that all the respondents were adults who had the capacity to give informed consent directly. All of them were in agreement with the content of the consent form and signed it. The interviews were recorded with their permission, therefore they had to be informed that the data would not be used for any other purpose or by any other person and that it would be deleted after transcription. They were also assured that the transcribed data would be kept in a safe place and eventually be destroyed.

Cohen *et al* (2000) argues that maintaining confidentiality and anonymity in social research is very important. Therefore, for ethical reasons, and to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the name of the school and that of the respondents is not mentioned in the final report. The respondents are referred to as R1 or R2 so as to ensure that the data is kept confidential and cannot be traced back to particular individuals (Leedy and Ormrod 2005; Yin 2003). In this way their right to privacy is also maintained.

Another serious ethical concern which has been thoroughly observed in this study is the acknowledgement (referencing) of intellectual property belonging to other people. The work of scholars is referenced following the American Psychology Association (APA) referencing convention as prescribed by the Faculty of Education at the University of Fort Hare.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter the researcher outlined the approach to the research. The researcher indicated that this is a qualitative study located within the interpretive paradigm. The objective of the research was to give a detailed description of the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms. It was thus a phenomenological study which aimed to describe the phenomenon of inclusive education. The chapter also described the sample and sample realization. The sample was purposively drawn and consisted of ten mainstream primary school teachers in the East London district. The sample was taken from all phases of the school in order to get a broad-based detailed description of the experiences of the teachers.

The researcher gave a detailed explanation of the central role played by the gatekeeper and the key insider in order to gain access to the research site and the respondents. The method of data collection is discussed at length. The main objective was to give a detailed description of the experiences of teachers in mainstream classrooms therefore the data collection method had to be qualitative in nature. Semi-structured phenomenological interviews were thus employed to gain in-depth information from the research participants. The researcher then proceeded to give a comprehensive explanation of how the interview process transpired and how the collected data was processed and analysed. The experiences of the respondents were transcribed verbatim in order to give the study more credibility. The researcher then identified the major themes and sub-themes which explicated the research questions focused on the experiences of the respondents in inclusive classrooms.

The chapter also explained the measures that the researcher employed to assure all readers of the study that the data and its conclusions are trustworthy. There is a detailed discussion of the four criteria which have now been accepted by qualitative researchers wishing to present a convincing case that their work is academically sound namely credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

Lastly, the researcher focused on ethical issues. All the necessary ethical protocol was observed, including obligations to the research participants before the actual research was undertaken. The respondents' confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process and problems encountered during the research have also been noted. The next chapter contains the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data collected for the study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the methodology used to gather the data for the study. The aim of this chapter is to present, analyze and interpret the data that emerged from the semi-structured phenomenological interviews. This is a phenomenological study that aims to elucidate the experiences of teachers who are teaching learners with special educational needs (LSEN) in a mainstream primary school. In order to give the reader some insight into the participants of this phenomenological study some biographical information regarding age, gender, grade/s taught, qualifications and teaching experience is given. This is followed by a detailed exposition of the experiences of the respondents in inclusive classrooms in which their challenges and need for support structures are described.

The data for this study was gathered through phenomenological interviews. As this is a qualitative study the researcher had to look for themes or categories during analysis and interpretation of the data. Five main categories or themes were clearly identifiable and each piece of data was thus classified accordingly. Various sub-themes emerged that explicated the main themes. These five main themes are factors related to the policy, factors that promote positive inclusive education, the challenges that teachers face, challenges related to the curriculum and teachers' need for support structures.

The respondents are quoted verbatim in order to let their voices be heard and in so doing the researcher could gain insight into the experiences of mainstream teachers who teach learners with various special educational needs. In the process the project was given more credibility.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

4.2.1 Distribution of respondents according to grade and gender

Table 3 reflects the grade and gender distribution of the ten respondents. Teachers from all phases of the school were interviewed in order to get a diverse perspective of their experiences in inclusive classrooms. The main respondents of the study included three teachers from the Foundation Phase (Grades 1, 2 & 3), five from the Intermediate Phase (grades 4, 5 & 6) and two from the Senior Phase (grade 7). 80% of the respondents were female and 20 % male, as indicated in table 3. The three Foundation Phase teachers were female, whereas four Intermediate Phase teachers were female and one male. In the Senior Phase (grade 7) one teacher was female and the other male.

RESPONDENT	GRADE	GENDER
1	1 & 2	FEMALE
2	2	FEMALE
3	3	FEMALE
4	4	FEMALE
5	4 & 5	FEMALE
6	5	FEMALE
7	5	FEMALE
8	6	MALE
9	7	FEMALE
10	7	MALE

Table 3: Grade and gender distribution of respondents

4.2.2 Distribution of respondents according to qualifications

The respondents were asked questions related to their academic and professional qualifications as reflected in Table 4. This was to ascertain whether they complied with the requirements for appointment as educators as provided by the Education Labor Relations Council (ELRC 2003) which states that an approved qualification denotes a degree, diploma, certificate or another qualification recognized by the Minister of Education as a qualification for appointment as an educator.

RESPONDENT	GRADE	QUALIFICATION
1	1 & 2	PGCE + B.Ed (Honors) Special Needs
2	2	HDE (JP)
3	3	HDE (JP)
4	4	DE 3 (SP) + FDE (Remedial)
5	4 & 5	BA + HDE
6	5	DE 3 (JP) + ACE
7	5	HDE (SP)
8	6	HDE (SP)
9	7	BA + HDE
10	7	BA + HDE

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to qualifications

In terms of the Norms and Standards for Educators (ELRC, 2003), a teacher needs a minimum Relative Education Qualification Value (REQV) of 13, which refers to a Matriculation Certificate (Grade 12) plus three years of training as an educator or 360 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) credits to be registered with the South African Council of Educators (SACE) as a professionally qualified educator.

The determination of the REQV is based primarily on the number of recognized prescribed full-time professional or academic years of study at an approved university, Technical College or College of Education and taking into account the level of school education attained (ELRC, 2003).

The respondents were asked to divulge their academic qualifications with the purpose of identifying whether they had the necessary qualifications and expertise to teach learners with special educational needs. Table 4.2 indicates that the respondents are highly qualified and hold more than the required qualifications for employment as educators. All the respondents hold professional qualifications. One has an Honors Degree in Education; seven respondents have Higher Diplomas in

Education; one holds a Further Diploma in Education and another has an Advanced Certificate in Education. All the academic qualifications as shown in the table have 360 credits on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) according to the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (NPFTED) (ELRC, 2003).

The professional profile of the educators therefore corresponds with Ward's (2004) point that learners require qualified teachers (and support staff) each day in order to facilitate optimal learning. The conclusions that can be drawn against this background are that the qualifications of the research participants match the Initial Professional Education of Teachers (IPET) pathways as set out by the NPFTED (ELRC, 2003). Similarly, Rohlehr (2006) posits that professional preparation is a critical component as it encompasses all arrangements for the preparation of teachers and administrators for the task of effectively facilitating the educational process in schools.

In terms of Education Law the main participants of this research are fully qualified to teach, but it could be assumed that they would experience difficulty to effectively implement inclusive education requirements in the absence of appropriate pre- and in service training. The research revealed that only two teachers (R1 and R4) had a qualification aimed at teaching learners with special educational needs, which points to the fact that inclusive education has not been a focal point of teacher training. R1 holds a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, specializing in psychology. At the time of the interview she was also studying towards a B. Ed (Honors) Degree in Special Needs Education.

R1 was the teacher with the lowest number of years teaching experience but the interviews revealed that, due to her professional knowledge regarding learners with special needs, she played a crucial role at the school when it came to guiding the other teachers when they encountered problems with certain learners. Teachers also regularly consulted with her about the learning needs of certain learners.

R4 holds a Further Diploma in Education specializing in remedial teaching. She is the coordinator of the Institutional Learner Support Team (ILST) and is therefore expected to play a crucial role regarding the special educational needs of learners and supporting teachers in general.

Fortunately for all the teachers who teach in the Foundation Phase (previously known as the Junior Primary Section) remedial teaching was one of their subjects during their pre-service teacher training. This entailed addressing educational barriers such as phonological problems (phonics) which lead to reading and writing problems; fine motor skill problems and number concept problems which result in problems with counting. These teachers were trained how to focus on children who have difficulty with their schoolwork. All these respondents were of the opinion that their exposure to remedial teaching to some degree assists them in their daily task of working with learners with special needs.

The interviews revealed that most teachers who teach in the Intermediate and Senior Phase are having difficulty with inclusive education. This could be because none of these respondents had any formal training in special needs education.

4.2.3 Distribution of respondents according to years of experience

The respondents were asked to divulge the experience they have in the teaching profession in terms of years. This is reflected in Table 5. The purpose was to determine whether practical experience in the teaching profession in any way enhanced or complicated the experiences of teachers in inclusive education settings regardless of a lack of professional training and perceived lack of expertise in addressing the educational needs of a wide range of learners.

Table 5: Respondents by years of experience

RESPONDENT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
YEARS EXPERIENCE	7	25	16	30	30	20	11	15	30	20

Table 5 reflects that the respondents have an average of 20 years experience as teachers. Three of them have 30 years experience in the teaching profession; one has 25 years and another 20 years. The remaining five respondents have between 10 and 20 years experience.

90% of the respondents have more than 10 years experience as teachers. Only one, R 1, has less than 10 years experience. Interestingly this is also the teacher with the highest qualification and the most training in inclusive education. This knowledge has now become an operational resource at the school. She voiced that it was difficult when she started out but now that she has gained some experience it helps her a lot. The deduction could thus be made that training in inclusive education is necessary to facilitate inclusive education but it has to be strengthened by experience gained in the field. A more detailed analysis of the correlation between number of years teaching and actual experiences in the classroom is given in the next section of this chapter.

4.2.4 Coding

In the presentation and analysis of the data the respondents are coded as R1 or R2 which refers to respondent number one or two. This was also done because it was very important to protect the respondent's identity. The actual words of the respondents are typed in italics.

4.3 THE EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

Five main categories or themes were clearly identifiable when analyzing and interpreting the data. Each piece of data was thus classified accordingly and various sub-themes emerged that explicate the main themes. These five main themes are factors related to the policy, factors that promote positive inclusive education, the challenges that teachers face, challenges related to the curriculum and teachers' need for support structures.

4.3.1 FACTORS THAT PROMOTE POSITIVE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

4.3.1.1 The attitude of teachers

Despite all the changes in South African education and the subsequent challenges that it brought about, all the respondents were optimistic and said they still enjoyed teaching. This sentiment is profound because some of the respondents have been in the profession for more than 30 years.

The respondents however held diverse views about inclusion. Some appeared to be positive while others were skeptical of the practicality of the policy but none were outright negative about inclusive education. All the respondents however complained about how difficult their task is, which indicates that their challenges will have to be addressed. R4 stated, *“Teachers are really struggling, but they still give their best for their learners”*.

When I asked R1 why she is teaching instead of doing some other more rewarding job she stated, *“I do it because I love it. I love working with children and now I teach children with special needs. It makes me feel good at the end of the day when I see that I have made a difference”*. R7 shared the same sentiment, *“I feel proud when my LSEN have learnt something. I may not be able to teach them how to fly to the moon, but I can teach them how to get to Johannesburg”*.

The growth and success experienced by learners with special educational needs appeared to be a rewarding feature for the respondents and appeared to be making teaching in inclusive classrooms a worthwhile and fulfilling job (Hargreaves 1998). The views expressed by these respondents revealed that they are very dedicated teachers who have the best interest of their learners at heart. They performed their duties under very difficult conditions but regardless still did the best possible to ensure that their learners learn.

The belief that they are making a difference to the lives of the learners, against the odds, is important for teachers because it gives them a sense of self-efficacy (Troman and Woods 2001). The sense of success that they achieved through their dedication resulted in a positive frame of mind that contributed to a positive attitude

towards learners with special educational needs, and thus towards inclusive education. *“When I go home at the end of the day I say thank you Lord – I’ve made a difference in someone’s life”*, R9 stated. This could also be the reason why they endured despite all the difficulties.

The deduction could thus be made that a positive mindset impacts on the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms and affects their reaction towards LSEN. Those who were positively inclined regardless of their working conditions seemed more accommodating towards LSEN and held the view that inclusive education could work. They were however fully aware of the challenges involved and what was needed to make it succeed as pointed out by R10, *“Inclusive education causes a lot of stress for the teacher. They will have to address the problems in the classroom if they want it to succeed”*. It became obvious that the more positive a teacher’s attitude, the less problematic they experienced the practical implementation of inclusive teaching strategies. In contrast, those who only focused on the challenges in inclusive classrooms came across as unhappy and unfulfilled. However, although some respondents appeared to be negative about addressing the educational needs of LSEN, it became clear that they were not negative towards the learners per se, but towards the conditions under which they worked.

The respondents highlighted another factor that seems to be affecting the attitude of teachers namely the negative labeling of learners with special educational needs. WP6 (DOE 2001) presents a shift away from labeling children according to their barriers. R2 warned, *“Teachers have to be vigilant when working in inclusive classrooms that they do not label children. When I started here I was told to study each learner’s file and see what their problems are. I did not do that because I did not want to label or judge the children. I prefer to work with the children and identify their problems. I allow them to develop into who they are”*. This response revealed that labeling or pre-judging learners could affect a teacher’s attitude which could result in a negative approach that would impede constructive teaching and learning. She also voiced concern for the future of these learners by stating, *“Teachers have to do the best for their learners. These children will have to go into society one day and cope. There is no special world out there”*.

R1 was also of the opinion that some teachers tended to label children who are different. *“Teachers are quick to label and box learners without knowing them. If a child does badly or just looks or behave differently, he/she is classified LSEN without having the correct background information”,* she stated. This could point to the fact that teachers are unable to identify and address barriers to learning effectively and thus resort to unfair labeling.

R10 also questioned his capabilities, *“I will now have to change my approach to teaching completely, whereas I do not know how to do things differently. I have been trained to teach a specific way. I do not like change. How am I expected to change after all these years? I don’t have time for all this nonsense”.* This sentiment points to the fact that policy initiatives have to be linked to clear implementation strategies, otherwise feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness will prevail (Engelbrecht et al 2007). It could thus be assumed that teachers are in need of relevant professional development if the new policy initiatives are to be successfully implemented.

Contrastingly, R9 had a different mindset. *“The sooner you accept that you have to do things differently the better. Teachers have to embrace change and rather empower themselves. You just have to accept it because it is not going to go away. You have to be part of the solution”,* she stated. According to her the workshops that she attended and the knowledge that she gained made her feel positive about having different learners in her class. *“I have been teaching for 30+ years. I know it is not easy, but surely I can try my best for these children”,* she exclaimed.

It became evident that the respondents were under the impression that they did not have the necessary expertise to address diverse educational needs; therefore they felt as if their teaching practice was being challenged. This brought about anxiety which could lead to stress and negative feelings that would influence their attitude (Troman and Woods 2001).

R7 stated, *“Our attitude towards learners with special needs would have been different if we were properly trained and the challenges addressed”.* This sentiment supports the idea that teachers in general endorse the idea of inclusion, but foresee

problems in its practical implementation (Pottas 2005). Professional development could thus negate negative perceptions because it became evident that the respondents would like to be in a position where they could address the educational needs of all the learners in their care. R5 stated, *“We do the best we can without any support from our employer. The teachers here are more than willing to learn. They attend workshops and seminars and grab any opportunity to empower themselves”*.

Other respondents also underscored the lack of support from the Education Department. R6 opined, *“The Education Department is not sustaining its own policies. They do not consult with us; we have had no training opportunities and support systems are nonexistent”*. R10 shared the same sentiment. *“The Department is not serious about inclusive education. We get nothing from them”*.

These statements revealed that the respondents, although a crucial part of the education system, felt isolated in the whole process of developing an inclusive education system. It also highlights deficiencies in the Education Department which seemed to contribute to the respondents' feelings of despondency and negative attitudes towards inclusive education.

4.3.1.2 Self empowerment

80% of the respondents in this study were not specially trained to work in inclusive classrooms and relied on what R9 termed *‘self education’*. Regardless of all the challenges some respondents were very positive and voiced the opinion that it is possible to educate oneself as R5 stated, *“Teachers just have to go the extra mile and find the information that is needed”*. Since the respondents are in need of further training, information from articles and books can provide further resources that can be used to inform and express the process of learning through experience (Ainscow 1999).

Many of the respondents conducted their own research; read a lot about the various barriers and educational needs and attended workshops offered by private entities or organized by the school. R4 stated, *“When I first started at this school I did not cope but I empowered myself. I did courses on autism and learners with behavioral*

problems. I got material from other people and educated myself. I made it my business to cope”,

This respondent actually spent a week at a special school for autistic learners. *“I gained a lot of experience in that one week and came back with a lot of knowledge, information and material on the topic of autism”,* she added. This teacher is now regularly invited to workshops and seminars about autism and has become a valuable asset to the school as she shares her knowledge with her colleagues and with the learners. She also happens to be the coordinator of the Institutional Level Support Team (ILST), therefore the relationship that has developed between herself and the local Autism Society helped her to perform her duties optimally.

The respondents were clearly challenged by the diversity of educational needs in their classrooms; therefore they were aware of the fact that they needed to be educated in inclusive education classroom practices. R5 opined, *“Since there is a total lack of support for us I depend on empowering myself. I need to understand them in order to work with them”*. This ‘understanding’ is crucial as teachers have to be able to effectively teach the learners in their care, therefore they have to take responsibility for their own learning (Ainscow 1999; Carl 2002). The respondents were doing exactly that, as R7 stated, *“Having the necessary skills and knowledge can make our teaching experiences more endurable”*.

It became evident that the respondents discovered best practice in their daily interaction with the learners in the classroom and this equipped them to address their educational needs. *“I depend on day to day discovery. If one thing does not work, I try something else. You can see what works and what doesn’t. You learn every day”,* R5 stated. The value of this on-site learning is highlighted by Ainscow (1999) who argues that the development of practice occurs in the main largely through ‘trial and error’ processes within which teachers extend their professional repertoires as a result of finding out what works for them.

It could however be argued that regardless of school-based or self motivated professional development, the respondents are still going to need professional in-

service training in order to empower themselves optimally to address special educational needs.

4.3.1.3 Experience in the profession

The interviews revealed that depending on the attitude and work ethic of a teacher, long years of service in an inclusive environment can translate into valuable experience that is much needed by younger more inexperienced teachers and could also benefit the learners. The respondents who have between 20 and 30 years experience as teachers seemed to be more positive about and more comfortable with inclusive education than those with fewer years experience.

The respondents were adamant that regardless of lack of training, their experience as teachers helped them a lot in coping with learners with diverse educational needs. R2 stated, *“Although I have had no training, I depend on my experience”*. R6 added, *“Experience plays a big role in my daily teaching. I have taught at four different schools where I worked with children from different socio economic backgrounds and this means four different types of experiences. This prepared me to cope with the different types of children that I now have in my class”*.

It appeared as if the expertise and knowledge that these respondents have gained through *‘hands-on experience’* enabled them to develop their teaching practice and thus seemed more capable of dealing effectively with inclusive classroom dynamics and the stressors that they encountered on a daily basis. The value of experience was revealed by R 1, 4 & 5 who have taught learners with partial hearing before without any formal training and now felt comfortable with addressing the educational needs of partial hearing impaired learners. They however stated that they were challenged by other disabilities such as deafness and autism which required specialized training which they did not have.

R1 stated, *“It was very difficult when I started out as a teacher, but after seven years in the profession I have gained a lot of experience and that helps me a lot”*. She further stated that although she held a degree in psychology and was still studying, she found the knowledge that she obtained through her experiences in the

classroom invaluable. It could thus be argued that although it is important to study, it is not until one works and participates in the daily operations of a school that you truly grasp what is involved and gain skills that can be applied later (Epter 2007).

By applying the knowledge that she gained through her studies and her practical experience this respondent was not only able to solve her own problems, but also that of other teachers who encountered problems in the classroom. This illustrates that, although practical experience is crucial, the significance of theoretical knowledge in inclusive education practices is just as important and should not be underestimated. The deduction could thus be made that practical experience is vital, but combined with appropriate pre- and/or in-service training, it could facilitate even more effective inclusive classroom practice, as R8 stated, *"It's not only about the knowledge that you gained at university. You have to apply that knowledge and discover new things as you go along"*.

Experienced respondents also seemed able to deal effectively with behavioral problems in the classroom and this enabled them to continue uninterrupted with their work. *"You must not scream and shout when learners misbehave. You must approach the situation calmly and listen to them. If I'm stressed, I give them time out"*, R5 stated. Respondents with many years experience also seemed to know how to deal effectively with behavioral problems amongst the learners. R7 stated, *"When learners argue amongst themselves you have to step in and solve the problem otherwise it will never stop"*. We could thus assume that it is important for classroom quarrels to be resolved speedily so that less time is wasted on disciplinary issues and more time is focused on teaching. It is also important for teachers to respond quickly and effectively to difficulties in the classroom because they can lead to frustration and emotional exhaustion (Winkler 2006).

When asked what helped him cope R8 replied, *"What sustains me at this moment is definitely my own experiences; hands-on experience and common sense. It is common knowledge that people learn more when they experience something practically"*. This statement revealed that real-world experience is crucial.

By being hands-on and interacting with the learners it could be assumed that the respondents would gain valuable knowledge and develop various skills which could make them more confident to address certain educational needs. R3 stated, *“Teachers fresh from university cannot be left on their own because they would not be able to cope with LSEN. They do not know what to do and might want to resign when they discover what needs to be done”*. R7 opined, *“It would be a nightmare to put a new teacher in one of these classes because the learners at the school have too many problems”*. These ‘problems’ referred to the diverse learning needs that the respondents encountered in inclusive classrooms. We could therefore argue that newly qualified teachers need time to gain experience in inclusive classroom practice. In order to gain this experience they would also need guidance and support from more experienced teachers.

4.3.1.4 Teacher collaboration

It became evident that the respondents worked very well together and placed a high premium on mutual support and camaraderie, as R5 stated, *“We are almost like a family”*. R9 added, *“I do not know what I would have done if it wasn’t for the love and support I get from my colleagues. Teaching here is not easy and that is what makes every day bearable”*. R5 stated, *“Sometimes you can hear your colleague is battling. You just have to go in and show your face and say to the learners they must listen and behave”*. R10 opined, *“Teachers have to support each other otherwise they will go crazy”*. R6 affirmed by stating, *“I feel challenged by inclusive education but the help of my colleagues sustain me”*. These statements prove that a collaborative approach is needed to facilitate successful inclusive education.

R1 stated, *“It was very difficult when I started here a few years ago”*. When asked what helped her cope she answered, *“Definitely the fact that we work so well together and support each other”*. These respondents obviously found themselves in a very challenging environment and shared the same burden; therefore they were able to serve as support structures for one another. They identified with each other’s challenges and shared solutions to problems that they encountered (Ainscow 1999). *“Sometimes you have to go into a class and ask your colleague how she’s doing.”*

When I hear my colleague is stressing I go to her class and ask her to go to the staffroom to take a breather”, R5 added.

The camaraderie among the respondents seemed to sustain them. It seemed as if they drew strength from each other, which emphasize the importance of collaboration and support in inclusive settings. Winkler (2006) refers to this support as a “social defense structure”. Stoppler (2010) emphasize the importance of such a ‘defense structure’ when in a strenuous environment. R6 affirmed, *“Just knowing that I can depend on my colleagues for support sustains me. You cannot do it alone. You need other people to help you”*.

Another significant factor that appeared to be of great help to the respondents is the support they received from the School Management Team (SMT)⁸. R4, the ILST coordinator, voiced deep appreciation for the support she got from the SMT and spoke very highly of them. Words such as ‘*great*’ and ‘*super*’ were used to describe these individuals. This support is very significant because teachers who know their leaders care about and support them in shared values and moral purposes; seem to thrive, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually (Troman and Woods, 2001).

The value of collaboration in challenging environments like inclusive classrooms seems to be manifold. Besides helping teachers to cope and lowering stress levels, it also appears to create interdependence. The positive interaction among the respondents could thus result in a sense of belonging because they knew that they are not standing alone and that they are making a worthy contribution to the success of the school. This in turn could boost their self confidence and lead to an improved sense of self efficacy which could in turn improve the overall quality of teaching and learning.

⁸ An executive team consisting of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Heads of Departments and one or two senior teachers.

4.3.1.5 That something special

When asked what special attributes teachers had to have to teach LSEN all the female respondents mentioned “*patience and caring*”. They regarded these intrinsic values as an important prerequisite for working with learners with special educational needs and were adamant that without it teachers would find it very difficult to cope. R5 stated, “*An insurmountable amount of patience is needed*” and emphasized the word ‘*patience*’ seven times in her interview. She referred to it as, “*That something special.*” Upon further exploration it became evident that this ‘something special’ encapsulates the various intrinsic values such as love, compassion, caring, empathy and tolerance that all humans should possess.

It was interesting to note that the only respondents who did not mention patience or any of the other virtues were the two male respondents (R8 & 10). They are the only male teachers on the staff and were openly skeptical about the feasibility of inclusive education. R10 even referred to inclusive education as ‘*nonsense*’.

The respondents that expressed endearing sentiments were of the opinion that it takes a special kind of person to work with LSEN. R2 stated, “*You need a special kind of teacher to work with these children*”. She related the story of a learner she had the previous year to prove her point. “*He was very difficult to work with. He progressed to the next grade but the teacher could not cope with him. He came back crying and asked me to take him back. He did not want to be in that specific teacher’s class and would not cooperate*”.

R5 stated, “*It has got to come from the heart*”. When probed further she explained that teachers should have compassion and empathy with the circumstances of the learners in their care and try their best to address their learning needs, no matter how difficult it is. R6 opined, “*If you are doing it just for a salary you are going to have a hard time. You cannot just regard it as a job – it has got to be like a calling*”.

These respondents are supported by Hargreaves (1998) who argues that like nursing, teaching is one of the caring professions and in this context a teacher’s commitment to care is not a personal choice, but a central aspect of the ethic and

organization of teaching. This implies that caring forms an integral part of a teacher's work as illustrated by the following statement by R4, *"If you are going to do a proper job, it is basically going to take up most of your life"*. This statement could however also point to the fact that teaching has become a strenuous profession because of the multi faceted role that teachers have to fulfill for which they are not always suitably qualified.

R7 stated that a *'special brand of patience'* is needed. When asked to describe this special kind of patience, she found it very difficult, showing that it is something affective. Instead she related an incident that happened when the learners got polio vaccinations. *"This highly autistic girl got very scared and screamed the roof off. We all came out to see what was happening. One of the teachers went to her and handled the situation very calmly. We wanted to help, but she said no, everything is under control"*.

This scenario could explicate that LSEN have to be approached with compassion and understanding. We could thus conclude that a teacher's attitude and approach to LSEN could be a deciding factor in how they experience inclusive classrooms.

4.3.1.6 Learners acting as a support structure

The respondents revealed that the learners themselves can be a very good support structure. It appeared as if learners are not only good at helping each other but also at assisting the teacher. *"Learners are good at helping each other; they can sometimes help more than you can"*, R6 stated. This is supported by Winkler (2006) who asserts that children do not only learn from the teacher but are always learning from each other in different ways as they teach each other games and songs, tell each other stories and play number games.

R7 mentioned an incident when one of her learners had an epileptic seizure. *"I got a bit nervous but the learners knew exactly what to do. They took over and helped the child. They have been together since grade 1 therefore they know what is going on"*, she added. This scenario proves how important it is for the learners to be educated about certain disabilities. It also points to the fact that learners have to be seen as

partners in education and part of the whole school community. This aspect could also be utilized within the classroom so that the learners can develop a feeling of interdependence (Carl 2002).

R5 mentioned a strategy that she applied in the classroom and found to be very effective. *“I make use of the ‘buddy system’ whereby I seat an academically stronger learner next to a weaker one with the objective of the former helping the latter”*. This ‘method’ usually entails further explanations and assistance and is effective because children can often explain the work to their friends in a way that helps them to understand the task better (Winkler 2006). The respondent mentioned that this helped her a lot because she has got too many learners in her class and cannot always give them the individual attention that they need.

R9 stated, *“I also let the children work in groups, which saves a lot of time and they learn various skills”*. This form of cooperative learning can be very beneficial because when learners work together in groups they are actually teaching each other (Dion *et al*, cited in Florian 2008). It not only helps them to understand the work better, they are also learning to cooperate, to organize themselves, and to become more confident in asking questions (Engelbrecht *et al* 2007).

We could thus deduce that there are benefits to having learners play an active role in the learning environment; therefore teachers who find themselves in difficult situations like inclusive classrooms should exploit these learning opportunities whenever possible.

4.3.1.7 Parental involvement and support

All the respondents were of the opinion that collaboration between the home and the school is crucial for successful inclusive education. R5 remarked that the parents of one of her hearing impaired learners are very involved in his education and very supportive. They communicate via the homework diary and sometimes the parents phone to find out how their child is coping. According to her the parents are more than willing to come to the school if there are issues to discuss. She explained that his mother will sometimes write a letter or phone the school and say, *“X is having*

problems, I don't think he had enough time to do the work or X tells me the work was too much". The respondent mentioned that she valued this interaction as it informed her of the learner's academic needs so that she could make the necessary adjustments to the curriculum for him and give him easier assessments. It appeared as if working together with parents could be mutually beneficial as it is in the best interest of the child and it makes the work of the teacher easier. Winkler (2006) asserts that parents should be involved as soon as possible as they are the primary educators of their children.

The respondents however viewed parental support in general as a challenge. It appeared as if some parents are supportive but there are also those who are indifferent. R6 expressed the sentiment that learners who have parental support are usually cooperative, disciplined and eager to learn and therefore more successful. *"You can immediately see the difference. It helps me as well as the child"*, she exclaimed.

R7 opined that it makes a big difference when parents honor teacher-parent conferences and become involved in their child's education. *"It helps because parents do not always know what is expected of them to help the child at home, so when they visit the school the teachers are able to explain certain procedures to them. It also helps the parents by keeping them abreast of various school related issues"*, she added. R3 stated, *"Parental support is even more important for LSEN because parents have to consolidate the learning process by ensuring that homework is done properly. The teacher cannot do it alone – you need the support of the parents"*, she added.

Regular contact with parents also seemed to be important when confronted with behavioral problems. R6 stated. *"If I have a problem with a specific learner I will first try and address the problem myself. If that does not work I call in the parents to resolve the problem. This usually helps but sometimes the children don't even listen to their parents"*.

On the other hand respondents complained that some parents do not give them or their children the necessary support. *“Sometimes diaries come to school signed but the homework has not been done. This makes matters even worse”*, R8 complained. According to her this meant that she could not continue with the day’s work because she would have to do the homework with the learners in class. R10 mentioned another issue that could have a negative effect on learners’ academic progress. *Some parents work out of town and leave their children with nannies. These caregivers are unable to assist the children with their homework and this causes the child’s education to deteriorate because they go home and watch television or play games instead of doing homework or studying. When they are asked questions in class they can’t answer and actually switch off”*. This could also mean that some learners did not have positive role models at home which contributed to the behavioral problems that the respondents experienced.

It seemed as if parental involvement is in the best interest of all parties involved and very important for successfully addressing special educational needs. The respondents and the parents worked together to make sure the children get a good education. The respondents work was made easier and the parents got to understand what their children’s needs are and how to address. In the final analysis the learners benefitted academically.

4.3.1.8 Support from the community

Judging from the support the school receives from community structures and organizations one could deduce that collaboration with other stakeholders is a crucial element for successful inclusive education.

The respondents were very fortunate and grateful for the support they received from outside entities because it lightened their task. R5 exclaimed, *“These people do the school and the children a big favor. We do not get any help from the Department”*. R1 mentioned that a professional psychologist offers his services free of charge to the school. *“He visits the school once a week to do counseling with some learners. We refer the learners to him and he works with them. He also consults with the parents of the learners and this not only helps the school but also the parents who*

do not have to pay. He is accompanied by ladies from his church who works with the learners who have behavioral problems”, she added.

The school also enjoyed the voluntary services of a retired speech therapist. *“She comes in twice a week to take the children for speech therapy. We are not speech therapists and the children, because of their deafness, actually need an expert to help them”, R6 stated. “There are also ladies from the Frere Hospital doing an outreach program at the school. They come in once a week and do remedial work with some learners and this helps us a lot”, she added.*

R7 mentioned that one of the major churches in the city helps the school financially and gives food parcels to disadvantaged learners. All the respondents spoke with pride of these relationships and expressed their gratitude towards these entities because the learners as well as the teachers were benefitting from this much needed external support. This illustrates that teachers in inclusive classrooms need a lot of support and where this support is available their plight is lightened.

4.3.2 CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE CURRICULUM

4.3.2.1 Curricular modifications

The curriculum is viewed as one of the most significant barriers to learning for learners with special educational needs in ordinary schools (DOE 2001), therefore the onus is placed on teachers to adapt the curriculum and design inclusive learning programs in order to accommodate the variety of educational needs in the classroom. This implies that teachers have to use a multi-level approach and ongoing assessment in order to facilitate optimal learner achievement. This multi-level approach refers to the principal of individualization (DOE 2005) whereby teachers have to prepare main lessons with variations that are responsive to individual learner needs (DOE 2001). In terms of inclusive education policy (WP6 2001), it is taken for granted that teachers should also be able to do this with LSEN, without considering the challenges that teachers face in inclusive classrooms.

Effecting the required curricular modifications is evidently posing a challenge for the respondents of this study. They mentioned quite a few factors that complicated

adapting the curriculum. R7 stated, *"This is a huge challenge. The Department said they were going to make the burden lighter but nothing has changed. Some of us have class teaching so you have to prepare for 7 / 8 subjects. We are expected to make all these changes to include special learners, but we do not receive any support from subject advisers. R9 referred to the requirement as impractical, "They did not consider the different types of children that we work with. It is a difficult task which is further complicated by the huge number of learners that we have in our classes and other factors such as language and disciplinary problems".*

The interviews revealed that although the respondents were aware of the fact that some learners needed different types of lessons and that their preparation could not be the same for all the children in their care, none of them actually planned in accordance with the educational needs of the learners in their class. R1 stated, *"I have to be honest with you and say I do not have graded worksheets. I do try to give the weaker ones easier exercises and the brighter children more difficult ones".*

Potterton (2010) asserts that the grip of traditional practices on teachers has been very strong; therefore many simply continued to use whole-class teaching approaches under the guise of a new curriculum. This also appeared to be the case with the respondents of this study. The many challenges that they faced in the classroom could however be the reason for this, as R8 declared, *"I find it very difficult to adapt the curriculum. I try but I don't always succeed. I now have to make additional worksheets according to the different levels of the learners in my class and that is a bit difficult. I just don't have the time to do it. I've got 37 books to mark. In English alone I sometimes have 37 essays to mark plus a mountain of administrative work. It is just too much".*

R10 stated, *"I do not have the time or the energy to individualize lessons. When will I finish my work if I have to plan ten different lessons? I also have to maintain a specific pace if I want to complete the syllabus therefore I present my lesson and give them exercises to do. While they are busy I give individual attention to those who do not understand".* Teachers are obliged to cover a certain amount of work annually as stipulated by the National Curriculum Statement. Time constraints thus

affected the respondents' readiness to individualize lessons. A study conducted by the Eastern Cape Department of Education (2009) also found that teachers at full service schools were reluctant to accommodate LSEN needs due to concerns about meeting NCS requirements. This implies that there is no synergy between the National Curriculum and the policy regulations contained in WP6.

R9 voiced concern about LSEN who could not keep up with the pace and fell behind because they were not given enough time to consolidate the content that was covered. *"I teach and then I forget about my special needs children because I want to complete the syllabus. I try and sit with them in the afternoon and discuss the work. We go over the work and spend extra time. I also make appointments with some of them for early in the morning then we go over the work"*, she stated. This could be problematic as LSEN need more time to consolidate new concepts and complete given tasks (Gous and Mfazwe 2003).

R1 opined that it was difficult to give individual attention, *"I have 8 LSEN in my class and each one of them is supposed to be doing something different. The Department expects learners to work at their own level. How do you do that if you've got 35 learners? How do I prepare different worksheets on top of all my other duties? It is physically impossible"*. The heavy workload brought about by the big number of learners per class and the diversity of educational needs that the respondents had to accommodate also appeared to complicate curricular modifications.

Despite the challenges some respondents did however try to facilitate effective learning for LSEN. R6 stated, *"I try to adapt the curriculum, especially in Mathematics because the learners are struggling with the subject. Some learners in my class just cannot do Mathematics, no matter what I do or say. I therefore try to simplify the work because it is of no use working at the normal level with them because they get all the answers wrong; it's demoralizing and not good for their self esteem. In content work I try and simplify the notes as much as possible. I give a little bit more work to those who understand"*, she added.

Others applied creative methods to deal with the challenges that learners with special needs posed. R4 mentioned the case of a child that refused to speak. *“I read to her, showed her some pictures, watched her reaction and asked questions. The child could hear the questions and pointed to the answers”*. R6 mentioned that some children come to school with broken arms and can’t write. *“What do you do? You give the child an oral exam”*, she added. R5 noted, *“What works for one child will not work for another. You cannot be too rigid when working with LSEN; you have got to be flexible and adapt”*.

It became evident that inclusive classroom dynamics such as the teacher-learner ratio, curriculum coverage expectations and time constraints complicate the modification of lessons but the some responses suggested that teachers have to be creative as there are different ways of overcoming problems. It could however also mean that teachers require clear guidelines and specific knowledge, skills and proficiency in order to make the necessary curricular modifications (Carl 2002).

4.3.2.2 Progression requirements

The respondents voiced a lot of discontent with the assessment and progression protocol which they had to comply with, as reflected in Assessment Instruction 29 of 2010 (Appendix F). This document was circulated to all Eastern Cape schools and indicates how progression should take place in the different phases.

In terms of Assessment instruction 29 (points 9.2 and 9.3) (Appendix F), teachers have to consider LSEN limitations, but the continuous assessment requirements do not accommodate these limitations as no special requirements have been laid down for them. It became evident that the respondents did not know what progression requirements to apply to LSEN. R7 stated, *“At the end of the year the LSEN does not make it but gets sent to the next grade. The cycle repeats itself because of the assessment policy and because he/she is too old he just gets sent to the next grade”*. R1 mentioned that she was once told by Education Support Services that LSEN have to proceed from the one grade to the next until they are ready to be redirected to Baysville School or Parklands Special School. This would imply, as

stated by R5, that *“LSEN are just pushed through the system only to end up in a special school”*.

Point 6.2 of the instruction states that any decision about progression should be based on the evidence of a learner’s performance against the recorded assessment tasks. R5 stated that this was not applied in practice. *“Even if we want to retain a child it is made very difficult. We must have what is called evidence. They don’t want to accept it when we give learners low marks, then we are asked why the child got such low marks and what we did to help the child improve.”*

In accordance with assessment protocol teachers have to prepare assessment schedules at the end of each school term which reflects each learner’s progress. These schedules are submitted to the Education Development Officer (EDO) who discusses it with the Management Team of the school. R5, the HOD, stated, *“The EDO is happy with a learner who achieves a level 2 in his/her subjects. This implies that a learner in grade 4 who achieves a level 2 in all his subjects, in other words 35% or Partial Achievement, is ready to progress to the next grade. Even if you know a learner is not ready for the next grade, they are allowed to proceed. It makes it very difficult for us because we struggle with these children”*.

The respondents clearly found this to be problematic, as voiced by R9, *“The progression requirements as stipulated by the Education Department are below standard and complicate matters for the receiving teacher. Many of the learners who achieve a level 2 are not ready to progress to the next grade”*. R7 stated, *“Learners are allowed to proceed to the next grade whereas they are not able to cope with the work of the grade they are in. This complicates the work of the teacher”*. R4 had the following to say, *“Some children in grade 4 are not coping adequately. They passed grade 3 because the assessment policy stipulates that they must pass, even if the teachers are of the opinion that they are not ready for the next grade. Teachers don’t have a say anymore”*.

R10 opined that it is usually these learners who cause all the disciplinary problems because they cannot cope with the standard of work. R8 blamed the complexity of the process on lack of set progression requirements for learners. *“It is very difficult for teachers because there are no set progression requirements for learners. The Department does not want to commit to progression requirements because they know the children are weak, so they leave it up to us to decide”*.

R6 added, *“Teachers have to use their professional discretion in deciding which learners are ready to progress to the next grade or not”*. When asked what ‘professional discretion’ entailed, she explained, *“We have to say whether we think the child will be able to cope in the next grade or not. Even if a child is very weak and achieves a level 2 in some subjects, he/she has to progress to the next grade”*.

R10 mentioned a form called “Motivation for retention” that teachers have to complete when retaining a learner. Parents have to co-sign this form in agreement that their child should repeat the grade. If they refused to sign it became very difficult to retain the child. *“It is as if we are asking for permission from the parents. The professional discretion of the teacher is totally ignored”*, he added.

The respondents also found point 6.4 that states that a learner may only be retained once in a phase problematic. This means that in a four year period a learner may only be retained once. The following statement by R6 illustrates the point. *“If a learner is repeating grade 4, he/she has to pass grades 5 and 6, no matter how academically weak they are”*.

The respondents sounded very frustrated when they voiced their dissatisfaction with the assessment and progression requirements that they had to apply. It is evident that the assessment policy and the lack of clear progression requirements contribute to the difficulties that teachers experience in inclusive classrooms. We could also argue that it leads to a weakening of the education system because some LSEN and other learners just get pushed through the education system.

4.3.2.3 Language of learning and teaching (LOLT)

A few respondents referred to the Language of learning and teaching (Lolt) as a contributing factor to their difficulties in inclusive classrooms. R4 stated, *“The majority of learners at this school are isiXhosa speaking whereas the language of teaching and learning is English”*. This situation could however be expected as South Africa is a culturally and linguistically diverse nation. It became evident that the language issue was complicating the teaching and learning process as voiced by R7. *“The fact that the learners are not from English speaking backgrounds makes it very difficult. Sometimes you can see the learners do not understand you, but what can you do? You just have to try your best and explain the work to the best of your ability”*. R6 added, *“Language is a problem for some of these children. It is even more difficult when they have hearing or other learning problems”*.

These statements prove that the task of teachers working with LSEN is further complicated when the learners do not understand the language of teaching and learning. Considering the fact that the respondents were working with high numbers of learners who have learning problems and cause disciplinary problems, without any support, the deduction could be made that the language problem is adding to the challenges faced by teachers in inclusive classrooms. The learning needs of certain learners were thus exacerbated by limited proficiency in English, therefore language could also be seen as a barrier to learning that the respondents would have to address. Taylor (2006) concur that not being educated in the mother-tongue inevitably poses an enormous learning handicap for a learner.

What complicated matters further was the fact that of all the respondents only R4 and R9 were capable of speaking isiXhosa. The lack of competency to teach in African languages is regarded as a serious challenge for the education system as a whole (DOE 2007). According to R9 lack of understanding was one of the biggest challenges. *“They are lost if you do not interpret some of the activities. Some cannot even read what’s in the modules”*, she added. R4 stated, *“Being able to speak Xhosa helps me a lot. I am able to translate the work and explain to them in their own language”*.

All the respondents agreed that it is important to speak the learners' home language because some children needed interpretation in order to understand. We could thus conclude that the respondents' lack of fluency in isiXhosa is also contributing to the barriers that learners face.

4.3.3 THE CHALLENGES THAT TEACHERS FACE

Although there were some factors that facilitate positive inclusive education, the research revealed that the respondents were facing huge challenges in inclusive classrooms because they were not prepared properly to implement the policy requirements stipulated in White Paper 6. This complexity is exacerbated by a myriad of factors found in their working environment which included amongst others lack of proper training, excessive workloads, curricular changes and high numbers of learners; diverse learning needs, lack of learner discipline and stress.

4.3.3.1 Lack of in-service training opportunities

All the respondents said they were left to their own devices in the classroom as they received no training from the Department of Education. R4 opined, *"There are simple things that mainstream teachers do not know like that you cannot stand with your back to a deaf child. You have to look at them when you speak because they lip read most often. Teachers do not know these things because of lack of training"*, she added.

R6 shared the following which shows that teachers need training. *"I have a child my class who is seeing a behavioral therapist. This professional once came to the school to explain to the staff how to work with the learner. The teachers were very appreciative of this simple gesture because within those few hours they learnt a lot and they could apply the knowledge gained to other learners"*. This serves as proof that if teachers were exposed to the basics of these specialized functions, the learners, who are in need of this care, as well as the teachers, would benefit immensely.

However, R9 stated, *"The Department promised training to teachers but I have had nothing to prepare me for inclusion. We had some training for Outcomes Based*

Education to teach the general class, but nothing to address different educational needs". This lack of training is a huge concern as teachers already in the system are increasingly confronted with a wide and diverse range of learning needs in classrooms (Engelbrecht et al 2007).

R8 reasoned rationally regarding the changed role and responsibilities of teachers by stating, *"Since teachers have to teach learners with diverse educational needs in their classrooms, it is just logical that training would be important. We were just trained to teach. We do not know how to work with deaf or blind children,"* he added.

R9 was also of the opinion that specialized training is important if teachers are expected to deal with learners with special needs. *"We are not trained. There is no mention of training. We have never been called to a workshop on how to teach blind learners for example. I cannot teach blind learners. I don't know Braille so how am I going to work with them if I am not given training? I know a little bit of remedial teaching therefore I can work with children with learning problems but I have never studied the physical and intellectual barriers,"* she added.

These are significant statements because the respondents were not exposed to any new knowledge and new skills necessary to affect the changes required in terms of the inclusive education policy, whereas teacher education programs have to empower teachers to gain new understandings of teaching and learning as well as new skills to address diverse educational needs (Ainscow 1999).

R5 questioned her competence to work with deaf dumb learner. *"I do not know Sign language therefore I do not feel comfortable with having these learners in my class. We don't even have the proper resources to work with them"*. It became evident that besides not knowing how to address special educational needs, the respondents also had to contend with lack of resources such as Braille machines, hearing aids and voice amplifiers, needed to facilitate effective learning for certain learners. Deiner (1983) asserts that using these assistive devices requires specialized training. It could thus be argued that even if these resources were available, the

respondents would not have been able to use them since they did not have the technical knowledge needed to operate them.

The respondents expressed concern for the diversity of educational needs that they had to address in inclusive classrooms without the necessary expertise. *“The children have so many different problems. How will you address all their needs without training? Not having training makes my life very difficult”*, R3 stated. R5 asserted, *“Teachers have problems because they simply do not know how to teach the different types of children in their classes”*. This could be the reason why so many teachers want to leave their jobs (ELRC 2005; Winkler 2006).

When asked if they would be able to cope with learners who use Sign language or Braille all the respondents gave a definite “no”. R6 stated, *“I would find it very difficult because I have never learnt Sign language or Braille”*. R8 opined, *“Teachers definitely need training in these two fields”*. Respondents 1, 2, 3 & 4 were however familiar with hearing aids as they worked with hearing impaired children. This made it clear that the respondents would feel comfortable teaching learners with learning difficulties if they had the necessary expertise.

R1 expounded on this need for skills and knowledge by stating that she understood the learners better because of her training. *“I understand how their brains function. I have a little bit of medical knowledge therefore I understand their behavior”*. This respondent was of the opinion that mainstream teachers who have had no formal training in special education could find it difficult to work with for instance autistic learners. *“They have tantrums out of the blue and they have no social skills”*, she added. She pointed out that regular classroom teachers misunderstood these learners and said they were misbehaving because they were not aware of the characteristics of autistic children.

R10 highlighted another worrying factor which could result from lack of training. *“If you don’t have the knowledge you go trial and error; you see what works and what doesn’t. It is as if we are using the children as guinea pigs because we don’t quite know what to do”*, he added. There could be a danger attached to this ‘trial and error

method' because teachers could cause more harm if their conceptual basis is unsound which could intensify the already existing educational barriers. It could also complicate the task of the respondents even more. Schmidt et al (2002) cited in Engelbrecht et al (2007) contends that lack of knowledge can be detrimental to LSEN therefore teachers are in need of new specialist skills.

If this status quo is not changed it could happen that, *"Some teachers will just give up and not even try because they simply do not know what to do"*, as stated by R9. The frustration was also evident in a statement made by R3, *"There is no training; no workshops; no empowerment of teachers, yet they want us to teach all these different children"*.

4.3.3.2 Diversity of educational needs

All the respondents expressed concern about the diverse spectrum of educational needs that they have to address without having the necessary knowledge and expertise. In one class the teacher had three autistic learners; two with hearing problems and a few with behavioral problems. *"We even have children with epilepsy. We are not adequately trained to help these children. Many of us do not even have first aid knowledge so what do you do if a child has a fit in your class? We have problems with LSEN because we do not have the training and neither do we have the knowledge and the necessary skills to deal with their problems"*, R7 stated.

R6 was of the opinion that the policy is impractical because she's got 37 learners in her class of whom 8 have been classified LSEN. *"Besides the problems that I already have in my class, I am now burdened with additional problems"*, she added. The respondent opined that because of their barriers to learning, these learners tended to be very disruptive, which exacerbate the challenges that they pose.

The challenges faced by the respondents and the perceived incompetence could therefore contribute to a negative mindset towards inclusive education and LSEN in general which does not auger well for the education of these learners. It also seemed as if the situation is further complicated if there are too many LSEN in a class. R5 stated, *"If there are too many of them their needs are too diverse and it is*

physically impossible for a teacher to make all the different adaptations to the curriculum. You would spend 24 hours just working out different programs for the children and that is impossible". R8 added, "I've got 12 LSEN in my class and I am struggling. If I were to have more I would go mad and the learners would go mad".

R5 stated, *"Many of the learners go for occupational therapy; some see speech therapists and others see behavioral therapists. Parents who can afford it take their children to specialists to have their specific problems addressed. How are we supposed to cope with all these problems? We don't know how to address their needs; we do not have the skills".* White Paper 6 however postulates that these specialist services will be made available to learners and be easily accessible, but this did not seem to be the case.

R10 opined, *"It is unfair to place learners with physical disabilities in mainstream schools because the teachers do not know how to address their educational needs and the learners do not cope. It is unfair towards the children as well as the teachers".* This respondent was implying that it is unfair to expect teachers to address diverse educational needs for which they did not have the necessary expertise and as a consequence the learners were negatively affected because their educational needs were not optimally addressed.

All the respondents referred to lack of training in inclusive teaching practices and this seemed to be a major factor that contributed to their perception that they are unqualified to address diverse learning needs. It also seemed to be a major contributor to the difficulties experienced by the respondents in inclusive classrooms.

Besides dealing with learning problems, the respondents encountered three physical disabilities that they had to address, namely hearing and speech problems, Autism and Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

4.3.3.2.1 Hearing and speech problems

The school had a separate section that catered only for learners with partial hearing. The school still caters for the educational needs of partial hearing learners but they

are now all in mainstream classrooms. The result of this experience could be the reason why the respondents felt comfortable, to a certain extent, to address the language and hearing problems of learners with partial hearing. In addition, a retired speech therapist visited the school three times a week to work with the learners. Having the necessary experience and the services of the therapist could be the reason why the respondents opined that learners with hearing problems are not a problem and progress well in the mainstream.

R2 stated, *“We have experience of learners with partial hearing therefore they do not pose such a big problem for us”*. Although the respondents were accepting of these learners they pointed out that it is a challenge. R1 mentioned that speech problems usually lead to language delays such as stuttering and mispronunciation and this posed a big challenge for the teacher because it is difficult to understand the child. *“Learners with hearing problems can cause a lot of frustration if you do not know what to do”, it is even frustrating for the child himself*”, she added. R8 added, *“It is even more complicated when a child does not have a hearing aid”*. Muthukrishna (2002) stresses the importance of using hearing aids and good audio logical support from an early age. The respondents however revealed that the availability of these devices was a problem because some parents could not afford to buy them and struggled to get them from the Health Services.

R5 voiced, *“Speech and language is the foundation for strong reading skills and academic success, therefore it is important to identify and assess these children early so that they can be helped”*. The deduction could thus be made that if teachers are not familiar with the processes involved in assessing and teaching learners with hearing problems appropriately, huge learning deficits could be created.

The respondents mentioned a few requirements for teaching learners with hearing problems which proved that they had knowledge of the disability that ordinary mainstream teachers could be unaware of. R1 stated, *“Learners with hearing problems or those who are hard of hearing need a smaller environment because they can’t hear”*. One could thus conclude that having these learners in noisy

classes in which they do not get individual attention because of high enrolment figures would be a futile and dangerous exercise.

R4 opined, *“These learners have to be approached in a special way. They have to sit in front of the class and teachers have to face them when they speak because they lip read most of the time, which enables them to understand what the teacher is saying. This also helps them with language development. If a teacher speaks too loudly they cannot hear, therefore the teacher has to tone down to a certain level. The teacher also has to go close to them and give them clear instructions”*.

It becomes apparent that it is very important for teachers to be aware of these issues if they are to respond positively to the educational needs and rights of hard of hearing and deaf learners (Muthukrishna 2002). R3 stated the following, *“Teachers sometimes forget to take certain things into account. The other day we had a soccer day and some children were blowing on their vuvuzelas⁹. This is a problem for children with partial hearing – they closed their ears because the noise was too much”*. These teachers were justifiably concerned because Swanepoel, et al (2010) asserts that the ‘vuvuzela’ has the potential to cause noise-induced hearing loss.

The respondents also lamented the fact that none of them were able to converse in Sign Language (SL). Gowda (2011) asserts that substantial experience in SL is needed in order to communicate with the hearing impaired, therefore those who teach hearing impaired must undergo advanced training. The fact that the respondents have inadequate Sign language skills and inadequate training could thus be seen as a barrier that prevents the maximum educational participation of deaf or hard of hearing learners. The lack of knowledge could also lead to exclusionary practices, as mentioned by some respondents, if teachers do not know how to approach these learners.

⁹ A uniquely South African blow instrument made of plastic which produces a loud monotone note, usually blown at football matches.

4.3.3.2.2 Autistic children

R1 mentioned that there were 42 autistic children altogether at the school. According to Autism SA (2011) each autism sufferer can exhibit different symptoms and this in itself could be an indication of how difficult it is to teach autistic children. R4 stated, *“There are different types of autism therefore these learners can be a load on the educator who has to plan for the different types. They have different personalities and each one has his own symptoms”*. The respondent mentioned that the school only accepted those who are ‘high functioning’ because the teachers were able to work with them.

All the respondents who had autistic learners in their class voiced that autistic children could be either highly intelligent or very slow. R6 stated, *“One will battle with Mathematics whereas the other will excel in it”*. R4 added, *“In the past they were thought to suffer from a mental illness and placed in mental institutions, whereas their problem is neither psychological nor intellectual”*. R1 stated, *“The eight that I have are all different and it is very difficult. I have to go from desk to desk giving individual attention to the learners. You could say I teach a lesson 8 times because I have to explain to each one of them therefore I complete my grade 1 syllabus over two years”*.

The respondents mentioned quite a few symptoms of Autism which indicated that they were familiar with this disorder. R4 stated, *“Speech and language delay and communication problems are often early signs of autism”*. This is affirmed by Dowshen (2008) who asserts that children with autism have difficulty linking words to their meaning and therefore can’t come up with the right words to express their thoughts.

R5 opined, *“Autistic children do not know how to communicate and exhibit anti social behavior. They are loners and they don’t play. They are withdrawn and do not want to associate with other people; they talk to themselves and are obsessive about certain things. One in my class is mad about war planes. He can tell you anything about them”*, she added. Apparently these children will focus on one thing for a month or two and nothing else will matter. That will pass and they will find another

obsession. This behavior is confirmed by Dowshen (2008) who asserts that a person with autism usually becomes trapped by rigid thought patterns and behaviors.

R4 stressed that autistic children need to follow a set program. *“They are all different but need structure”*, she stated. Apparently the slightest deviation from their routine can trigger temper tantrums (Dowshen 2008). R6 opined that autistic children need structured play. *“They don’t know what play is. They have to be told what to do and the teacher has to physically show them what to do. Everyone will run to the ball and start fighting over it. We have problems and complaints everyday during break because they push each other and fight,”* she continued. R7 voiced a different opinion, *“The teachers who complain do not know how autistic children function”*. It is thus important for teachers to have basic knowledge of the symptoms of various disabilities in order to avoid misunderstandings.

R2 stated, *“It is important for children with autism to be in calm and orderly surroundings”*. This is affirmed by Dowshen (2008). Establishing an environment that is conducive to teaching autistic children could thus be problematic at this school because the classes have too many learners and the respondents were struggling to cope with the learners’ behavior.

Considering the fact that the respondents have had no training in dealing with autistic children and work without the necessary support, we could assume that they will find it very difficult to teach these learners. The stresses involved could also lead to social and emotional complications for the respondents, as well as for the learners (Dover 2007).

Studying the literature on Autism it became evident that the respondents were well-informed about the disorder. They thus had the knowledge but found it difficult to teach these learners effectively because they did not have the necessary expertise.

4.3.3.2.3 Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

R1 mentioned, *“Many learners at the school have been classified as suffering from Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD as commonly referred to. Many others are also suffering from the disorder but have just not been classified. Parents who can afford it or those who have medical aid take their children to private medical practitioners such as child psychologists and pediatricians where the diagnosis is usually made. We refer others to Frere Hospital but nothing is done. Poor parents really have a hard time and in the meantime we struggle and the children struggle”*. This statement once again revealed the negative impact that inefficient support systems had on the respondents, the learners, as well as the parents.

It became obvious that the respondents were very familiar with the symptoms of this disorder. All the respondents opined that these children were very difficult to work with. R3 stated, *“Children suffering from ADHD are constantly looking for attention at the most inopportune times. They don’t wait their turn to ask or answer something. They just blurt out the answer. They are not focused. I’d be teaching an English lesson and one would raise a hand and ask me about something that happened at break time - totally irrelevant”*. R6 supported this by stating, *“They are not coping therefore they look for attention in all the negative ways. They distract others because they are not interested in their schooling”*. R5 stated, *“Many of them cannot learn because they are language delayed and cannot focus in class”*. R8 had the following to say, *“Kids with ADHD act without thinking, they are hyperactive, and have trouble focusing. They cannot sit still and do their work; they do not listen or pay attention. It’s as if they do not hear you”*. *“The other learners are negatively affected by these constant distractions and complain about these learners’ behaviour”*, R7 stated.

The Centre for Disease Control in the USA confirms that these children may also suffer from Conduct Disorder (CD), also known as Behavioral Disorder (BD), which is a behavioral pattern characterized by aggression toward others and serious violations of rules, laws, and social norms. This was corroborated by R8 who stated, *“One would stand up and walk to the other side of the class to go*

and smack another about something that happened at break time. They can't control themselves; they just react without considering you as a teacher".

The behavior patterns exhibited by these learners are confirmed by Green *et al* (2000) who states that the conduct disorder is usually severe and highly disruptive to the person's life as well as to other people in his/her life. This makes it obvious that it could be very difficult for them to focus on their school work and achieve good results. We could deduce that the task of the respondents is complicated by children suffering from ADHD.

4.3.3.3 The workload of teachers

The respondents complained about their workload which has become too demanding. R1 stated, *"I have 15 LSEN who need individual attention with no assistant in the class. I'm alone all day and it is not easy"*. R5 summed the situation up as such, *"I have been teaching for more than 30 years and I enjoy teaching but the workload has increased dramatically over the past 15 years. It is a big strain"*.

R10 gave a detailed exposition of the heavy duty that teachers have to perform. *"Besides teaching and assessment, teachers also have to maintain a mountain of administrative duties such as the compilation of Teacher Portfolios for each subject that they teach. In this portfolio should be all documents related to assessment and teachers are responsible for ensuring that this is kept up to date. R7 also complained about the heavy administrative burden by stating, "There is just too much administration and very little time to teach. We have to teach, give projects, tests and other assignments and do lots of assessments. I think it is difficult for the children too because they also have a lot of work"*.

Besides all these administrative duties teachers also have co- and extra-curricular duties to perform. R6 explained, *"We have a learner support program for reading and Mathematics which is intended to help learners who are struggling with their schoolwork, and duties such as the coaching of various sporting codes, drama classes, Bible Fun, choir, and After-Study"*. The respondents viewed all these extra tasks as additional work.

The respondents who teach grade 4 had class teaching, in other words they stay with their class the whole day and teach all eight subjects (See Appendix G). Considering the fact that there are $\pm$ 35 learners with diverse educational needs in each class, it could be concluded that these teachers have a very difficult task as revealed by R5, *“They are all different and that makes my workload so heavy. Besides that, I have had no training for what I am doing and I have no support”*. The fact that the respondents have so many learners could also be the reason why most of them did not really modify the curriculum to accommodate the learning needs of all the learners. *“We have to prepare differentiated lessons and worksheets. How do I do that when I have 20 LSEN in my class on top of all my other duties?”* R3 questioned.

R4, who is also the ILST coordinator, described her demanding situation as such, *“I am a full time teacher with 40 learners in my class. I am also the teacher support person at the school; I have to assess all the learners in the school and LSEN have to be assessed properly. One person cannot do it and still be expected to be full time in the classroom. I have sport after school, I have a lot of marking to do and I have to keep my files up to date. Most days of the week I leave school well beyond four o’clock in the afternoon”*. The difficult position that members of the ILST find themselves in is confirmed by a report by the ECDOE (2009) which highlights the dual role of the ILST coordinator.

The challenging working conditions that these respondents work under has been identified as one of the factors that have led to the diminishing interest in teaching as a career (DOE 2007). This study found that these conditions are exacerbated by many other factors of which the teacher- learner ratio is a major one.

4.3.3.4 The teacher-learner ratio

The national norm in South African schools is 1: 35 in primary schools (ELRC 2003). In independent schools the norm is 1:16 (Walton *et al* 2009). The respondents interviewed for this study had between 35 and 45 learners in their classes. They experienced the huge number of learners in their classes as one of the most

pressing challenges in inclusion education because, together with numerous other challenges, it seemed to make life very difficult for them.

When asked to name a challenge in the classroom, R1 exclaimed, *“Definitely the high number of learners that we have in our classes”*. She actually emphasized the word ‘definitely’. R6 opined, *“I think the idea is perfect but it is putting a strain on teachers because whether we like it or not; we do have big classes”*, R10 referred to the ideal of a smaller class as “Utopian”. *“I know it is the ideal to have smaller classes but it is probably impossible under the present circumstances”*. R8 mentioned, *“It would be good to have fewer learners in my class”*.

The respondent’s concerns could be valid because it seemed as if having too many learners in an inclusive classroom impacted on the whole spectrum of teaching and learning as it led to an increased workload; affected the quality of teaching and learning; complicated classroom management, and maintaining positive discipline became nearly impossible.

R6 described her classroom situation as such, *“I think a smaller class would make a difference. You would be able to talk nicely without screaming and shouting and the learners would learn. I work so hard and try my best but sometimes I become stressed because I can’t get through to the learners”*.

R7, who had ten classified LSEN ranging from mildly intellectually impaired learners, some with ADHD and a few with partial hearing capacity had the following to say, *“I am already floundering. It is very difficult. I try my best for the learners in my care but it is not always possible to pay attention to their individual needs. I also have to consider my other learners. If I did everything according to their needs I would need a thirty hour day and two assistants”*. This is supported by Troman and Woods (2001) who argues that integration of LSEN in mainstream is sometimes at the expense of teachers being able to give attention to all members of the class and covering the national curriculum.

Other respondents also referred to how difficult it was to adapt the curriculum in overcrowded classrooms. *“I have 37 learners in my class and I don’t have the time to adapt the curriculum and work at their pace. I can hardly fit 30 learners into this class but I have 37. Look how squashed the desks are. I can’t even do group work. The Department is going to have to look at numbers if they want us to do proper work, but it is probably not going to happen because there is no money to pay more teachers”*, R10 stated.

All the respondents asserted that it was very difficult to give individual attention because they had too many learners. R8 asserted, *“At this school no class should have more than 20 learners because we have many LSEN. I love to go and sit with a child who is struggling while the rest are carrying on with their work. I love that one on one contact. If you have more than twenty learners it becomes very difficult”*. R5 concurred, *“I have so many learners it is nearly impossible to give individual attention to the weaker ones. They disappear into the woodwork because they can’t cope with the general standard in the class and because they can’t cope they withdraw into themselves or become disciplinary problems”*.

R10 made another worrying statement, *“I sometimes only discover after a few weeks that some learners do not understand the work because I have too many learners in my class”*. *“The high number of learners also makes it difficult for teachers to get to know the learners personally and address their educational needs. It becomes very difficult to really get to know the learners. I have 40 grade 4 learners and I do not know all of them”*, R4 stated. She was supported by R5 who had the following to say, *“I know the naughty ones and the others get lost in the woodwork. You do not get to know them personally and this makes it difficult to identify their educational needs. If you have fewer learners you know exactly what each one of them need. You know what you can do with them and what they are capable of – they can’t pull the wool over your eyes”*. These statements definitely justify the need for learner numbers to be reduced because it became evident that the respondents found it difficult to teach too many learners. It also seemed to complicate remedial teaching which is crucial for LSEN and could thus affect the quality of their education negatively.

R6 blamed the huge learner numbers on the fact that learners are not weighted anymore. According to her one deaf child was supposed to equal 4 learners but the system is apparently not applied anymore. *“Nowadays if they say you must have 40 learners in your class you have got to have 40 physical bodies in your class. Learners are weighted at special schools but not in mainstream schools. The learning problems and the physical barriers are the same but in the mainstream it does not count. They lose their weighting and that is unfair”*. R9 made a statement that could be very significant for inclusive education, *“I think teachers would be more willing to have LSEN in their classrooms if they had fewer learners because they would be able to cope”*.

It also became evident that the high number of learners and the diverse educational needs that the respondents had to address resulted in disciplinary problems which added to the complications they faced on a daily basis.

4.3.3.5 Behavioural problems

It became evident that lack of learner discipline is a disturbing factor in inclusive classrooms. Nearly all the respondents opined that LSEN cause disciplinary problems in class. R5 stated, *“I become quite stressed sometimes because the ones who are causing the problems are the ones who are weak and now they are stopping the others from learning”*. R10 opined, *“LSEN are children with disciplinary problems because they can’t cope with the work and get frustrated therefore they try and get the teachers’ attention in a negative way such as interfering with the learner seated next to them”*. This behavior is affirmed by Winkler (2006) who states that children who find it difficult to learn usually hide their learning problems behind disruptive behavior in class.

R1 made an example of learners who suffer from Attention Deficit (ADHD) and stated, *“I have a terrible day when these learners have not taken their Ritalin. They disrupt the class and are not focused. One will get up and walk to the other side of the class to go and argue or hit another learner. They do not focus on their schoolwork, they don’t do tasks and/or projects, they don’t study, and therefore they achieve weak academic results. They just don’t care because they get pushed from*

the one grade to the next because of education policy. It is unfair towards the teacher”.

According to R5 it only took one child to disrupt the class then the others would follow. Apparently some LSEN even become violent in class. *“We have to deal with a lot of bickering and fighting, sometimes to the extent of physical fights breaking out in class because of these behavioral problems”,* she added.

The respondents lamented the behavioral problems that they encountered and viewed it as a major obstacle to successful inclusive education. They saw a direct correlation between the large number of learners in their classes, the diverse learning needs and disciplinary problems and felt that this exacerbates the challenges they faced daily. R5 explained, *“We sit with 35-40 learners in a class who have all sorts of learning needs and disabilities. They are bound to get up to mischief and it is very difficult to control them. Sometimes it’s as if there is no teacher in the classroom”.*

It became evident that the lack of discipline and respect that prevailed in these inclusive classrooms fueled the negative mindset that existed among the respondents regarding inclusive education. R9 sounded very despondent as she stated, *“Teachers try their best but are losing the battle. Unless the parents teach their children discipline at home we are always going to sit with this problem”.* R6 also linked lack of discipline at home to lack of discipline at school. *“Discipline has gone out the window. There is no discipline at home and I can see from the way children behave in class”,* she added.

It seemed as if the major problem that the respondents had with lack of discipline was the fact that it affected their teaching. R10 stated, *“The learners do not listen; they do as they please; they do not study and do not do their tasks. I spend more time disciplining children than actually teaching. The moment they see your attention is off them there is havoc in the class. If I had fewer learners I would be able to keep an eye on all of them”.* R8 added, *“The learners disrupt lessons by shouting out*

answers; asking irrelevant questions and refusing to stop talking. They even swear and hit each other during lessons”.

Judging from these responses, it seemed as if disciplinary problems limited the actual time that the respondents had to teach and thus complicated their task in the classroom. R8 stated, *“We have one hour periods and sometimes between fifteen to twenty minutes get lost because of lack of discipline”*. This implies that the respondents had less time to focus on LSEN, as pointed out by R9, *“Many a time I discover that a period has gone by and I have not had a chance to get to that child who needs me the most because I have to tend to disciplinary problems. There are so many of them therefore some go unnoticed”*.

It however appeared as if not all learners were causing disciplinary problems as pointed out by R6. *“You do find a few learners who are well behaved but because the majority are behaving badly they overshadow the rest of the class. When someone walks in here they only see the bad and it’s so unfair towards the ones who are really trying”*.

R9 suggested a possible reason for misbehavior. *“The teacher first has to find out what is causing the child to misbehave. They could be hungry or there could be problems at home. You cannot expect the child to sit still for a long time if he/she is hungry. If they are uncomfortable they will become restless, fiddle and misbehave”*, she added. This assertion could be valid because Winkler (2004) states that disruptive behavior can be a way in which children are trying to communicate with teachers.

The interviews revealed that working with too many learners with diverse educational needs in an unruly environment put a lot of strain on the respondents, which could make them prone to stress and worsen the situation.

4.3.3.6 Stress

It became obvious that the respondents worked in a very challenging environment. Frustration was clearly tangible in their responses as they listed the challenges they faced. The statement made by R5 significantly captured the milieu that prevailed at the school. *“The teachers at this school are much stressed. You can hear it in the classrooms”*. Stoppler (2010) defines stress as internal and external factors or forces that have a psychological effect on the individual.

The interviews revealed that the working conditions of the respondents frustrated them and contributed to their stress. They complained about learners not obeying instructions and disregarding them. R6 stated, *“They don’t listen; they don’t want to work; they just do as they please. Sometimes all you can do is let them be”*. R9 referred to the situation as a *“Losing battle”*, which indicated that she felt hopeless.

To make matters worse, it became apparent that female teachers were disrespected even more as R3 stated, *“It is worse in the female teacher’s classes. They are not scared of us. Sometimes it’s as if we are not in the class”*. This state of affairs is noteworthy because 8 of the 10 respondents and most of the teachers at the school were female, therefore we could deduct that the teachers are really having a difficult task at the school.

The misconduct also sometimes affected the relationship between the respondents as R5 stated, *“We have a lot of violence in the classrooms and on the playgrounds. In most cases it involves LSEN and this also causes friction amongst the teachers because some think these learners are allowed to do as they please”*. R7 shared the following, *“They argue in class about things that happened during break, after school, in the taxis to or from school or where they live and sometimes it ends up in bloody fights”*. R3 stated, *“One will get up and go to the other side of the class to go and hit another. Disciplining them does not help. They are scared of no one”*.

R4 highlighted another serious consequence of unruly behavior by stating, *“The learners who are causing problems are actually obstructing the others from learning and that makes me stress. They know they are not on par with the other children. It*

is all very well to say they have to be part of the mainstream but they usually don't feel like being there – they feel inferior and start acting out. They need to get some recognition so they get it by misbehaving". The bad behavior thus impacted negatively on the quality and standard of education that learners who were eager to learn received.

The behavior described by the respondents revealed that some learners showed a total disregard for the authority of the teachers. Working in these contexts could thus be draining and demanding for teachers (Engelbrecht *et al* 2007; Winkler 2006). It could also have a negative impact on the psyche of the respondents as they addressed the learners but were constantly ignored.

4.3.3.7 Denial

Another issue that the respondents experienced and had to deal with is parents who refuse to acknowledge and accept that their child has got a learning disability. Some respondents stated that this denial frustrated their efforts to help LSEN and therefore complicated their work. R1 opined, *"Some parents do not easily accept that their children have problems and this exacerbates the problems we face on a daily basis. These children would cope better if their parents accepted their disability and helped them"*, she added. R6 stated, *"We have to be very assertive when it comes to dealing with parents because a lot of them are in denial"*.

R7 argued, *"It is in the best interest of the child to acknowledge his disability. You can't just sit back and pretend there are no problems. It helps the child as well as the teacher. It helps me to teach the child and it helps the child to learn"*. The respondent was of the opinion that it is mutually beneficial when parents acknowledge their children's barriers to learning and collaborated with the teachers because it made things easier for the teacher in the classroom and the learner also seemed to be more academically successful than those who denied it.

R9 used disruptive behavior as an example and stated, *“Negative behavior can be corrected when parents acknowledge it and work with the teacher to address issues”*. This indicated how important a joint effort between home and school is to successfully address the problems that children experience (Engelbrecht et al 2007).

R10 shared the following experience, *“I have a learner that suffers from ADHD in my class. He gives problems at school and at home. The parents however refused to put him on Ritalin. I addressed the situation and explained all the pros and cons and got them to change their minds. They consulted with a psychologist who prescribed the medication and also encouraged them to bond more with their child and stop shouting at him because he needed a relaxed atmosphere. Once this was established the learner was totally different and even his handwriting improved. I have never experienced something like that. We changed a negative situation into a positive one and the child just flourished”*.

This scenario proves how important a systemic approach to inclusive education where parents, teachers and professionals collaborate to address the educational needs of a child is. R3 stated, *“Working together is definitely to the advantage of the child, whose best interest should always be placed first”*.

According to the respondents parents who acknowledge their children’s learning difficulties are also more willing to play a proactive role in the child’s education. On the contrary there were also parents who refused to acknowledge that their child has a learning disability. R5 opined, *“Some parents seem ashamed to acknowledge or to tell the teachers that something is wrong with their children”*. R4 shared the following, *“We once had a parent who came here and shouted, saying we are labeling her child. She actually went to the Department to report us. The child was tested and we were proven right. We are teachers. We will never do something that is not to the benefit of the child”*. R8 added, *“It is these parents who are making life difficult for us, but they also cause problems for their own children”*.

It is evident that teachers in inclusive classrooms are facing enormous challenges therefore they need a lot of support.

4.3.4 TEACHER'S NEED FOR SUPPORT STRUCTURES

WP6 (DOE, 2001) proposes that an integrated education system with effective support systems infused throughout be created in order to optimally address the educational needs of learners with special needs. Therefore, an array of support strategies and interventions aimed at assisting teachers to cope in diverse classrooms are postulated in the policy. Following is a juxtaposing of the support strategies promised in WP6 in relation to the respondents' experiences of support and empowerment in practice.

4.3.4.1 District-Based Support Teams (DBST)

WP6 makes substantial reference to District-Based Support Teams (DBST) that will comprise of staff from Provincial, Regional, District and Head Office and from special schools. Their function is to develop and support teachers with specialized expertise and to build the capacity of schools so that they can address severe learning difficulties and be able to accommodate a range of learning needs. Some respondents questioned the availability and functioning of such a service within the Education Department. R2 stated, *"We have access to a retired speech therapist that assesses learners for us. Besides that we do not know where to go for help"*. R5 added, *"We have contacted the DBST to have children evaluated but found it very difficult to get to the right people"*.

It became apparent that the only actual contact that the respondents had with the DBST was when they needed to have learners assessed and even this seemed to be difficult to execute. However, WP6 states that the DBST will consult with teachers and identify and prioritize learning needs and barriers to learning. From what R4 mentioned it could be deduced that the process to have a child assessed was a very tedious one. *"If you want children assessed you must have a thick file of evidence on each child. I find this frustrating. In the olden days it was much easier to have underachieving learners assessed. Learners were identified and taken to the Department and assessed and that was it. Today it is as if we want to have the learners classified LSEN"*, she stated.

WP6 acknowledges the central role played by educators in identifying and assessing LSEN but it seemed as if the respondents were not familiar with the process of referring learners for assessments or who or where to send them to. R3 related the following incident, *“A lady from the Department once came to the school and shouted at us because we referred children to Parklands Special School. She told us that if a learner is identified as one with a learning disability the child should be referred to the Department with his/her file and they will place the child”*. This is the procedure teachers were told to follow but according to R3 they did not know where these people were. *“We are supposed to have all these people helping but it is not happening. We have names, but we do not know who or where they are”*, she added. This lack of awareness of resources available could be attributed to lack of proper consultative processes between schools and the District Office (Engelbrecht *et al* 2007).

R8 observed, *“Proper and accurate assessment of learners is crucial in order to be fully informed of their specific educational needs”*. All the respondents however remarked that they found it difficult to get assistance from the DBST. *“We were once told that we cannot have children assessed because it is an infringement of their rights”*, R3 added. This misinterpretation of education law is explicable because a report on the status of implementation of inclusive education at full service schools in the East London District (ECDOE, 2009) found that EDO’s and other DBST officials lacked understanding of the needs of learners who experienced barriers to learning and of White Paper 6 in general.

All the respondents sounded very negative in response to cooperation with the DBST. It became evident that the relationship between the respondents and this very important support structure was strained and could therefore also be stressful for the respondents. R6 exclaimed, *“We have to work together if we want to help the learners. We have to know that we can depend on the Department for help. At the moment we don’t know who to turn to. We are left to our own devices”*.

The status quo could also be contributing to the negativity towards inclusive education. Engelbrecht *et al* (2007) argues that expecting individuals to change without offering institutional support is politically manipulative and dishonest. R7 stated, *“We would have been more positive towards inclusive education if we had the necessary support. We became teachers to help the child. You can’t ask someone to bake a cake and not give them the proper ingredients”*.

4.3.4.2 Education Support Services (ESS)

In accordance with WP6 (DOE 2001) specialist support personnel such as therapists, psychologists, remedial educators and other healthcare professionals are to function as part of the DBST and form part of an integrated system which sustains the inclusive education system.

The respondents however declared that they found it very difficult to access the services of these specialists. R8 stated, *“On paper they promise us everything; speech therapists, psychologists, etc, but in reality there is nothing. We just don’t have the support”*. R5 mentioned, *“The school receives a lot of support from private individuals and we depend on the services of a retired speech therapist. They come in to do the school a favor. We do not know any speech therapist that comes from the Department”*.

R1 stated, *“I only know of three psychologists who have to service the whole East London District and now I hear that one of them has since resigned”*. Shortage of personnel (See Table 1) could well be the reason why support personnel are not known and not available to support the respondents. The discontent of the respondents is validated by Engelbrecht *et al* (2003) who argues that inclusive education in mainstream schools presupposes the provision of appropriate and easily accessible support services designed to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.

R4 however mentioned, *“Many learners at the school need specialist attention and we can’t help them”*. This was understandable as the respondents did not have the expertise to perform the functions of these professionals. *“We have so many needs.*

Our children need occupational therapy, others need hearing and eye tests, but we just don't know who to turn to. It is very frustrating because the parents blame us for not helping their children", she added.

According to R3 health services such as Frere Hospital were also very ineffective and did not support them in any way. *"We send parents with their children to Frere Hospital but they are sent back without being helped",* she stated. Chetty (cited in Lazarus 2006) asserts that the Health Department is committed to working with other departments in a collaborative framework. This may be the case but it is debatable because lack of service delivery and the refusal of the Department of Health to attend to children's problems were confirmed in the report on the status of inclusive education (ECDOE 2009).

Based on these assertions it could thus be argued that the dysfunctional nature of Education Support Services prolong and exacerbate barriers to learning and therefore contribute to inferior education for LSEN. In addition, it seemed as if poverty in conjunction with these ineffective support services jeopardized the education of learners whose parents could not afford private practitioners. R7 exclaimed, *"Privileged parents are able to take their children to these specialized services. What about the children whose parents can't afford it? Must they go without it and suffer forever?"* she questioned. This respondent clearly had a lot of empathy with the learners who had to go without specialized services because the frustration was tangible in her voice when she spoke about her inability to help such learners.

This lack of service delivery also imperiled the relationship between the respondents and parents and further complicated the task of teachers in inclusive settings. It became evident that the respondents would have valued the availability of these services because it would have helped them to optimally address the educational needs of LSEN.

4.3.4.3 Institution Level Support Teams (ILST)

Point 2.2.2.3 of WP6 (DOE 2001) refers to a group of educators at school level who are expected to form a committee known as the Institution Level Support Team (ILST) or commonly referred to as the school-based support team. The primary function of this team is to put in place properly coordinated learner and educator support services at school.

At the school the ILST consisted of the Deputy Principal, two Heads of Department, the coordinator and two teachers, one from the Foundation Phase and one from the Intermediate Phase. R4 had this to say about her demanding work schedule, *“I enjoy teaching but the workload has increased dramatically and this has put a big strain on me. I am in class until 13:30 but I work until 15:00 every day. I have 40 learners in my class all with different educational needs and I just can’t fulfill all my duties”*.

It became evident that the ILST members found it challenging to perform their expected functions because all of them, except the Deputy Principal, were full time teachers with pressing work schedules. Time constraints, heavy workloads and other classroom obligations emerged as the major factors hindering their optimal functioning.

R4, who was the ILST coordinator, explained the functions of her team. *“Above our normal duties we are expected to develop a professional support structure, in other words we have to support the other teachers. It is our duty to identify learner, educator and institutional needs and design learning programs, learner support material and equipment, and assessment instruments for the rest of the staff”*. It could be assumed that these additional tasks placed enormous challenges on these ordinary class teachers who already faced diverse challenges in inclusive classrooms.

R4 referred to the ILST functions as *“Lots of work and lots of stress”*. She described her task of providing assistance to the school as a whole as stressful and a major challenge. *“It is difficult to put all the assessments needed by Education Support Services together. In addition I also struggle to get appointments with the*

psychologist responsible for assessing the learners. I should know what's going on in the whole school, but I find it impossible because I am a full time teacher. Some teachers refuse to cooperate because they see the work as not part of their job description. They sometimes refuse to complete the necessary forms then I have to do it. I have to do most of the work. I even have to beg the parents to come and sign the forms because they do not want to accept that their children have learning problems. It is very difficult to convince them and sometimes they don't give their full cooperation. She sounded very frustrated as she added, "We have to do a lot of work and sometimes the learners don't even get placed".

A report on the status of implementation of inclusive education in East London found that the development of ILST's is complicated by factors such as lack of support on the part of the EDO regarding LSEN matters, difficulty with the shift from identification to implementation, pressure on the ILST coordinator to handle all administration and referrals, and the dual role of the ILST coordinator – actual teaching vs. coordination (ECDOE, 2009).

The deduction could thus be made that the functioning of these ILST's will always be compromised if teachers do not receive training and development from the Education Department.

4.3.4.4 Teacher's need for in-service training

The respondents echoed a need for in-service teacher training programs to empower them to deal effectively with the diverse educational needs that they encountered. In-service training is viewed as a major support system because it empowers teachers to address the challenges they face in the classroom (Davidoff *et al* 1997; Donald *et al* 2006). Ainscow (2000) refers to in-service training as 'On-the-job' support, and views it as crucial as attention to teacher learning is likely to have direct spin-offs in terms of pupil learning.

R8 stated, *"I would appreciate it if the Department could offer workshops and other forms of training".* R10 exclaimed, *"They expect miracles from us. I would like them to show us how to do it but I don't think they've got the capacity. We don't receive*

any support from the Department. Not one of them has ever been to this school to talk to us about inclusive education". This need is emphasized by Engelbrecht *et al* (2007) who assert that providing relevant teacher training and support and specific curriculum development projects is a major challenge for the development of an inclusive teaching and learning environment.

WP6 (DOE 2001) places the responsibility of facilitating structured programs on the various District Offices and their DBST's. When asked if such programs were presented by the DBST all the respondents gave an emphatic, *"No!"* R5 voiced her dissatisfaction by stating, *"I have been at this school for twenty two years and have never received any training. I attended some workshops but nothing organized by the Education Department"*. R7 summed the situation up in these few words, *"We have to find our own way"*. According to S. Govender, a DBST member (personal communication, October 14, 2011) schools have to request training which is usually in the form of once-off workshops lasting an hour or two. This indicates that teachers are basically left to their own devices and that in-service training opportunities are unstructured and vastly inadequate.

The interviews further revealed that since the inception of the inclusive policy none of the respondents had ever received any training aimed at equipping them to deal with the challenges brought about by having learners with diverse educational needs in their classrooms. R10 stated, *"Lack of expertise is a major obstacle which could be removed if teachers received in-service training that would provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to deal effectively with the educational needs of the learners in their care. We need more knowledge and information. If we had this we would be more positive about inclusive education"*.

It could thus be assumed that lack of focus on teachers could turn into a dilemma as the inclusive education reform efforts in schools and classrooms could be jeopardized without the continuous improvement of teachers and teacher education (Engelbrecht *et al* 2007).

4.3.4.5 The role of special schools

WP6 purports that existing special schools are to be developed to serve as resource centers. The personnel at these schools is to be empowered so that they can, as part of District Support Services, offer support to schools in the areas of curriculum development, assessment strategies and teaching methods (DOE 2001).

When asked if they received any support from Parklands Special School all the respondents said they did not have any such contact with the school. *“The only time we deal with Parklands is when we refer learners to them”*, R4 stated. R8 had the following to say, *“We would have appreciated it if we could go somewhere to get help. It would have been super if they could do all those things for us because we don’t know how to do it. We need that type of assistance”*. R6, whose own child has Down syndrome and is at Parklands, stated that the teachers at this school are struggling just as much.

These responses reveal that the teachers at special schools are not fulfilling or are unable to fulfill their mandate in accordance with inclusive education policy regulations. The respondents voiced an unambiguous need for the type of services and support that special schools are expected to deliver.

4.3.4.6 The need for assistants in the classroom

In some schools personnel are hired to assist teachers in the classroom. These people are known by a variety of names such as teaching assistant, learning support assistant, teacher aide, paraprofessional, par educator, and special needs assistant (Florian 2008). In South Africa they are commonly known as teacher aides or teacher assistants.

At the school there were only two teacher aides therefore they were not assigned to any specific class. When asked what these teacher aides actually did, R5 explained, *“They fulfil a more general role assisting teachers with the issuing and covering of books; they help with the physical needs of learners, do the photocopying, work in the library, and help with school functions”*. It became evident that these assistants did not perform any teaching functions. During the interviews the respondents

expressed the desire to have someone in the classroom that could assist them with their heavy workload. *“It would be great to have someone in the classroom who could actually help with teaching”*, R4 stated.

The respondents however had clear expectations of a teacher aide. It became obvious that they would like this person to have some form of training in dealing with children or some experience of teaching as voiced by R6, *“It should not just be anybody. This person should be professionally trained in dealing with special needs. They should be able to reinforce what I have taught and work with one of the LSEN in reading, writing or Mathematics while I’m busy with something else. In this way we would be able to give the learners that individual attention they need”*.

R7 mentioned, *“This person should not just be somebody from the street. They must have some skills in dealing with children”*, which implied that she would like the teacher aide to have experience of teaching. R9 however warned that teacher aides could become a liability for the teacher. *“You can’t just take someone off the street. If this is the case the workload will become more for me because I will have to train that person and that would be an extra burden”*, she added. R10 mentioned, *“I could do with another pair of hands but the employment of assistants will remain a pipedream because there is no money”*.

4.3.5 FACTORS RELATED TO THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

4.3.5.1 Teachers’ familiarity with inclusive education policy

When I asked the respondents to inform me about White Paper 6 most of them asked me to explain what it is about. The teachers made vague statements about the policy such as, *“I have heard about White Paper 6 but I am not familiar with the policy”*, *“I am only partially aware of the policy”*, *“I have a little bit of knowledge of inclusive education”* and *“What is that all about? Please fill me in”*.

When I mentioned the words “inclusive education” they had an idea of what I was referring to. This revealed that the respondents know about the existence of such a policy and that it purports the inclusion of learners with various educational needs in mainstream classrooms, but they were definitely not familiar with its content. Even

more alarming is a finding by the Psycho-Social Section¹⁰ of the ECDOE (2009) that Education Development Officers (EDO's) and other District Based Support Team (DBST) officials lack understanding of the nature and role of inclusive education and White Paper 6, and the needs of learners who experience barriers to learning.

When asked to explain what inclusive education is R4 responded, *"It means that a child with an IQ of 130 will be in the same class as a child with an IQ of 65"*. R7 opined, *"Deaf, blind, all sorts of children, will all be in the same class"*. Other respondents shared similar strange viewpoints. These responses revealed that the respondents were clearly not familiar with the policy and are under the impression that learners with serious medical problems will also be accommodated in mainstream classrooms, whereas the policy clearly states that special schools will be strengthened rather than abolished (DOE 2001).

These misunderstandings point to the fact that teachers still think of inclusive education in terms of serious disabilities. They equate inclusive education with the functions of special schools; therefore it raises fear amongst them because they have no knowledge of dealing with serious disabilities such as Down's syndrome. The respondents expressed concern about their ability to teach these children and felt that they would become an added burden for them. *"We have not been trained to teach children with serious defects such as Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy and Spina Bifida"*, R3 exclaimed. *"We don't know how to teach blind children; we don't even know Braille, not one teacher at this school knows Sign language. How will we cope?"* R5 questioned.

The lack of familiarity with the guiding inclusive education policy document is an anomaly that needs serious attention as the school caters for the educational needs of so many learners with special needs. Of all the respondents, only R1, who has a psychology degree and is now studying towards her B. Ed (Honors) Degree specializing in Learners with Special Needs, had actually ever seen the policy

¹⁰ A division within the East London Education District Office which deals with LSEN and inclusive education in general.

document. *“I am kind of familiar with the policy. I attended a contact session during my studies and the lecturer showed us the document but we did not really discuss it. I only know that it is all about including all children in the mainstream and not having special classes”*, she stated. When probed further it became evident that the respondent had a good understanding of inclusive education and knowledge of the various learning difficulties and physical disabilities. We could thus deduce that she benefited from her studies in the field of inclusive education and this knowledge is now benefiting the whole school as she shares it with her colleagues.

It could thus be concluded that proper dissemination and advocacy, as pledged in White Paper 6, never took place at this school, whereas already in 1997 the NCSNET/NCESS warned that if teachers and other important stakeholders such as parents are not made part of the process from the start it could jeopardize the successful implementation of inclusive education policy in South African schools.

4.3.5.2 How teachers experience inclusive classrooms

The interviews revealed that there is a direct correlation between the perceptions and attitudes of teachers and the challenges involved in inclusive classrooms which include, among others, large classes with increasing learner diversity and intensified educational needs of learners. These factors contribute to a demanding work environment for teachers which impact on how positive or negative they feel towards inclusive education. It however became evident that what may be construed as negativity towards the policy of inclusive education is actually frustration with conditions of service.

R5 illustrated the challenging situation that the respondents found them in as such, *“You have a mainstream teacher trained 25 to 30 years ago to teach learners with no apparent learning deficiencies who have below average, average and above average academic potential, using a straightforward teaching method. This teacher now has to teach 35 - 40 learners from diverse backgrounds and focus on each one’s educational need, some of which may be disabilities such as hearing problems, speech problems, blindness, autism or Down’s syndrome. The teacher*

was never exposed to any training to enable him/her to address these diverse educational needs but is now expected to adapt the curriculum, which implies that the content, teaching and assessment methods have to be made suitable to individual learning styles. In addition the teacher still has to deal with behavioral problems, a mountain of administrative tasks related to the curriculum and various extra mural activities. This is too much; it will never work."

The interviews that followed endorsed this state of affairs and revealed that the first consequence is teachers questioning their ability as teachers and feeling despondent, as depicted by R 6 who stated that she sometimes questions why she is still teaching. *"Sometimes I become so frustrated and wonder if I should not pack up and leave and find myself another job"*. R4 stated, *"The fact that I don't know how to address the various educational needs in my classroom makes me feel inadequate"*. She continued by stating that she often questioned her ability by asking, *"What am I doing wrong? Why can't I get through to them?"*

Despite unanimity about the challenges in inclusive classes, the respondents were divided in their opinion of whether LSEN should be taught in mainstream classes or not. R6 was of the opinion that if an educator went the extra mile in a supportive environment inclusive education could work while others were skeptical of its feasibility in mainstream classes. Many respondents opined, *"I've got nothing against LSEN, but..."* proving that the skepticism was perceptibly brought about by the many challenges that teachers associate with inclusive education. It is meaningful that none of the respondents were openly opposed to addressing special educational needs, but all of them had explicit terms and conditions that had to be met if successful inclusion of LSEN was to be achieved.

The majority of respondents gave a definite "Yes" to the question whether LSEN should be taught in mainstream classes. The reason for this could be because they have experience of working with LSEN. R9 stated, *"I have lived and worked in the rural areas where the classes are much bigger. There, children with special needs are relegated to the back of the class and not given the time of day. We should not complain and rather give each child the opportunity. We live in a democratic society*

and all learners have to be developed". This respondent's philosophy is congruent with the rights discourse which enshrines the rights of all children, even those with disabilities, to a quality education in mainstream classes, as encapsulated in White Paper 6 (DOE 2001).

R1, who has a very diverse learner population in her class, had a more pragmatic viewpoint of her experiences in teaching learners with special needs. She keeps her learners in the same class for two years. Although positive about inclusive education, she acknowledged the challenges she faces every day. *"You have to come to my class and see what I have to deal with. There are just too many challenges. I have been hurt, kicked and bitten. I even have to wipe their bottoms"*, she stated.

Despite these difficulties she felt encouraged by the progress she was observing. *"I feel proud when I see the progress my LSEN are making"*. Contrastingly she mentioned that her ability is challenged by autistic children. Apparently these children have no inhibitions. *"I often have to discuss improper behavior with their parents. Many of them find it difficult in mainstream and act out"*, she added. It was evident that this respondent, although qualified (to some degree) to teach LSEN, copes with certain barriers but is challenged by autistic children. We could thus conclude that teachers are more challenged by certain categories of learning barriers than others.

Notwithstanding the challenges it is not all doom and gloom in inclusive classrooms. Some respondents were even able to describe a good day. For R6, who worked with 10 LSEN, a good day entailed, *"If I didn't experience any tantrums and all the children in my class were happy and learnt even just one word that they did not know before"*. R1 also stated, *"I do have some good days but if the learner's routine has been disrupted, which can be caused by something as trivial as someone sitting or standing out of their usual order, there will be problems and it can take up to one hour just to get the class settled"*.

The school also has some success stories with inclusive education. *“Parents come begging the school to accept their children because they cannot cope at other schools”,* R5 stated. R4 related the following story, *“One of the ladies on the school’s Governing Body has an autistic child. She had nowhere to take her child and she brought him to us. You’d be surprised if you saw what this child was like when he came here compared to how he is now. It is unbelievable. At first he clung to his teacher and would not move. We got him as far as acting on the stage. He has made tremendous progress”.*

Other respondents were however skeptical about the feasibility of inclusive education. R2 declared, *“I have nothing against LSEN, but I do think they should be taught in smaller classes where they can get individual attention. In the past LSEN were taught in special classes where they received a lot of individual attention. Some of these children were then put in mainstream where they coped”,* she stated.

R6, whose own child has Down syndrome, also voiced mixed feelings about inclusive education. *“When I look at my child’s progress in relation to his age I know he needs special education”.* Because of her child’s disability, this parent / teacher did a lot of research about Down’s syndrome. *“It is very important for you as a parent to know what you are letting yourself and your child in for. Children suffering from Down’s syndrome reach their ceiling by age 13/14 when they are in grade 6 or 7 then they can’t cope in the mainstream anymore and have to go to Parklands¹¹ in any case.* Based on her personal experience she questioned the wisdom of mainstream education for certain learners.

It became evident that if the objective is to ultimately create an education system that has the capacity to effectively address the unique learning needs of all learners, it cannot be disputed that the conditions under which teachers are expected to function have to be investigated, otherwise they will find it difficult to change their

¹¹ A special school in East London that caters for the educational needs of learners with serious disabilities.

mindset and remain incompetent to effectively implement inclusive education strategies in the classroom.

4.3.5.3. The practicality of the policy

The respondents expressed concern for what the inclusive education policy requires of them and many described it as “*utopian*”. R10 stated, “*Inclusive education is utopian because it does not consider the realities of the classroom*”. He opined that the idea of inclusivity is a good one, but had reservations about the practical implementation thereof. Struthers (cited in Lazarus 2006) opines that we have to bridge the gap between policy and reality. The developers of WP6 were however of the opinion that mainstream teachers would be able to address diverse educational needs because the training they got for implementing the National Curriculum (NCS) and Outcomes Based Education is congruent with the teaching requirements of inclusive education.

This assertion is questionable because numerous research studies that focused on the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms (Eloff and Kgwete 2007; Engelbrecht *et al* 2007; Hay *et al* 2001; Peel 2005; Pottas 2005; Swart *et al* 2005) found that teachers do not think they have the necessary expertise to teach the diversity of learning needs. It has also been argued that the training that teachers received to implement the new curriculum was inadequate and superficial (Motshekga, 2009 cited in Potterton, 2010). In addition, the statement by R6 validate the fact that teachers view inclusive education as something different from the NCS, “*These are new things we have to do, therefore we need to be empowered to work in these challenging circumstances otherwise teachers are just going to give up and relegate children to the back of the class and the child will get nowhere*”.

Considering the fact that one of the two grade 7 classes had 38 learners and the general teacher-learner ratio at this school is 1: 35, with some respondents having 6 or 7 subjects to teach, it is understandable that they could find it difficult to implement the policy requirements. This individualization could also intensify their workload which was blamed for their inability to effectively implement the new curriculum and assessment policies brought in after 1994.

It became evident that the high number of learners, exacerbated by other contextual factors, is making it difficult for teachers to comply with the inclusive policy requirements. R2 opined, *“The people who drew up the policy have lost touch with what is happening in the classroom. I know this is the ideal – what the government wants, but it is not practical. Mainstream teachers will never cope”*.

The fact that the respondents had so many learners in their classes automatically resulted in a diversity of learning needs that they found difficult to address. 80% of the respondents had no special training to address different learning needs whereas Evans (2007) opines that special education requires expertise entirely different from the expertise of mainstream teachers. This sentiment was shared by R6 who stated, *“I do not think they considered the fact that we have had no training for this”*.

R1 taught a combined grade 1/2 class which consisted of 30 learners of which 15 were classified learners with learning disabilities ranging from autism, speech and hearing problems, ADD and one that suffered from incontinence. She is also the highest qualified teacher in relation to special needs at the school. Although qualified to teach learners with special needs she was adamant that the policy will not work in mainstream schools. *“It will never work. I’m having difficulty with 15 children, imagine having more; it will never work”*, she stressed. This statement also proves that the challenges that teachers associate with inclusive education contribute towards a negative mindset in relation to the application of the policy requirements. This position is supported by Engelbrecht *et al* (2007) who assert that policy initiatives should be linked to clear implementation strategies, otherwise feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness will prevail.

When asked what is needed to make the policy of inclusion work all the respondents referred to teacher training, a reduction in the number of learners per class and more support in the classroom. R 3 opined, *“If the policy is to be successfully implemented in South Africa the Department of Education will have to look at the experiences of other countries who implement inclusive education; classes have to be made smaller; specialists have to come in and work with the teachers and with the learners and support structures have to be functional and effective”*.

Regardless of all the shortcomings the respondents expressed a deep concern for the learners in their care. Their opinion on the suitability of inclusive education varied and it became evident that they were generally speaking not against the concept of inclusion. Even those who were negative stated that they would feel more positive towards inclusion if all the challenges were addressed.

4.4 Summary

This chapter focused on the experiences of teachers who teach LSEN in mainstream primary school classrooms. The respondents are well qualified and have many years experience in the teaching profession, therefore the data that was produced is rich in description, which gave the researcher an in depth understanding of their experiences in inclusive classrooms.

The interviews generated data that revealed that the teachers were challenged by inclusive education. Although these teachers were working in an inclusive environment, their concept of what inclusive education entails revealed many misunderstandings. This could be attributed to the fact that they were not properly introduced and orientated to WP6 and inclusive education, which is a serious incongruity since teachers are responsible for the implementation of educational policy.

The empirical data revealed many difficulties experienced by teachers in inclusive classrooms. These challenges are comprehensively cited in the literature on inclusive education. It is evident that these challenges make it very difficult for teachers to comply with the inclusive education policy requirements. These complexities lead to frustration and stress which affected the morale of the teachers and contributed to their negative mindset. It also resulted in feelings of despondency among the respondents which in turn impacted negatively on the standard and quality of education that LSEN receive in mainstream classrooms.

One of the major challenges facing these teachers is lack of knowledge and skills in inclusive education practices. This was to be expected since their pre-service training did not focus on inclusive practices. They found it difficult to adapt their

teaching practice and make the necessary curricular and assessment modifications and adaptations in order to address a diverse range of learning styles and abilities. They also lacked knowledge of special education pedagogy; therefore they were challenged by learners who suffer from physical disabilities such as autism and ADHD. Literature on these topics proves that it is very difficult to teach learners who suffer from these disabilities. It is also a well established fact that these fields require specialized expertise.

The challenges impacting on inclusive pedagogy indicates that teachers need a thorough grounding in inclusive education practices. This could be achieved through intensive in-service training programs. Institutions of Higher Learning will also have to develop programs aimed at equipping student teachers with the knowledge and skills needed in inclusive classrooms.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the respondents had too many learners in the classrooms (± 40) which automatically resulted in a diverse spectrum of learning needs that had to be addressed without having any support in the classroom. This, together with full extra mural programs, contributed to a heavy workload which resulted in teachers not adapting the curriculum to suit individual learning needs. They felt already overburdened and pressed for time therefore they were unable to prepare and institute these adaptations. The huge numbers also complicated giving individual attention to LSEN, an aspect regarded as very important for successful inclusive education.

The diversity also resulted in teachers having to deal with many disciplinary problems which had a direct impact on their teaching practice. The data revealed that female teachers were more challenged by learners who display negative behaviour than their male counterparts. This complicated their task and made them feel even more inadequate. The negative behaviour also contributed to high stress levels among the respondents. Another consequence is that lots of precious teaching time got lost because the respondents had to solve these behavioural issues before they could continue with their work.

The respondents were also challenged by language diversity. Most of the learners at the school were from indigenous backgrounds, whereas 90% of the respondents were English speaking. They were also not conversant in Sign language or Braille and did not have any knowledge of working with technologically advanced assistive devices except hearing aids.

It became evident that the respondents worked in an environment where resources are lacking. Despite the fact that the school caters mainly for learners from disadvantaged communities, it has been classified historically advantaged which resulted in it being deprived of much needed funding. It appears as if the Department of Education ignored societal transformation in its model of school funding which impacted negatively on the funding allocated to the school. Most parents were also not in a position to support the school financially. These factors lead to the school being dependent on sponsorships and donations from individuals, businesses and other sectors of the community.

These teachers obviously worked under very difficult conditions with very little support. They argued that the support systems put in place by the Department of Education were very ineffective. Education Support Services were also inefficient in sustaining the inclusive system. The situation was further complicated by parents who did not want to acknowledge that their children have learning problems.

The respondents thus placed a high premium on collaboration. In order to face the challenges brought about by these diverse learner populations they relied heavily on each others' support. They worked well together and also valued the support they received from the senior management of the school and other individuals and community structures. The respondents further expressed the sentiment that better collaboration between the home, the school and medical professionals could help them to effectively address the learning needs of learners.

In order to facilitate positive experiences in inclusive classrooms, these respondents empowered themselves by doing research about the various disabilities and learning styles; doing short courses on disabilities and learning challenges; and attending

various workshops and seminars. They also gained valuable experience by working with LSEN on a daily basis.

Despite all the challenges, the respondents had some positive experiences in inclusive classrooms. They did not exhibit negativity towards inclusive education nor towards having LSEN in their classrooms. The negative feelings were more the product of their conditions of service. It became evident that the respondents would have been much more positive and optimistic if the challenges they faced in inclusive classrooms could be addressed.

In the following chapter the conclusions and recommendations of the study are discussed.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter contained the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data gathered through phenomenological interviews. This chapter presents the overall conclusions of the research. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the experiences of mainstream primary school teachers who teach learners with special educational needs.

The sub-questions that supported the main question were:

- What particular experiences encourage positive inclusive education?
- What are the teachers' experiences in adapting the curriculum?
- What aspects of their experiences do teachers find challenging?
- What are the implications of the experiences of teachers for inclusive education policy in schools?

Following are the conclusions emanating from the data as pertaining to each research question. To a great extent there is alignment between the conclusions and recommendations of the study; in other words some conclusions are actually also recommendations.

5.2 Experiences that encourage positive inclusive education

Despite the challenges that these respondents experienced in mainstream classrooms they were not negative towards inclusive education and neither did they exhibit negative attitudes towards LSEN. In fact the interviews revealed that the teachers were very dedicated and had great concern and love for the learners in their care. Despite the challenges, the teachers achieved some success and they valued it. The growth and success that LSEN achieve under difficult conditions is thus a rewarding feature of inclusive education as it gives the teachers involved a sense of self-efficacy and contributes to a positive attitude. This positive mindset

further made it easier for the teachers to cope. A positive mindset thus facilitates positive experiences for teachers in inclusive classrooms.

The study revealed that it is in teachers' best interest to confront their bias towards LSEN as preconceived ideas result in negativity which complicates matters for all concerned. Educational transformation, in this case inclusive education, contributed to negative mindsets as some of the respondents were not used to teaching learners with diverse educational needs. It also brought about fear which stems from a perceived lack of knowledge and expertise. This situation could be righted by affording teachers adequate opportunities for professional development. If neglected it could impact negatively on the quality of teaching and learning because teachers who experience feelings of professional isolation are more likely to suffer from stress and burnout (Troman and Woods 2001).

The study revealed that having a positive attitude towards empowering oneself facilitates positive inclusion experiences. It is however important for teachers to have the necessary knowledge and skills for addressing diverse educational needs in inclusive classrooms, therefore they have to empower themselves by enrolling for various courses, they can also widen their knowledge-base through on-site learning, doing research and finding information, and by attending workshops and seminars.

It became evident that sharing best practice also facilitates positive experiences for teachers. Regardless of the fact that 80% of the respondents had no formal training in inclusive education and that in-service training opportunities were non-existent, the knowledge and skills that they had gained over the years enabled them to do their best for the learners in their care. Experience, combined with effective collaboration and mutual support, thus sustains teachers in dealing with challenges such as diverse learning needs and negative behaviour experienced in inclusive classrooms. Experience also enables teachers to devise creative strategies to facilitate effective learning for LSEN and for dealing with behavioural problems. Experience in the classroom, combined with academic study focused on inclusive education, could thus give teachers the capacity to deal effectively with the challenges of inclusive classrooms.

The study revealed that adding a bit of humour to lessons could relax the atmosphere in inclusive classrooms. This could also be beneficial as positive interaction between teachers and learners could minimize behavioural problems and maximize educational outcomes. Stress levels are also affected which enable teachers as well as learners to perform better in the classroom.

The study revealed that effective collaboration is a crucial aspect for the facilitation of positive inclusive education. The importance of collaboration is emphasized in all studies focusing on inclusive education. When teachers work well together they can serve as resources and support structures for each other. It is therefore important for teachers to build a sense of comraderie and support each other; share each others concerns, reflect on challenges and offer creative solutions to problems. We can also conclude that it is reassuring for teachers to know that their colleagues “have their back” which makes the burden bearable. Effective collaboration can thus sustain teachers who find themselves in difficult circumstances.

Schools should thus create opportunities for collaboration so that teachers can develop a sense of unity and interdependence and serve as resources for each other by sharing best practice, planning together, sharing information and creative ideas, discussing issues pertaining to learners and discussing various problems that confront them. This can also help to improve teachers’ teaching practice which could contribute to better service delivery from which LSEN could benefit. Feelings of despondency could also be reduced and in the process contribute to the development of a positive attitude. Collaboration in inclusive settings thus holds benefits for teachers as well as for learners.

The data revealed that support is a crucial factor for successful inclusive education. It is important for principals and other seniors to support teachers who work in inclusive settings because it has a positive impact on the psyche teachers and boosts their self confidence and sense of belonging and thus leads to a greater sense of self efficacy.

Another crucial aspect which contributes to successful inclusive education is collaboration between the school and the home. Good working relationships between parents and teachers are mutually beneficial as it facilitates better learning and better teaching. Communication is also vital as parents know more about their children than anybody else. Parents can supply teachers with vital information about the home circumstances and issues pertaining to the child and enable teachers to adapt their teaching practice accordingly and approach the child in a specific way.

The data revealed that it is important for parents to acknowledge their children's learning disabilities, work with the teachers and support the child. The study found that learners whose parents show an active interest in their education were more cooperative, disciplined, eager to learn and therefore more successful. This could be because such learners are aware that their parents and the school are working together in their best interest, therefore they exert these positive behaviours which benefits them as well as the teachers.

The study revealed that support from the community is crucial for successful inclusive education, especially in resource strapped environments. External support in the form of workshops and seminars is valuable since it leads to empowerment which in turn benefits the education of the learners.

The study highlights the importance of intrinsic values such as patience, caring, tolerance and empathy when working with learners with special educational needs. We can thus conclude that teaching should not just be perceived as just a job for which you earn a salary. However, teachers working in inclusive environments have to be vigilant that they don't care too much because it could have a negative impact on their psyche and become an added burden. This study found that female teachers were more inclined towards showing these intrinsic values than their male counterparts. The study also exposed correlation between these values and attitudes towards inclusive education. Although the female teachers were more challenged in the classroom, they were more positive in their attitude towards inclusive education than the male respondents.

The study revealed that learners can play a significant role in inclusive classrooms and serve as support structures to teachers when allowed to do certain things such as explaining concepts and generally helping each other. This could lower the burden on teachers and lead to reduced stress levels. It is also important for learners to be educated about the symptoms of disabilities in order to assist the teacher should anything happen in the classroom. This can also lead to sensitization about special needs education and various physical disabilities and reduce stigmatization.

5.3 Teachers' experiences in adapting the curriculum

It can be concluded that teachers experience difficulty with the crucial requirement of adapting the curriculum to suit the learning abilities of LSEN. Big classes which result in disciplinary problems, diverse educational needs and a heavy workload makes it impossible for teachers to implement the required multi-level approach so that all learning needs can be addressed. This is further complicated by the absence of effective support from district-based education officials. Lack of the required training, knowledge and skills in inclusive teaching practice also impacts on teachers' ability to diversify teaching practice. This is affirmed by Beattie *et al* (2006), Carl (2002), Engelbrecht *et al* (2007), and Mitchell (2008).

Effective curriculum delivery is further complicated when there is disparity between the language of teaching and learning and the home language. This results in difficulty with reading and comprehension, understanding concepts and effective communication which delays learners from completing their work and generally misunderstanding the teachers. Language disparities can thus be a barrier to successful inclusive education, which compells teachers to study the predominant African language spoken by the learners at a school. This is important because switching from English to the mother tongue (code switching) facilitates better understanding in inclusive classrooms as teachers are able to translate the work and address the learner's educational needs more comprehensively.

The study revealed that making curricular adaptations and modifications add to teachers' already challenging and stressful workloads. The fact that the respondents were pressurized by Departmental requirements to complete the syllabus also made it difficult for them to individualise lessons and allow learners to work at their own pace. The fact that departmental officials were unaware of curriculum and assessment concessions made to accommodate LSEN resulted in learners' educational needs not being met. There is thus a definite need for DBST's to be capacitated so that they can empower teachers and develop the inclusive education system.

The study reveals that there are alternative methods that teachers can employ to reach all the learners in their classrooms. An inclusive education curriculum should therefore be flexible enough and allow teachers to sometimes use unorthodox methods which they find effective in addressing diverse learning styles and abilities.

The study reveals that it is important for LSEN to have an adapted curriculum and assessment standards because it is futile to brush all learners with the same comb regardless of learning need or disability. Such practices would contradict the objectives of inclusive education.

It is therefore imperative for the Department of Education to revise existing assessment and progression protocol as it frustrates the efforts of teachers and contributes to a weakening of the education system. Definite progression requirements also need to be formulated so that certain standards can be maintained. Teachers should also be able to thoroughly assess LSEN in order to determine whether they are ready to progress to the next grade or not. Doing so could counter the practice of assessment fraud and what Collett (2010) refers to as "automatic progression".

The workload of teachers holds significant consequences for inclusive education. It creates demands on teachers that are both physically and mentally overwhelming. A heavy workload also results in teachers not differentiating the curriculum nor applying any assessment concessions.

The study reveals that teachers who are teaching autistic children or those suffering from ADHD have to apply individual teaching because the learners cannot focus when taught in a group. This means that the same lesson has to be taught as much as ten times. This holds serious implications for teachers' workload and dictates that the number of learners in a classroom be reduced where a significant number of classified LSEN are present. Failing to do so will impede the effective development of inclusive education in the country.

5.4 Experiences that teachers find challenging

The study revealed that teachers are experiencing huge challenges in inclusive classrooms. It became evident that the factors that impede on teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms form a complex web; the one impacting on the other and not one could be isolated as being more challenging as or of more importance than the other. It can thus be concluded that an integrated approach which includes all stakeholders is needed for inclusive education to work. All aspects of the school have to be paid attention to and this is where whole school development could play a significant role.

The complexity relating to inclusive education is brought about by a myriad of factors that range from the inability to teach effectively, large numbers of learners in the classroom with diverse educational needs, lack of learner discipline and diligence, lack of appropriate training and a deficiency in skills and knowledge, which ultimately lead to stress and a lack of confidence and competence. These factors have been well researched and are frequently identified in local as well as international studies on inclusive education (Donald *et al* 2011; Eloff and Kgwete 2007; Engelbrecht and Green 2007; Forlin 2007; Harrison 2011; Henderson 2010; Nel 2011; Roffey 2011; Saloviita 2009; Torreno 2011). This emphasizes how important it is to pay attention to these factors if successful inclusive education is to be achieved.

It became evident that mainstream teachers are not opposed to inclusive education but their inadequacy in effectively addressing learner needs and the difficulties that they experience in inclusive classrooms leads to feelings of negativity and despondency. Regardless of the very difficult circumstances the respondents were

remarkably positive and more than willing to learn more about inclusive education in order to broaden their knowledge and skills base.

Major issues emanate from the study that will have to be attended to if teachers are to change their mindset towards inclusive education. The first factor is lack of professional development. This factor has been identified in various studies (Eloff and Kgwete 2005; Pottas 2005; Walton et al 2009) that focused on the role of teachers in inclusive education in South Africa.

The study reveals that lack of training causes a great amount of anxiety and is a huge concern for teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms as they are increasingly confronted with a diverse range of learning needs in the classroom. Concern about not being able to address the educational needs of learners is the primary fear experienced by teachers working in inclusive contexts. This fear is however also linked to deep concern for the well being of learners and actually discloses how dedicated certain teachers are to the education of learners in their care.

Whether it is perception or not the fact remains that teachers think they lack the requisite skills and knowledge. If this is the case their mindset towards addressing diverse educational needs would remain negative which could psychologically obstruct any attempt to implement inclusive education practices and the application of pedagogically sound teaching methods that could facilitate positive learning for those who need extra help.

The majority of teachers in South Africa had their training when education was not only segregated along racial lines but also according to learning ability therefore it is not only imperative but also logical that there is a need for teachers to be re-trained in inclusive education practices. If this is not done it will be very difficult to realize effective inclusive education. However, regardless of the fact that the Department of Education is primarily responsible for teacher education (DOE 2007) it is quite evident that teachers who are faced with so many challenges cannot become complacent and wait on the Department of Education to empower them. Teachers should engage in their own professional development by taking study courses that

focus on inclusive education. This responsibility is emphasized by many scholars (Ainscow 2000; Dommissie 2009; Engelbrecht *et al* 2007; Lazarus 2006; Millar 2011; Mitchell 2008; Sharma *et al* 2006; Stubbs 2008). It also goes without saying that any professional, whatever field they are in, need to keep up to date with professional development otherwise they could stagnate and become ineffective.

The study also revealed that the capacity of newly qualified teachers to address diverse learning needs and physical disabilities is lacking when they enter the field. This assertion is supported by Engelbrecht and Green (2007). Of the 10 respondents only two had any qualification aimed at LSEN. These two teachers, although also challenged by the diversity of educational needs in their classrooms, played a proactive role in the development of inclusive practices at the school. The data thus proves that academic study in inclusive education practices could be beneficial to the education system. Inclusive education should therefore form an integral part of teacher training and practical knowledge and skills in special needs education should be infused in all teacher training courses and not just be a once-off theoretical module.

Another aspect that deserves urgent attention is the identification and assessment of learners with special educational needs. If these functions are expected from teachers it is crucial to empower them with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform such functions. In addition to knowledge and understanding of barriers to learning, teachers also need practical training in teaching strategies that can be applied in the classroom. The data revealed that teachers find it difficult to translate theory into practice, in other words they lack the expertise to integrate the NCS with inclusive education policy regulations in order to make their teaching practice more inclusive. The study validate that it cannot be taken for granted that teachers have the skills to adapt the curriculum and apply multi-level teaching approaches without considering the lived realities of the classroom. Ignoring the challenges that teachers face could lead to serious deficits in the education of LSEN and aggravate the barriers faced by certain learners.

Teachers therefore need to acquire specialist skills in recognizing, identifying and addressing barriers to learning and creating inclusive and enabling teaching and learning environments for all learners that will ensure individual access and participation in the curriculum. They should thus have the expertise that will allow them to make the necessary accommodations and adaptations to teaching, learning and assessment, which are very difficult to execute in inclusive classrooms without the necessary expertise considering the diversity of learning needs. The importance of having these skills is emphasized by Engelbrecht *et al* (2007); Potterton 2010; Saloviita 2009; Stubbs 2008; Tomsho 2007; Torreno 2011).

The respondents had broad knowledge of the symptoms of autism, but lacked the skills to teach these learners effectively. The conclusion can thus be made that knowledge of a disability is not enough to successfully address the educational needs of certain learners and that it should be married with skills and expertise that can be applied in the classroom. We can also conclude that the more diverse the symptoms of a disability, such as in the case of autistic learners, the more challenged and negative teachers are towards addressing the educational need or having the learners in the classroom.

The importance of having appropriate knowledge and skills to address certain physical disabilities and the availability of specialized support is confirmed by the fact that the teachers felt competent with addressing the educational needs of learners with partial hearing. This competence was brought about by the valuable experience that the teachers have gained from working with such children over the years. The services of a retired speech therapist also lightened the plight of the teachers and facilitated successful inclusive education for the learners. In turn this capability resulted in a positive mindset towards learners with partial hearing, whereas the respondents were negative towards autistic learners because of the fact that autistic children need to be treated and taught by highly specialized professionals.

Mainstream teachers who are unfamiliar with the processes involved in identifying, assessing and teaching learners with hearing problems for example can create huge learning deficits for such learners. We can deduce that the education of these learners could be even more effective if teachers were conversant in Sign language. The impetus is thus on teachers to become familiar with Sign language.

Expecting teachers to teach learners with diverse learning needs and physical disabilities without endowing them with the necessary skills and knowledge is unfair towards the learners as well as the teachers. It could also be a violation of their basic human rights.

In order to address the challenges involved in inclusive education the onus is on universities to structure programs that will equip teachers not only with the theory of inclusive education but also with practical skills. For in-service teachers Institutions of Higher Learning and even Further Education Training Colleges should develop one or two year courses that will focus exclusively on different aspects of inclusive education. A thorough study of WP6 should form part of any training program focusing on inclusive education in order to familiarize teachers with the salient features of the policy. By doing so misunderstandings pertaining to the policy and confusion as to the roles and responsibilities of different entities could be curtailed. Teachers should be taught how to identify and assess children who experience learning difficulties; they should study the symptoms and the impact of various learning barriers on teaching and learning; they should be exposed to effective teaching and behaviour modification strategies and how to handle stress in inclusive classrooms. The focus should thus be on actual classroom practice, in other words empowering teachers with knowledge and practical skills that are of immediate benefit in the classroom.

As part of their studies students should do some of their practice teaching at special schools in order to gain first-hand knowledge and experience of various learning needs and physical disabilities. A well coordinated program should thus be developed so that all prospective teachers can spend a month or two at a special school where they can observe and learn from special education teachers in

practice. The successful implementation of inclusive education therefore holds huge challenges for Institutions of Higher Learning.

A good example is the special needs education awareness course offered to student teachers in Botswana (Dart 2006). This course is offered at colleges of education and gives students a broad introduction to the area of special education. Students study the development of policy as it relates to children with special needs. They are given the opportunity to explore what inclusive education entails and to practice some of the skills necessary to support the system. The aim of the course is to make students aware of the types of special educational needs in schools. They study various categories of special needs such as visual impairment, hearing impairment and learning difficulties. Students are taught the basic skills of observing, identifying, and supporting learners with special educational needs.

During their teaching practice students get an assignment that guides them through the process of identifying and assessing one particular learner who is in need of learning support. Back at college they have to study the learner and his/her specific learning problem and develop an individualized education plan (IEP) for the learner. Throughout their years of study they visit various schools and non governmental organizations (NGO's) that cater for a range of learners with special needs.

Exposure to inclusive practice at college or university could also make teachers aware of the need for more inclusive practices and give them some experience of implementing it at classroom level. It could also help to change teachers' attitude towards children with learning difficulties and disabilities. Having basic knowledge of the symptoms and characteristics of learners with disabilities could also reduce misunderstandings between teachers.

Another factor that complicates inclusive education is having too many learners in a classroom because it results in a diverse range of learning abilities. This is further complicated by lack of necessary expertise to address diverse learning needs effectively which results in some learners not getting an appropriate education. The education of LSEN is thus compromised in large classes because teachers are

unable to give intensive remediation to those who need it. Having deaf or partial hearing learners in full classes where individual attention is nearly impossible and where other learners exhibit bad behaviour is a good example of how counterproductive large classes are for effective learning. There is thus merit in teachers' call for lowering numbers in inclusive classrooms. It can thus be concluded that smaller classes could contribute to effective inclusive education.

The data reveals that inclusive education brings about a lot of disciplinary problems that frustrate teachers because they are unable to effectively address them. It became evident that there is a direct correlation between the large number of learners, the diverse learning needs and disciplinary problems. Disciplinary problems result in a lot of time wastage which is a precious commodity in inclusive classrooms. The study also reveals that female teachers suffer the consequences of bad behaviour more intensively than their male counterparts. Parents who negate their parental responsibility of instilling positive values in their children contribute to the difficulties that teachers experience with certain learners.

The study revealed that certain categories of LSEN such as those suffering from ADHD and autistic learners were primarily responsible for behavioural problems in inclusive classrooms. This could be because such learners become frustrated with their inability to cope with the quantity and standard of the learning content and resort to negative behaviour which affects the teacher as well as the other learners in the class. The challenges that LSEN pose therefore impact on the quality of teaching and learning that learners receive in inclusive classrooms.

The workload of teachers working in inclusive settings is another serious issue that demands immediate attention. The nine subjects that mainstream teachers have to teach, in conjunction with other administrative duties and other inclusive education challenges contribute to a heavy workload that makes it nearly impossible for teachers to modify the curriculum and individualize lessons to suit the different learning abilities. It also makes it difficult for teachers to pay individual attention to LSEN which is a crucial factor for successful inclusive education.

The demands of inclusive education therefore affect the quality of teaching and learning, it complicates classroom management and maintaining positive discipline becomes nearly impossible. These demands to a great extent contribute to the negative mindset among teachers. If the experiences of teachers in mainstream inclusive classrooms are to be improved, their workload as well as the number of learners in their classrooms will have to be reduced.

In addition to all the challenges, the plight of teachers working in inclusive settings is further complicated by parents who refuse to accept their children's learning problems and/or disability. This complicates the task of teaching LSEN even more and has a negative impact on their education. In most cases this refusal stems from fear of stigmatization which indicates that there is a need for society in general to be educated about special needs education. On the other hand, parents who acknowledge their children's disability are more cooperative, therefore a positive home-school relationship can be established whereby the teachers as well as the parents collaborate to support the child. This collaboration is very beneficial as it results in good academic achievement, better learner behaviour, a positive classroom climate and an overall positive school climate.

Needless to say the generally difficult conditions under which teachers work in inclusive settings increases stress levels and contribute to feelings of inadequacy and despondency. These factors clearly play a huge role in determining the attitude of teachers, which is usually more negative among male teachers than female teachers. The stressors associated with inclusive education therefore have to be addressed so that teachers can have an enhanced sense of efficacy which could result in positive attitudes towards inclusive education.

5.5 Implications of the experiences of teachers for inclusive education policy in schools

There are a substantial number of issues related to the inclusive education policy that will have to be addressed if the objective is to facilitate quality inclusive education for learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools. There is clear indication that an inclusive education policy should be aligned to the day to day realities of the classroom, therefore consultation with teachers should be an integral part of the development of such a policy.

The formulators of WP6 were well aware of the challenges that come with inclusive education because the challenges exposed by this study are referred to in WP6. The policy is well formulated but there are lots of weaknesses which indicate that the policy needs further development that should be based on the challenges that teachers encounter.

Some respondents viewed the inclusive education policy regulations as “utopian” because it did not consider the realities of the classroom. The knowledge and skills required by teachers in inclusive settings cannot be taken for granted. It cannot be assumed, as stipulated in the policy, that the training that teachers received for the NCS and OBE will be sufficient for making the necessary curricular and assessment accommodations and adaptations. The vision of the NCS should be aligned to that of the inclusive education policy because teachers clearly found it difficult to translate theory into practice, which resulted in them actually not implementing the policy regulations. Teachers should also be aware of accommodations and concessions that are allowed in terms of teaching and assessing LSEN. All these important regulations are not stated in the policy.

This results in another dilemma for teachers because teachers are still required to teach the full national curriculum to regular learners, regardless of the concessions allowed for LSEN. In accordance with policy teachers are required to apply multi-level instruction. This implies that teachers have to prepare main lessons with variations that are responsive to individual learner needs. They also have to adapt

their assessment methods to suit different learning abilities and the learners have to be allowed to work at their own pace. In practice this means that teachers have to plan according to the learning needs of all the learners in the class. One respondent had 10 LSEN in her class; 7 autistic learners and 3 suffering from ADHD. The expectation is thus that this teacher must plan her lessons, on a daily basis, to suit the learning styles of these ten learners and that of the rest of the class. This is obviously an immense task that will frustrate any teacher.

The data exposes that a well structured and coordinated program and vision for the effective implementation of inclusive education in the East London district is lacking. A concerted effort is therefore vital in order to create an environment that will be conducive to the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Not being familiar with the salient features of WP6 resulted in misconceptions that contributed to feelings of negativity and despondency towards inclusive education. Teachers therefore have to be exposed to a thorough study of the policy in order to familiarise themselves with the most pertinent provisions thereof.

Inclusive education policy regulations clearly entail substantial change in teaching practice which is experienced as challenging, whereas the policy states that teachers should be in a position to implement its regulations without further training. Effective implementation of any inclusive education policy requires well qualified and experienced teachers who possess the requisite knowledge and skills. Teachers should be well trained in inclusive curriculum implementation and assessment methods that focus on diverse ability levels. They should also have secure subject knowledge which should then be combined with an expertise about making that knowledge accessible to students with learning needs. Teachers should also be able to maintain high standards of behaviour, particularly in the levels of motivation and expectations within learners.

The study therefore confirms that the re-training of teachers will have to be prioritised. The importance of well trained teachers is emphasized in WP6 but for the past ten years nothing has been done to effectively capacitate the respondents of this study, although the school where the research was undertaken is registered with the Department as one that addresses the educational needs of LSEN. If teachers perceive not to have the knowledge and skills needed to address the diversity of educational needs that occur in their classrooms, as revealed in many other studies (Eloff and Kgwete 2007; Moore 2008; Nel 2011), their mindset could remain negative. If the situation is not changed it could pose very difficult to change teachers' attitude and develop effective inclusive education practices.

What should have been done from the onset is the formulation of policy that will outline a clear program for the re-training of in-service teachers. What is needed are not short workshops presented after school, but well planned and well structured one or two year long courses which could be done on a part-time basis with practical sessions during school holidays. Inclusive education should thus form an integral part of teacher training at university level.

Practicing teachers should also be encouraged to further their studies in fields such as educational psychology, remedial teaching or speech therapy which would have a significant impact on their efficacy in inclusive education. One or two teachers per school could be identified and issued with bursaries to study in these specific fields. These teachers could become valuable assets to schools as they would share their expertise and knowledge with other staff members and sustain the education system. Teachers would also feel confident knowing that they have permanent on-site support specialists to consult with. This is what facilitates effective inclusive education in most independent schools in South Africa (Walton *et al* 2009). Having these on-site specialists could also expedite the process of developing the inclusive education system.

The study also highlights another worrying factor that correlates with inadequate training namely the fact that teachers could neglect the education of LSEN if they are unable to effectively address their educational needs. This could impact negatively on the education of LSEN and could, if allowed to continue, lead to more serious educational and psychological barriers.

Another significant factor that impacts on the effective implementation of inclusive policy is the high learner enrolment that teachers have to contend with. The study reveals that it is very difficult and actually counterproductive to have 40 learners (or more in some cases) in classes that accommodate diverse learning needs and physical disabilities. Having too many learners in a class makes it very difficult for teachers to make the required adaptations to the curriculum and assessment methods. Behavioural problems are also prevalent in such big classes. In addition, the fact that teachers are not qualified special needs educators and therefore lack the requisite knowledge and skills in inclusive teaching practice makes inclusive education a recipe for disaster. Giving individual attention to LSEN is very complicated in too full classes. Such classes could also exacerbate the symptoms of disabilities such as autism as these learners need a structured program and a calm learning environment (Autism South Africa). The education of LSEN will therefore always be compromised in big classes, thereby working against the objectives of inclusive policy and rendering it impractical. It also became evident that high numbers and diversity of learning needs are two factors that strongly contribute to mainstream teachers' perception that inclusive education will not work.

There is thus a definite need for the teacher learner ratio to be lowered from 1:40. A possible solution to these challenges could be the application of weighting, as discussed in chapter 2, which could result in the reduction of learner numbers in classes where a significant number of classified LSEN are present.

Another factor that impedes on inclusive policy is deficiency of resources such as hearing aides, therapy rooms, multi-sensory rooms, soundproof rooms and soft play rooms. These resources are necessary for the identification, assessment and teaching of certain categories of LSEN such as those suffering from speech and

hearing problems. It is thus difficult for teachers to effectively address these learning barriers in the absence of these resources. Successful implementation of inclusive policy could thus be jeopardized if the necessary resources are not made available to mainstream schools.

It also became evident that teachers are bearing a heavy workload which is contributing to their inability to effectively implement inclusive education. Heavy workloads impact negatively on inclusive policy because it makes it difficult for teachers to pay attention to the educational needs of those for whom the policy is intended. The workload of teachers therefore has to be reduced so that they can pay adequate individual attention to LSEN. The call for teacher assistants to be employed could help to reduce teacher workload.

Effective inclusive education requires the availability of diverse support systems. The experiences of other countries who have adopted inclusive practices show that the provision of adequate support to educators and centers of learning is critical in determining success (Engelbrecht *et al* 2003). An array of support systems is postulated in WP6 which should be developed by the provinces in order to support teachers and the education system as a whole. It became evident that these systems are highly ineffective in the East London District (DOE 2009) which complicated matters for the respondents.

Substantial reference is made in the policy of a District-based Support Team whose functions are crucial for the development of inclusive education since they have to support teachers and empower them with knowledge and practical skills. The data reveals that this 'team' is highly ineffective. This is understandable since the team consists of only 4 education specialists who have to service and support a huge district that consists of 350 schools (S. Govender, DBST member, personal communication, October 14, 2011). There is thus a pressing need to capacitate this team with the necessary human resources and skills needed to sustain the inclusive education system.

The role of special schools as resource centres is well described in the policy. The teachers at these schools are supposed to form part of the DBST and support mainstream teachers. The data however reveals that these schools are unable to fulfil their supporting role. Teachers at these schools should be capacitated because the respondents expressed a desire for effective collaboration with them as they were in need of their expertise and resources. Special schools could play a significant role in the development of the inclusive education system and should therefore be developed and capacitated so that they can fulfil their support obligations.

The availability of specialized services such as educational psychology and occupational or speech therapy are also crucial in inclusive education. These professionals have expertise that is needed by LSEN which teachers do not possess. Education Support Services in the district are however inefficient and basically non existent. The reason for this is because the very same 4 education specialists who form the DBST basically serve as ESS (S. Govender, DBST member, personal communication, October 14, 2011). Service delivery at the local Frere Hospital was also very slow and inefficient.

The ineffectiveness of education support systems thus hinder the effective support needed by certain learners and impacts negatively on the educational experiences of LSEN in mainstream schools and thus on the education system as a whole. This ineffective service delivery also discriminates against the poor because some parents can afford private practitioners to work with their children, whereas those who depend on the state experience great difficulty to access necessary services.

Effectively addressing the needs of LSEN thus requires an integrated system of service delivery and support. Parents, the community, the Education Department, education specialists, special education teachers and health professionals should form part of education support services and work together to support teachers and learners with special needs. Development of human resources at all levels (schools, mainstream as well as special, parents, district office personnel, education

specialists and health professionals) could prove to be critical for successful inclusive education.

A well-structured and well-coordinated system of collaboration should be established between the Education Department and other government departments such as the Health Department, Social Services and Public Works in order to develop an integrated system of service provision to LSEN and their teachers and parents. In this way duplication of services and functions could be minimized.

5.6 Positive aspects emanating from the study

Despite the fact that the respondents of this study were challenged by the complexity of inclusive education, their attitude towards LSEN and inclusive education in general was positive. The feelings of despondency were brought about by their inability to effectively address the educational needs of learners with special educational needs and the inefficiency of support systems. The study however reveal that these teachers deeply care about the well-being of the learners in their care and went the extra mile to fulfil their needs, both educationally and physically.

5.7 Limitations

The fact that this is a small scale study that only focused on one mainstream primary school in the East London region could be regarded as a limiting factor because it rendered the sample relatively small.

Phenomenological studies such as this one make detailed comments about individual situations or experiences which do not lend themselves to direct generalization (Lester 1999; Smith 2007). This study did not focus on high schools or on special schools, therefore the findings and conclusions are not generalizable to other educational contexts. Bogdan & Biklin (2003) however argue that qualitative researchers' concerns are not whether or not their findings are generalizable but rather to which other setting and subject the findings are generalizable to.

The school where the research was conducted has a long history of working with learners with special educational needs, including some physical disabilities, therefore it could be assumed that the teachers shared rich experiences regarding the dynamics of inclusive classrooms with the researcher.

There could also have been limitations regarding data collection. The personal involvement of the researcher could permit both bias and distortion to the data collected and the research process (Ochsner 2001). Various procedures were however employed to counteract incorrect interpretation which included corroboration of the findings and conclusions by the respondents.

5.8 Possibilities for future research

This study focused only on the experiences of teachers in mainstream primary schools, which also served as a limitation to the study. The fact that the findings of the study cannot be generalized to other environments actually opens up many avenues for future research.

Literature disclosed that teachers at full service schools received substantial training and support; therefore an investigation of their experiences could inform regarding the elements necessary for the development of an effective inclusive education model. It would therefore also be interesting to investigate the impact of inclusive education on teachers who have the required knowledge and skills and where sufficient support structures are in place, in other words teachers who work in environments that are conducive to positive and effective inclusive education, much like the study conducted by Walton *et al* (2009) in independent schools.

A study on the state of inclusive education at High Schools would also be worthwhile. It would be interesting to know how LSEN are supported in High Schools and what options are available to these learners after completing formal schooling.

Lastly an investigation into the functioning of special schools could also make a huge contribution to the development of effective inclusive education.

5.9 Conclusion

This study categorically reveals that inclusive education is a complex educational program and that one prescriptive model will not adequately serve the educational needs of all learners. This means that a “one size fits all” approach will be counterproductive therefore inclusive education policy should not be too rigid and prescriptive.

Schools and teachers should rather be empowered and supported to develop their own practical models, operating within national policy guidelines. The policy should thus be flexible, allowing teachers to create their own methods of application, constantly reflecting on their practice, consulting with each other and other roleplayers, constantly revising and making the necessary adjustments so that the educational needs of LSEN can be adequately addressed. The development of an effective inclusive education system should thus be an ongoing process.

The state will however always have significant roles to play in developing inclusive centers of learning through proper planning and supporting schools, empowering teachers and supplying them with the necessary human and material resources. There should also be a clear shared vision in order for the inclusive education initiative to really take off. The focus should be on developing inclusive schools and there should be willingness on the part of all stakeholders to develop an inclusive education system. We should not be talking about education anymore, but rather about inclusive education.

The themes emerging from this study are similar to those identified by Eloff and Kgwele (2007), Moore (2008) and Nel (2011) who carried out studies relating to inclusive education. It is also noteworthy that the findings of this study are analogous with those carried out by the Psycho-Social Section of the East London District in December 2009. Empirical research thus confirms that the challenges that teachers face in inclusive classrooms should not be underestimated.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Letter to Education Department requesting permission to conduct research at schools.

12 Kelly Road
Amalinda
East London
5247
February 2009

The Circuit Manager
DoE: East London District Office
East London
5200

Dear Madam

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am currently doing my Masters Degree in Education through the University of Fort Hare and request permission to carry out fieldwork at a certain school in the East London District. The day to day functioning of the school will not be disrupted because all activities related to the research will be conducted after hours at a convenient time for the teachers.

My topic of research is inclusive education with the focus on the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The research will be qualitative in nature; therefore I would like to conduct interviews with some educators. This will work on a voluntary basis. In order to ensure confidentiality the name of the school and persons involved will not be mentioned in the study.

I would appreciate it if I could visitPrimary School as they have inclusive classes.

Permission will also be sought from the respective school principals and those teachers willing to voluntarily participate in the study. Please treat this request as urgent as time to complete the study is limited.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information. You may also contact my supervisor at the University of Fort Hare. Her details are as follows:

Prof. X. Mtose Tel: 043 704 7229 Email: xmtose@ufh.ac.za

Looking forward to a positive response

Yours in education

A. Naidoo

Email: allanq@vodamail.co.za

Cell: 0844201927

APPENDIX B: Letter to principal requesting permission to conduct research at school.

12 Kelly Road
Amalinda
East London
5247
February 2009

The Principal
.....Primary
East London

Dear Sir / Madam

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I am a teacher at St Anne's Primary School currently doing my Masters Degree in Education through the University of Fort Hare.

My topic of research is inclusive education with the focus on the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The objective of the research is to gain insight into the experiences of teachers who teach learners with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. Your institution is known to focus on LSEN therefore the teachers fit the profile of respondents perfectly. The research will be qualitative in nature; therefore I request permission to conduct individual interviews with three teachers from the Foundation Phase (grades 1, 2 & 3), five from the Intermediate Phase (grades 4, 5 & 6) and two from the Senior Phase (grade 7).

Please bring this request to the attention of your SGB. I can assure you that the day to day functioning of the school will not be disrupted as I am planning to conduct all activities related to the research after hours at a convenient time for all concerned.

There are no risks involved in this study and participation is on a voluntary basis. Permission to conduct the research has also been sought from the Department of Education. The name of the school and persons involved will be held strictly confidential and will not be mentioned in the study. I will however be happy to share the findings with the participants once the research has been completed.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information. You may also contact my supervisor at the university of Fort Hare. Her details are as follows:

Prof. X. Mtose Tel: 043 704 7229 Email: xmtose@ufh.ac.za

Looking forward to a speedy response as time to complete the study is limited.

Yours in education

A. Naidoo

Email: allanq@vodamail.co.za

Cell: 0844201927

APPENDIX C: Permission granted by Education Department

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

Dear colleague

I am a teacher at St Anne's Primary School currently doing my Masters Degree in Education through the University of Fort Hare.

My topic of research is inclusive education with the focus on the experiences of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The objective of the research is to gain insight into the experiences of teachers who teach learners with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. The research will be qualitative in nature; therefore, I would appreciate it if you could avail yourself to be interviewed for the purpose of gathering data for my study.

There are no risks involved in this study and participation is on a voluntary basis. If at any time during the study you wish to withdraw your participation, you are free to do so without prejudice. All information gathered will be used only for the purpose of completing the study and will remain strictly confidential. Names of schools and persons involved will also be held confidential and will not be disclosed in the study.

Permission to conduct the research has also been sought from the Department of Education. I can assure you that your participation in the study will not interfere with any of your duties as the interviews will be conducted at a convenient time for all concerned.

If you have any questions or require any further information prior to your participation or at any time during the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. My contact details are: Email: allang@vodamail.co.za Cell: 0844201927

My supervisor is Prof. X. Mtose, the Executive Dean of the Education Faculty. Her contact details are: Tel: 043 704 7229 Email: xmtose@ufh.ac.za

Thanking you in anticipation for your willingness to be interviewed for the purpose of completing my research project. It is highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

A. Naidoo

AUTHORIZATION

I, the person signed below, hereby acknowledge that I have read the above and understand the nature of this study. I understand that by agreeing to participate in this study I have not waived any legal or human right.

I also accept the following:

The topic and purpose of the research interview has been explained to me.

I may decline to answer questions I consider inappropriate.

My comments will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

My participation will be kept anonymous.

I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Participant's signature:..... Date:.....

Researcher's signature:..... Date:.....

APPENDIX E: TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

How are you?

How long have you been teaching?

How long have you been at this school?

Do you enjoy teaching?

The policy on inclusive education, White Paper 6, states that all learners, regardless of their learning needs, should be accommodated in mainstream schools.

What is your opinion of this?

Do you think this policy will work in regular schools?

How do you approach learners with special needs in your classroom?

How do you cope with the diversity of learning needs in your classroom?

Please tell me about your experiences of teaching learners with special educational needs.

What does the term “inclusive education” mean to you?

What categories of LSEN do you have in your classroom?

How have you dealt with inclusive education in your own classroom?

Would you claim that teaching LSEN in regular schools generally works?

Should LSEN be part of regular schools? If yes / no, what are the reasons?

What specific attributes does a teacher need to possess to work with children with special needs?

How do you cater for the educational needs of learners with special needs?

How do you adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of all the learners in your classroom? Give me some examples.

What are the challenges involved in teaching these learners?

Are there any benefits involved in teaching these learners?

Tell me how these learners are generally treated in regular classrooms?

How do you feel about these children?

Have you received any training in inclusive education?

If you have not received any training, has this affected your capability in the classroom in any way?

If you have, how has this equipped you to teach LSEN?

Would training help to prepare you for teaching in a classroom where there are LSEN?

Do you think that the knowledge and skills that you have as a teacher are sufficient to teach LSEN or do you find yourself wanting at times?

What kinds of LSEN have you had experience of?

In the case of a child using sign language, Braille or a hearing aid, would you be able to cope with that? How would you deal with such a challenge?

If you had such a learner in your class, what impact do you think it would have on your role as a teacher in the classroom? Would you be able to cope?

In short, describe a typical day in your classroom?

Please share some experiences you have had in implementing the inclusive education policy.

Are there any support structures available to you to implement inclusive education?

Suppose there was an inexperienced teacher at the school who had to teach LSEN, what advice would you give to such a teacher?

What would you tell the teacher works / does not work in an inclusive classroom?

What do you think needs to be done for the policy of inclusive education to be successfully implemented in a regular school?

Please share anything else regarding LSEN.

Thank you very much for your willingness to share your experiences as a teacher with me. It is highly appreciated.

APPENDIX G: A typical Grade 4 timetable

APPENDIX H: Interview transcript

How are you?

I am very well, thank you.

How long have you been teaching?

I have 30 years teaching experience. I started teaching in 1981.

How long have you been at this school?

I started at this school in 1997.

Do you enjoy teaching?

I enjoy it very much but the workload has increased dramatically. It is a big strain. There are lots of assessments and no guidelines for teachers.

The policy on inclusive education, White Paper 6, states that all learners, regardless of their learning needs, should be accommodated in mainstream schools. What is your opinion of this?

I have heard about it but I am not familiar with the policy. We went on a course on inclusion some time ago and we were told classes would be smaller because of weighting and support would be forthcoming but nothing has happened so far. We were rather told bottoms on seats equal teaching posts, no matter what the needs of the children are. We have a little bit of support since we have the partial hearing section. We have a retired speech therapist that does the evaluations and assessments for us. Besides that you find you don't know where to go. We have no support.

Do you think this policy will work in regular schools?

It could work but the challenges are too many. It causes a lot of frustration. We've contacted the DBST to have children evaluated because we were told we are not allowed to have children tested. They said it is against the law; it is an infringement of children's rights. If you want children assessed you must have a thick file of evidence. I find this frustrating. When I started teaching – if you noticed that a child

was underperforming the child would be assessed. If they found the child had a low IQ the child would be helped. The policy says a child must work at his own pace but what frightens me is they expect a child to do the same tests and same assessments as other children to decide if the child can progress. This is a problem. You have not done the work with the child but you expect him to write an exam. That bothers me.

How do you approach learners with special needs in your classroom?

I must be honest I feel confused. I know what remediation of learners involves because I have a remedial diploma. There should be a resource room where we can assess them. You need all sorts of activities and then you have to develop them and bring them up to a certain level.

How do you cope with the diversity of learning needs in your classroom?

It is very difficult and stressful. I work in the classroom till 13:30 with 40 grade fours. Then I have sport till 15:00. I am also the teacher support person at school. I should know what's going on in the whole school. I am responsible for the whole school. I'm not doing it because I find it's impossible to do and still have a full class.

Please tell me about your experiences of teaching learners with special educational needs.

It is very difficult. Inclusion is worrying me a lot. (The respondent repeated this a few times in her interview). I can see the merit of it. When children grow up they have to fit in society. We need all the support we can get.

Will the policy work in mainstream classes?

I don't see how it can work. It depends – maybe if we had smaller classes but at the moment if they say you must sit with 40 – 45 children in a class with different needs I don't see how it can work. They must bring back the weighting. If you've got a child that is hard of hearing this child would be weighted 4. If you've got 5 of them they would equal 20 learners plus another 15 who are not LSEN that would give you a class of 35. It is however not working like that. We are sitting with full classes. The numbers should be lowered

What does the term “inclusive education” mean to you?

A child with an IQ of 130 will be sitting with a child who has an IQ of 65. They are not coping academically because of this. Deaf, blind, autistic – they must all be in the same classroom and that worries me.

What categories of LSEN do you have in your classroom?

I have 8 LSEN in my class each doing something different. I have one child who is deaf, three who are hard of hearing and four who are intellectually disabled.

How do you prepare for different children?

These children have a backlog. I must prepare different lessons but I am not doing it. It is asking too much of the teacher. The children must work at their own level. How do you do it if you've got so many learners? How do you prepare for different children? I must have different worksheets on top of my other duties. If a child has got special needs he should have an IP. We have to assess in various areas. It's a lot of work. Now you've got to do it for all the underachievers. One person cannot do that and be full time in the classroom. It's impossible.

Would you claim that teaching LSEN in regular schools generally works?

I don't know. What I do know is that it is not working for me. The children are too different. I don't think I would be able to make it. If you have deaf and dumb children, how are you going to work? We have no resources. Are you going to do oral testing? I don't even know Sign language. How am I going to cope? I don't feel adequate to cope with these LSEN in my class.

Should LSEN be part of regular schools? If yes / no, what are the reasons?

It depends on the barrier. I would not feel adequate or comfortable to teach these children. I don't mind the child with a learning barrier. When children can't do the work they will go crazy and so would I. Perhaps if we had a few to teach it would be better. Children who can't cope are drowning and the more they drown, the more difficult it becomes. We have a lot of behavioural problems. One of my learners is on Ritalyn. I called the parents in and they did not want to hear about it. I told them it's time to have him assessed. She took him to an educational psychologist and his

work has improved. He still has a backlog and his reading and spelling is weak but at least we got somewhere.

What specific attributes does a teacher need to possess to work with children with special needs?

The teacher should be calm. The minute you start screaming you make matters worse. You must have a lot of empathy. You must not look at where the child is coming from otherwise you are not going to be able to help him. You must also be a kind and caring person. If you don't you are going to struggle. If not you will just confuse the child even more – we are all different. It takes a special kind of person to work with LSEN. You cannot just regard it as a job – it has got to be like a calling. If you are going to do a proper job it is basically going to take up most of your life.

How do you cater for the educational needs of learners with special needs?

The way it is at the moment we support each other. We give them extra lessons – I have children coming for extra lessons – it's like a support program but it is so difficult because you do not have the time. A remedial program is so much more. You've got to get to the root of the problem. What we are trying to do is to get them to do what we teach them. We want them to perform at a certain level.

How do you adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of all the learners in your classroom? Give me some examples.

I don't have graded worksheets. What I do is I give them a few easy exercises and then it gets more difficult. The good ones will come and ask is this right. They want you to check their work. The bright ones benefit the least because you've got the others who have got problems. They get resentful, especially the boys, and become naughty because of not getting attention.

What are the challenges involved in teaching these learners?

You have to put in everything. I've got no problem with making differentiated work cards, etc, but I don't have the time to do it. You cannot do the same thing year after year. You've got to make adjustments. I now have to find time to make additional worksheets according to the different levels of learners in my class. It is a bit difficult.

I just don't have the time to do it. It's a vicious circle. I find that I'll be working till 12 o'clock because I want to get everything done. The next morning I'm exhausted at school – tired and irritated and not as accommodating as I normally would be.

Are there any benefits involved in teaching these learners?

It really feels good when you have taught them something and even the weakest one understands or can answer you. It makes me feel as if I have achieved something. I feel good because I have helped the child. It is also good when they are well disciplined and actually listen when you speak to them. Working well with the parents and having their support also helps.

Tell me how these learners are generally treated in regular classrooms?

The learners are actually not that bad with each other. Only with the ones who misbehave. The others get very cross with them because they feel they are wasting the money their parents pay for them to get a good education. The older learners actually help those who have problems – they support each other.

How do you feel about these children?

I don't have anything against them. We are here to help the child, especially the ones who are struggling but I do sometimes think some would have benefited from a special class. The ones who misbehave and are rude really get to me. Sometimes they are the ones who need all the support but they show no interest. They really make me cross.

Have you received any training in inclusive education?

We are not trained. There is no mention of training. We've never even been called to a workshop on how to teach blind learners for example. I cannot teach blind learners. I don't know Braille. How am I going to work with them? I have never been trained. I've studied how to work with children with learning problems but I've never studied the physical disabilities. I only have my qualification which included remedial teaching. I don't even remember receiving a notice saying we are going on a course or something. It is so difficult to work with these children.

If you have not received any training, has this affected your capability in the classroom in any way?

Lack of training makes things very difficult. If you don't have the training you go trial and error; this works and that doesn't. It's as if we are using the children as guinea pigs because you don't quite know how to handle it. My own experience of remedial teaching helps me a lot because I can see I could be helping this child by doing this and that but sometimes I just don't have the time to do it.

If you have received training, how has this equipped you to teach LSEN?

As I just said my own remedial teaching experience helps me a lot. The numbers also makes it very difficult for remedial to work – like if the child has got auditory perceptual problems or can't spell – reversal problems – the maximum you should have is 4 – 6 in a group and they should all have similar problems. Now you sit with 10 – 12 children who need intensive remediation. A lot of the expertise and games you need you can actually only give to a small group but now you have 12 then they fight each other to use the resources. It is difficult and it becomes awkward. You find that none of them is strong in that area. In class you can have a group leader who can organise the children, now you can't watch 12 children and help one while the others are waiting. Time is a problem. You can't even have them in small groups after school because at three o'clock they have to go home – the taxis do not want to wait for them so they can't stay long.

Would training help to prepare you for teaching in a classroom where there are LSEN?

Definitely. Training is crucial, especially if are going to teach blind or deaf or autistic children. You actually have to have specialized training and qualifications to handle these children. I would not feel comfortable to teach a child who reads Braille. You have to go and do all that learning all by yourself.

Do you think that the knowledge and skills that you have as a teacher are sufficient to teach LSEN or do you find yourself wanting at times?

I don't think I know everything that I need to know and that is why I say we need training. You can never know enough. I do sometimes feel as if I'm floundering. Sometimes you don't know what to do. I do think we need to know more. We all could do with a lot of help in certain areas.

What kinds of LSEN have you had experience of?

Most of us here can work with partial hearing children because we have the Partial Hearing Section. I also understand autistic children a little but they are very difficult to work with. They can drive you crazy.

In the case of a child using sign language, Braille or a hearing aid, would you be able to cope with that?

I don't know because I don't know how to work with such children. I have had no training. I don't know Braille or Sign language but I do know how to work with hearing aids.

If you had such a learner in your class, what impact do you think it would have on your role as a teacher in the classroom?

It would be very difficult for me to teach them. I would probably be irritated because I won't know how to help them. I would feel as if I have failed.

In short, describe a typical day in your classroom?

Behaviour is definitely a challenge. I become quite stressed sometimes because the ones who are causing the problems are actually stopping the others from learning. They won't be ignored. I find if you punish them or ignore them they act out. They want your attention all the time. It is a big problem because it makes my task more difficult. I can clearly see a difference in the class when they are well behaved.

Please share some experiences you have had in implementing the inclusive education policy.

It is very difficult because the children are all different and sometimes you don't know what to do. I also have a problem with children not coping adequately in grade 4 but they pass because the assessment policy says they must pass, even if I do not feel they are ready to go to the next grade. The requirements are too low; they only need a level 2 to pass, which is 35%.

Are there any support structures / mechanisms available to you to implement inclusive education?

Yes, the teachers here support each other a lot. Mrs.....who has a lot of knowledge about inclusive education because of her studies also helps us a lot (The respondent was referring to R1). We also have the people from the Partial Hearing Section and they get people from outside to help. We work well together. Our management team also helps us a lot; they are very supportive. We get no support from the Department to help us cope. Some parents are also very supportive. They help their children and I can see it. It helps me as well as the child. If I send something home to be done I know that mom or dad is going to do it. Your supportive parents – when you call them they come. We discuss the problems; they agree with what I am saying and offer to help the children as much as they can. Other parents don't show any interest. Sometimes we send diaries home and it comes back unsigned. Sometimes it is signed but the homework is not done. It's a big problem. We know that the work is sometimes new to the parents as well – they don't know how to help their children and that is why we are more than willing to help them because it helps us as well.

Suppose there was an inexperienced teacher at the school who had to teach LSEN, what advice would you give to such a teacher?

Follow the more experienced teachers. If you don't know something ask. We are all here to learn. I would tell her to do her best. I would tell her not to feel bad because you sometimes mark a test and wonder what you have been doing all along. You will always get those who are struggling – try and help them – do the best you can. If a child is unable to grasp something try and show them in a different way. There are a number of ways you can teach children and make them understand.

What would you tell the teacher works or does not work in an inclusive classroom?

Some come from other schools and have shaky foundations. Do not pile work on them otherwise everything will fall flat. Give them easy activities. Work with them and don't take any nonsense. Don't stress if they don't understand you. Some have language problems; always remember that English is their third language.

What do you think needs to be done for the policy of inclusive education to be successfully implemented in a regular school?

Teachers need a lot of training. We cannot do it without training. How do they expect us to do it if we don't know how to? They also need to lower the numbers. We have too many children in our classes and there is too much work. It is also important to work closely with parents. I let the learners take their books home so that the parents can see what is going on. I call in those whose children have problems and address the matter. Parents are also sometimes not proficient in English. I try and teach them learning methods and how to do the homework. I explain to parents what needs to be done.

Please share anything else regarding LSEN.

Some children are really struggling and sometimes I think they would have been better off in a special class. We can't get through to them. Education is deteriorating. Children go home and don't do homework and they don't study. Sometimes the parents work out of town and there is no parental supervision. There is lack of parental support. The children don't listen to us. You ask them questions and they actually switch off. It is very difficult.

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

No thanks. I think you have explained everything to me.

Thank you very much for your willingness to share your experiences as a teacher with me. It is highly appreciated.