

## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1. Introduction

##### 1.1 Background to the problem

As a teacher in the Foundation Phase<sup>1</sup>, I have experienced a multiplicity of challenges in the teaching and learning situation; one of which is the inability to accurately identify barriers to learning experienced by learners. Many a times, it has been difficult to say with certainty which phenomenon is linked to educational challenges, for example, in language development, reading, writing, attention, perception and social relationships. The further down the grades that one teaches, the more difficult it is to identify barriers to learning. These barriers to learning also impact on the development of some learners.

In my interactions with colleagues, I have observed that some teachers, more often than not, have labelled and still continue to label learners who experience barriers to learning as slow learners, mental retards, behaviourally disordered, crippled, emotionally disturbed and so forth. Teachers view and understand barriers to learning differently and in most cases, incorrectly. These differences in understanding and labelling learners inaccurately warrant teachers to acquire basic theoretical knowledge and practical skills to identify barriers to learning.

Informal discussions with other teachers in the Foundation Phase about barriers to learning, revealed that there are several challenges that teachers experience when attempting to identify barriers to learning. At face value, it is noticeable that many teachers lack the necessary knowledge, skills and tools to identify barriers to learning. These challenges, have led to serious difficulties in understanding the fundamental classroom management, teaching and learning processes of learners with diverse

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<sup>1</sup> The Foundation Phase is the first phase of the General Education and Training Band: (Grades R, 1, 2 and 3) (RNCS: Teacher's Guide for the Development of Learning Programmes, Department of Education, 2003: 1)

educational needs which include but not limited to physical, sensory, cognitive, or emotional needs (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2006: 20). The inability of teachers to recognize, barriers to learning that impact on teaching and learning renders their teaching effort very difficult: many teachers are unable to handle diversity in their classes.

In South Africa today, education is moving towards a policy of inclusion (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker & Engelbrecht, 2007: viii) or inclusive education (Donald, et al. 2006: 17). In today's context therefore, it is of utmost importance that teachers should have knowledge and skills, to identify barriers to learning so that they are able to render the required assistance and support to all learners in terms of their diverse and individual learning needs. Donald, et al. (2006: 17) put it clearly that *"it is particularly important to accommodate the needs of students who experience different barriers to learning"*. When teachers are able to identify barriers to learning, teaching will be duly planned and purposeful, based on constructive intervention programmes developed by teachers. Ouvry (1987:24) states that: *"it is essential to identify where the difficulty lies if an effective programme is to be planned for each learner, with objectives which are relevant and attainable."*

Cosford (1990: 1) shares the same idea as Ouvry (1987) that when teachers are able to identify barriers to learning, appropriate steps can be taken to assist learners who experience barriers to learning:

*If the classroom teachers can easily recognize learners who have problems in areas of mental retardation, emotional adjustment, motor disorder and sensory disability, such teachers will be in a better position to identify and understand the problems of these learners.*

In the same vein, I agree with Boucher and Du Toit (2000: 241) that:

*In South Africa, learning difficulties abound at all levels of learning. To render timely and effective learning support in the regular school, the first essential is*

*for teachers to understand the nature, degree and context of each learner's difficulty ...*

Knoetze and Vermoter (2007: 2 – 3) argue that for teachers to be in a position to *design and implement programmes that meet the needs of all learners ... the difficulties experienced by individual learners “must be identified and the learners assessed in order to establish how learning support should be given”.*

Rossi and Stuart (2007: 139) assert that: *many children are often retained, placed in special education, drop out of high school, or lose confidence, all unnecessary.* This observation could be alluded to the notion that; many learners repeat their grades, whilst others are referred to special education institutions, and some, leave the schooling system because teachers do not have mechanisms in place, that could help them to identify the barriers to learning that these learners experience. All these challenges, according to Rossi and Stuart are preventable.

The challenges to identify barriers to learning are not unique to South Africa. In other countries like the United States of America, the problem is worsened by a lack of a common understanding and definition of what is commonly referred to as barriers to learning, learning difficulties, learning problems, learning disabilities, special needs or/and exceptional children (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988; Adelman & Taylor, 2002,).

In the United States of America for example, barriers to learning were identified legally as learning disabilities. According to Adelman and Taylor (2002: 1), the identification of barriers to learning has led to the over-identification and policy backlash in the United States of America, because identification meant different things to various people in diverse contexts. So, in an attempt to differentiate barriers to learning (*among learners with learning problems*), the approach to view barriers to learning (*learning problems*) as the context for understanding barriers to learning (*learning disabilities*) was adopted by the United States of America. This approach enabled authorities to identify learning problems in the teaching and learning contexts as barriers to learning (Adelman & Taylor, 2002).

In other countries, advisory bodies that look into issues of mental health of children have been established namely: the National Advisory Committee on Handicap Children (Adelman & Taylor, 2002: 2) and the Centre for School Mental Health Assistance (Weist, 2003: 77), to name a few. The Centre for School Mental Health Assistance for example, concerns itself with the technical assistance, training and conducts research for schools in the areas of learners' total wellness.

In South Africa, the Department of Education has introduced the Inclusive Education and Training System policy in an attempt to move away from the system of designated Special Schools Education (Engelbrecht et al: 2007; Education White Paper 6: 2001). The Education White Paper 6 argues that children who experience barriers to learning and development should be able to access ordinary schools. Establishing this new system is an attempt to empower teachers to identify barriers to learning and to acknowledge diversity in their classrooms. For a very long time, the identification of barriers to learning and development rested in the hands of experts in Special Schools.

The new system for example, has targeted approximately 500 out of 20,000 primary schools that will be converted into full-service schools<sup>2</sup> (Education White Paper 6, 2001: 22 – 23) with the aim of empowering teachers in terms of the implied '*inclusivity process*' in education. The Education White Paper 6 (2001: 46 – 51) also indicates the '*Strategic Areas of Change*' that will ensure that capacity is built in mainstream schools through a number of established District, Provincial and National Bodies. Human, capital and physical resources will be pulled together so as to benefit all the stakeholders in education. In the light of all these developments, there is a glimmer of hope that the systematic and accurate identification of barriers to learning, will receive its long overdue attention.

These new developments may pose many educational and administrative challenges, nonetheless, this study hopes to add value by finding out how teachers identify barriers to learning because I believe that, if teachers were able to identify barriers to

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<sup>2</sup> Full-service schools are schools that will be equipped and supported to provide for the full range of learning needs

learning in time, appropriate measures could be put in place in order to render meaningful assistance to the affected learners.

It is therefore my view that the lack of knowledge and skills to identify barriers to learning during the Foundation Phase, is disempowering and therefore, will fall short of the realization of the 'inclusive education and training system' that is being envisaged for South Africa (Education White Paper 6, 2001). Bothma, Gravette and Swart (2000:201) point out that *the challenge facing many South African teachers is that they have not been trained to cope with diversity of learners now entering schools*. Montgomery (1990: xix) maintains that *"at the initial training level, all teachers must be exposed to a compulsory component concerned with Special Needs Education in schools."*

Teachers in the Foundation Phase are responsible for laying a strong academic base which is very critical for future educational developments. If and when teachers are not aware of the kinds of challenges that are experienced by learners due to a variety of barriers to learning, teaching then becomes a worthless activity. It is in this context that I align myself with the authors cited above that; *if teachers are able to identify barriers to learning earlier in the lives of the learners, correct interventions could be employed and assistance rendered to the learners experiencing the barriers to learning.*

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Foundation Phase teachers are to a great extent challenged in identifying barriers to learning. As a consequence thereof, many teachers frequently label learners experiencing barriers to learning incorrectly. The inability to identify barriers to learning makes it difficult for teachers to pinpoint the real problem(s) that hinder the learners' academic performance and progress. Therefore, the problem of this study is to investigate how Grade 3 teachers identify barriers to learning.

### 1.3 Significance of the study

In the light of the current debates and developments in Special Needs Education towards *Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (Education White Paper 6, 2001), teachers need to be empowered in terms of critical knowledge, skills and attitudes to identify barriers to learning. This is important since South Africa *'acknowledges that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support* (Education White Paper 6, 2001: 6). In order for teachers to render suitable support to learners with educational challenges, Grade 3 teachers should be able to identify barriers to learning.

It is important for Grade 3 teachers to create accurate profiles of their learners at this stage, since Grade 3, is the final schooling level (Exit point) of the Foundation Phase. Learners, who experience certain barriers to learning, will then be easily assisted by the teachers in the next schooling phase, the Intermediate Phase<sup>3</sup>.

This study, it is hoped will assist towards Teacher development on a variety of issues regarding the identification of barriers to learning. This view supports the Education White Paper 6 (2001) policy document that *"teachers will be empowered with knowledge and skills to identify learners with special needs, furthermore allowing for early intervention*. The study will also be shared with the Limpopo Department of Education.

### 1.4 Research questions

The problem of the study gave rise to the following research questions:

- a) How well equipped are teachers to identify barriers to learning?
- b) What criteria do teachers use to identify barriers to learning?
- c) What do teachers do when confronted with learners who experience barriers to learning?

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<sup>3</sup> The Intermediate Phase is the second schooling phase of the General Education and Training Band: (Grades 4, 5, and 6)

## 1.5 Aims of the study

### 1.5.1 General aim

The aim of the study was to explore challenges teachers encountered when identifying barriers to learning.

### 1.5.2 Specific aims

The specific aims of the study were:

- a) To find ways and means which teachers use to identify barriers to learning in the context of Grade 3 learners and
- b) To formulate criteria to be used by teachers when identifying barriers to learning.

## 1.6 Definition and explanation of concepts

### a) Learning barriers

Various authors define learning barriers differently. Knox (1989:93) indicates that *learning barriers are a wide range of disorders affecting learners of at least normal intelligence, most of which impair reading or mathematical skills, but which may also affect writing, listening, speaking and reasoning abilities*. According to Montgomery (1990:2), *learning barriers are those disabilities, which either prevent or hinder the learner from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided in schools*.

### b) Barriers to learning and development

Landsberg, Krüger and Nel (2005:17) define barriers to learning and development as *those factors which lead to the inability of the system to*

*accommodate diversity which leads to learning breakdown, or which prevent the learner from accessing educational provision.* Landsberg et al (2005: 17) perceive barriers to learning and development as systemic in the sense that factors that create barriers to learning may be located within the learner, the school, the educational system, society the economic and political contexts.

- c) In this study, I adopt the above descriptions of barriers to learning and in line with the Education White Paper 6 (2001: 12), use the term '**barriers to learning**' to refer to both internal and external learning difficulties or problems that are referred to by many authors as 'disability' and 'impairments'. Such barriers to learning and development could be physiological, psychological, socio-economic and also due to the inability of schools and teachers to recognise diversity and teach accordingly (Donald, et al, 2006).

## 1.7 Research methodology

### 1.7.1 Research design

The study employed both the qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The study is broadly qualitative in the sense that barriers to learning are observed from a particular perspective as understood by the Foundation Phase teachers. This is in line with the interpretive social science approach. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002: 6), this approach is "*rooted in an empathetic understanding of the everyday lived experience of people in specific historical settings*". I hold the view that teachers themselves, are in a better position to explain and give meaning to the kinds of problems that they experience when identifying barriers to learning. The discussions between colleagues, other teachers and I about barriers to learning in general, reveal that barriers to learning are contextualized.

The study also features some elements of the quantitative approach due to the objective nature of how data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire. I wanted to give an objective description of how teachers identified barriers to learning. Schumarcher and Macmillan (1993; 32) assert that *quantitative research designs adopt a positivist philosophy of knowing that emphasizes objectivity and quantification of the phenomenon*. It is this assertion that influenced me to record on a questionnaire the possible barriers to learning, which were shown to teachers during the interview sessions. I required some elements of consistency regarding the identification of barriers to learning. This was necessary because most barriers to learning have long been identified in the field of Special Needs Education by scholars such as (Epanchin & Paul, 1987; Ouvry, 1987; Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988; Kapp, 1994; Landsberg et al, 2005 & Donald, et al. 2006) to name a few. Some of these barriers to learning may or may not be known to Foundation Phase Teachers. Therefore, the questionnaire served as a reliable tool that supported the interview process by reminding teachers of the barriers to learning when teachers saw them in print form.

#### 1.7.2 Population and sample

The Ritavi District has five Education circuits. From these circuits I chose Circuit “2” as a single case that was studied. The rationales thereof are discussed in Chapter 3.

The sample was drawn from Grade 3 teachers at Circuit 2. This circuit has a population of thirteen (13) primary schools. The majority of the schools have two or three Grade 3 teachers as indicated in Chapter 3. The non-probability Convenience sampling technique was decided upon. Since the design was a Case study, I decided to concentrate on all the schools in Circuit 2; hence the sample consisted of all the thirty-one (31) teachers.

### 1.7.3 Data collection methods.

I employed a questionnaire technique to collect data about the teachers' knowledge of the signs, symptoms and types of barriers to learning. Together with the questionnaire the interview technique was used to ask for more information regarding barriers to learning. The interview composed of semi-structured question items. This enabled me to prompt and probe whenever the need arose. For example, when teachers gave examples of 'barriers to learning' or 'signs' or 'symptoms', the semi-structured interview technique enabled me to ask for in-depth explanation in order to get a better understanding of the symptoms. This method had the advantage of allowing participants the freedom to raise issues that were important to them, rather than to wholly respond to a set of predetermined questions.

### 1.7.4 Data Collection procedure

Permission to conduct the research was sought from the Department of Education in Limpopo Province. Arrangements were made with the Area Manager of Circuit 2 to collect data from the schools. Further arrangements were also made with School Principals and Grade 3 teachers of the chosen schools. I piloted the questionnaire and the interview schedule in four schools in the neighbouring circuit, which were not part of the target population. The aim was to determine the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the instruments and to ascertain the appropriateness of the chosen data collection techniques.

### 1.7.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed deductively and inductively in the form of themes, categories and subcategories. This provided an understanding regarding teachers' opinions of their experiences and competences when identifying barriers to learning.

## 1.8 Delimitation of the study

The study covered Grade 3 teachers at Circuit 2. The justification for this research decision was based on the following practical issues namely:

- a) Limited financial resources,
- b) Time constraints and
- c) I, as a Grade 3 teacher always had a challenge of learners who could not perform Grade 3 specific tasks such as reading and writing. When I tried to locate the problems, I found that they were more profound than what I thought. They were problems that were not only confined to Grade 3 but also the other preceding grades; 2, 1 and R. It would have been ideal to cover the entire Foundation Phase as the scope of the study, but due to the practical research reasons, I opted for Grade 3 so that at the end, I as a Grade 3 teacher could be empowered by the study in the long run.

## 1.9 Limitations of the study

- a) The teachers experienced challenges with the terminology used in the questionnaire; this showed how different the concept of 'barriers to learning' was understood by different teachers. Teachers used concepts such as 'learning barriers', 'barriers to learning', 'learning difficulties' and 'learning problems' interchangeably. As a result thereof, some teachers also experienced difficulties to distinguish between these concepts. In the process, I was also challenged to pursue the line of discussions followed by some of the teachers when explaining how they identified barriers to learning. On hind sight, I think, my questionnaire and interview question items should have been more explicit.
- b) Another determining limitation was the misfortune I had regarding supervision. The study took a long time to be completed because my former supervisors – three of them, retired one after the other in a period of three years.

- c) And, finally I was emotionally and financially drained by the drawbacks explained in (b) above.

## **1.10 Division of the Study**

### **Chapter 1**

The Chapter sketches the background to the study, the problem and explains how the study was undertaken by giving a brief rationale for the research design and the attendant research issues.

### **Chapter 2**

Chapter 2 covers the literature review on barriers to learning, factors contributing to barriers to learning and development and the theoretical framework that directed the study.

### **Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 explains the research methodology, the design of the study, population, sampling, data collection and analysis.

### **Chapter 4**

This Chapter discusses the findings/results and the interpretation thereof.

### **Chapter 5**

Chapter 5 summarizes the findings, discusses the recommendations and draws the conclusion of the study.

### **References**

All the resources cited are listed under this section.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review seeks to sketch out broad perspectives of the problem of barriers to learning. It considers the state and progress made in this area, by identifying relationships, contradictions, gaps and inconsistencies in the work done so far. The remainder of the Chapter presents the theoretical framework which underpins the study.

#### 2.2 Conceptions of barriers to learning

Before one could identify learners who experience barriers to learning and development, one should have a clear understanding of the different concepts given to learners who experience barriers to learning, as well as various concepts used to describe barriers to learning.

The conceptualization of barriers to learning has been typified by difficulties when pinpointing exactly what barriers to learning are. Diverse views have been considered by different writers and authorities in the field of Special Needs Education. Some refer to children experiencing barriers to learning as:

- a) Exceptional children (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988)
- b) Special children (Mahlangu, 1989)
- c) Children with problems (Kapp, 1994)

It is clear from the above categories that the emphasis is put on the identification of learners who experience learning problems and learning difficulties, rather than on the identification of the barriers to learning. This is problematic; nonetheless, different authors' approaches are helpful in the sense that criteria are established to assist in the identification of barriers to learning.

Hallahan and Kauffmann (1988:6) state that the exceptional children *are those who require special education and related services in order for them to reach their full potential. These children are exceptional in that they may be superior intellectually, mentally retarded, or have learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, disordered speech or language, impaired hearing or sight.* This is echoed by Mahlangu (1989:2), that special children differ in areas such as mental characteristics, sensory abilities, neuromotor or physical characteristics, social behaviours, communication abilities, or have multiple handicaps.

It is interesting to note that other authors share the same approach followed by Hallahan and Kauffman, and Mahlangu. Kapp (1994: 26) uses the following criteria to categorize children with problems thereby identifying barriers to learning:

- a) Development problems (*When the child's total development or certain aspects of it such as language, motor ability, etc., shows a clear delay in contrast with other children*)
- b) Learning problems (*Normally evident at school when the child experiences more learning difficulties*)
- c) Behaviour problems (*Usually when the behaviour is different, more intense and of longer duration than is normally expected from a child of that age*)

The above criteria according to Kapp (1994: 35) manifest as depression, aggression, attention-seeking behaviour, irritability, inadequate attitude of daring, lack of motivation, problems with the acquisition of basic learning skills, such as, reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. These manifestations, point to various barriers to learning and development.

It is clear that Mahlangu, Kapp, Hallahan and Kauffman identify children differently. These differences account for the variety of definitions that imply to barriers to learning. If, at the level of experts there are differences in the conceptualization of barriers to learning, what more at the level of Foundation Phase teachers?

As indicated in the previous chapter, the National Department of Education has introduced Inclusive Education. Inclusivity is viewed as one of the *'principles underpinning the Curriculum'* in South Africa (Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9; Foundation Phase, 2003: 5 – 7).

In my view, Inclusive Education as a system poses many educational challenges in catering for all types of learners. Schools must now recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their learners regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001:17); in an inclusive education all learners should have the opportunity to participate in the education system. This is in line with views shared by India (2000: 4) that: *inclusion does not only include those within the system but also those who have not received the kind of education required to meet their unique learning needs*. In the light of the developments in the Education System in South Africa, teachers are expected to identify barriers to learning so that they are able to render assistance to learners experiencing barriers to learning and development.

### **2.3 Factors contributing to barriers to learning**

Many factors that contribute to barriers to learning have been well researched in the field of Education and Psychology. These contributory factors are classified as internal or external barriers (Fourie & Goodyer, 2004:27). Donald et al (2006: 21) refer to internal barriers to learning as intrinsic (*factors operating mainly from within the person*) and external barriers to learning as extrinsic (*factors operating mainly from outside the person*). It is therefore clear that some of the factors are within the individual whilst others relate to the school; and the broader environment/community. Notwithstanding the importance of these factors, they do not constitute the main thrust of this study even though it would be important for teachers to know the possible causes of barriers to learning especially those that are linked to the environment or teachers themselves as barriers to learning for learners.

The knowledge of these factors and causes will help teachers to understand learners who experience barriers to learning better and be able to identify them at a very early

stage. As a result, the early identification of learners with barriers to learning and development will assist to prevent barriers to learning from escalating or intensifying (Landsberg, Krüger & Nel, 2005:38).

### 2.3.1 Internal barriers to learning

Internal barriers to learning are factors within the individual self: These are obstacles within the learner that impede learning and development. According to Hyam (2004:25), a learner may be born with barriers such as:

- a) Physical barriers – specific difficulties in bodily functioning such as paralysis and deformities.
- b) Neurological barriers – intellectual and developmental delays and
- c) Sensory barriers – specific difficulties in the functioning of the senses.

Hyam (2004: 26) states that individuals may also develop barriers which are caused by the environment (external environmental factors). Learners growing up in impoverished environments are prone to conditions such as: Tuberculosis, pneumonia, gastro-enteritis, measles, malnutrition, infections, chronic illnesses and progressive diseases such as the Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). According to Batshaw and Perret (1992:370), environmental influences are as important as the learner's physical and emotional health. When a learner is ill, the environment changes for him/her; it no longer directs to him/her the inviting appeal to participate. These may also create barriers to learning, for the learner instead of actively participating in learning by withdrawing him-/her- self and demonstrating a general disinterest and unhappiness, (Kapp, 1994:180). If the teacher has observed this behaviour from the learner, he/she will be able to find out whether or not a problem exists and if so, the source thereof.

According to Fourie and Goodyer (2004:10) physical development barriers to learning include physical diseases, dysfunctions of the nervous, skeletal and motor systems,

inadequacies or weaknesses in fine motor co-ordination, and lack of stamina. Learners with poor motor skills find it difficult to play with their peers at home or at school and may be excluded from the school games and sports. Physical problems may also cause poor posture, and handwriting difficulties which may affect the ability to learn. The aforementioned may lead to feelings of unhappiness, anger, fear, inappropriate aggression, lack of confidence, poor self image, stress, chronic depression and thus leading to further physical, emotional and developmental defects that may impede learning and development (Fourie & Goodyer, 2004: 27).

A learner in an unhappy home environment will be unhappy at school. He may begin to feel lonely and withdraws from classroom activities giving excuses of ill-health or injury. If such feelings of unhappiness and practices continue, this may lead to barriers to learning.

### 2.3.2 External barriers to learning

External barriers to learning refer to those factors that emanate from the child's local and wider environments such as the family, school and the community or society (Donald et al, 2006: 21 – 22). At a closer level, the home environment has an impact on the child's learning and development. Hyam (2004:17) holds the view that every child is born into a specific environment and his learning occurs within those surroundings (*the social context, family & broader society*). Socio-economic factors and factors related to the family play a very crucial role in the learning and development of a child.

Family relationships and family environment can contribute to barriers to learning. As mentioned in Kapp (1994:151), insecurity, family disharmony, incompleteness and the inability of parents to offer the child frequent affective and spiritual security, are all factors that affect the learner's attitude towards learning. Lack of parental involvement in their children's education may also contribute to barriers to learning. Some parents tend to pass onto schools their responsibilities without taking an active role in the school work of their children. Many parents send their children to schools, long before they are school-ready. This is against Piaget's maturational approach which suggests

that *forcing young children to perform academic tasks for which they are not yet ready*, is unacceptable and should be considered a form of abuse (Lerner, 1993:186).

Lerner (1993) maintains that *education has a dialogic character and further avers that a happy reciprocal dialogue between parent and child forms the basis of mutual respect and builds emotional bonds*. In an emotionally suitable climate, the child is usually open to the influences of the parents' feelings, thoughts and values as rooted in their educational actions. If the educational dialogue is disturbed, the learner experiences educational distress. An educationally distressed learner feels insecure, anxious and is therefore not very open to learning. Thus insecurity and emotional inability may lead to barriers to learning. Lerner further explains that a variety of educational errors may contribute to this, including rejection of the child, inconsistent conduct, too strict and unreasonable discipline, alcohol abuse, alcoholism in the home, unemployment, poor housing conditions. Socio-economic factors such as a lack of access to basic services (medical services and shelter) as well as poverty and under development may place a learner at risk (Kruger & Adams, 2002: 248). Unsafe environments and unhygienic conditions contribute to barriers to learning.

Apart from the child's immediate environment of the home setup that creates barriers to learning and development, is the teaching and learning environment. According to Engelbrecht and Green (2001:19) the most contributory factors that negatively affect the facilitation of teaching and learning, are the incompetently trained teachers, and a dearth of a positive teaching and learning culture. These challenges do not create a welcoming environment for learners; instead they contribute to the barriers to learning that learners and teachers have to cope with. This view is similar to what is raised by the Education White Paper 6 (2001:19) that most barriers to learning arise from different aspects of the curriculum, such as:

- a) The content
- b) The language of teaching
- c) How the classroom is organised and managed
- d) The methods and processes used in teaching
- e) The pace of teaching and the time available to complete the curriculum

- f) The learning material and equipment that is used
- g) How learning is assessed

According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (1997: 244 - 245), the material and content the teacher chooses should be relevant to the age and developmental interests of the child. Children who experience a level of difficulty in learning also experience failure. This results in daily experiences of feeling that they are not coping. It also means that they are not coping with what teachers are expecting of them. If a learner's attempts are not positively supported by teachers, and he/she experiences continual failure and retained in the same grade, the learner will develop feelings of anxiety, failure and confusion about the school's expectations. Kapp (1994:117) indicates that the demands made on a learner by teachers, may also be too high. If the learner cannot meet these demands, he/she fears criticism and non-acceptance, especially if teachers react unsympathetically towards his/her failure.

As teachers have to accommodate learners experiencing barriers to learning in their classrooms, they should be aware of the environments and circumstances that their learners find themselves in so as to be alert to the factors that may contribute to barriers to learning. It is therefore, utmost important that teachers are trained and empowered to successfully deal with challenging behaviours in the classroom (Landsberg, Krüger & Nel, 2005: 455).

#### **2.4 The identification of barriers to learning in the context of an inclusive education system**

Transformation in the South African Education sector since 1994 has made attempts to address the imbalances of the past education system. Among the many changes was the introduction of Inclusive Education (Education White Paper 6, 2001). This new development poses many educational challenges in catering for all types of learners. Schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of all their learners, regardless of any difficulties and differences they may have in an inclusive education system. All learners should have the opportunity to participate in the same educational system (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001: 17). Inclusion is about all learners

and not just a few. It is not just about disability, but means responding to all learners' individual needs (Landsberg, Krüger & Nel, 2005:19). For the new system to work effectively in an inclusive setting, it is therefore essential that teachers are able to identify barriers to learning at an early stage. This will enable teachers to plan for appropriate support and care for learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Engelbrecht, Swart and Eloff (2001) researched on stress and coping skills of ten teachers who had a learner with a Down syndrome in their classes. The ten teachers were all females with ages ranging from 26 years to 56 years and beyond. All the teachers had between them twelve to thirteen years of teaching experience. Seven out of the ten sampled teachers had never had any experience dealing with a learner with a Down syndrome in an Inclusive classroom. Only three of the teachers had had some form of formal training in dealing with learners with special educational needs. These teachers had completed a Further Diploma in Education (Remedial teaching).

The above researchers' findings show that despite an increase in the number of learners with special educational needs in the mainstream classes in South Africa today, teachers do not have the necessary experience to deal with such learners in an inclusive education environment. The majority of the teachers were trained for the mainstream classes.

In the new dispensation teachers are now challenged with the task to accommodate diversity and to deal with barriers to learning. Unfortunately most teachers' initial training did not prepare them for diversity (special educational needs) in their classrooms (Kruger & Adams, 2002: 233).

In another study, Bothma, Gravette and Swart (2002) investigated the attitudes of primary school teachers towards inclusive education. A total of 26 categories were identified from two groups of primary school teachers from the middle class suburbs of Gauteng Province in South Africa. The purpose of the research was to explore the attitudes of a selection of primary school teachers towards the policy of inclusive education. The findings of this study show that teachers felt that they were obliged to implement policies (in this case inclusion) which they were not consulted on. Furthermore, teachers often do not have a clear understanding of the demands of the

changes they must implement. The teachers indicated that they had neither the training nor the ability to work with Learners with Special Needs (LSEN). These attitudes were reflected in statements such as *“I am definitely not for it”, “I think special needs, need to be their special need”* (Bothma, Gravette & Swart, 2002: 203). Findings also strongly suggest that teachers hold negative attitudes towards the policy of inclusion. Thus I believe that if teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion are not addressed, these attitudes could become a critical barrier to learning and development and the successful implementation of the policy of inclusive education.

In New Zealand, the Education Review Office through the assistance of the school boards of trustees, investigated and reported on the identification of barriers to learning as part of its regular review activities. The school boards of trustees collected data between 1994 and 1995 from 272 schools (209 Primary, 54 Secondary and 9 Area schools). The findings regarding barriers to learning in primary schools were as follows:

- a) Home and family conditions of the learners
- b) Parental attitudes to school and learning
- c) Health and nutrition of learners
- d) Stress caused by “broken” homes and dysfunctional families
- e) Children who begin their schooling with poor language skills and poor vocabulary
- f) Teachers who lack skills in classroom behaviour management, who are unable to deal with learners with differing needs (Aitken, 1995:7)

The issue at stake is; are teachers in New Zealand able to identify these barriers to learning and report about them accordingly? The evidence suggests that many teachers were able to indicate various barriers to learning.

Adelman and Taylor (2002: 11) report that the United States of America Mental Health in Schools Center Project identified the following examples of risk producing conditions:

1. Neighbourhood
  - a) An extreme economic deprivation
  - b) Community disorganisation including high level mobility
  - c) Violence and drugs
  - d) Minority and or immigration status.
  
2. Family
  - a) Chronic poverty
  - b) Conflict/disruptions/violence
  - c) Substance abuse
  - d) Models problem behaviour
  - e) Abusive care-taking
  - f) Inadequate provision of quality child care
  
3. School and Peers
  - a) Poor quality school
  - b) Negative encounters with teachers
  - c) Negative encounters with peers and/or inappropriate peer models
  
4. Individual
  - a) Medical problems
  - b) Low birth weight/neurodevelopmental delay
  - c) Psychophysiological problems
  - d) Difficult temperament and adjustment problems

The above Centre Project (Adelman & Taylor, 2002: 11) managed to list the above examples of barriers to learning however; did not establish how teachers identified the above mentioned categories from learners who experienced them and also what teachers did when confronted with learners with these barriers to learning.

Woods (1993: 110) indicates the following characteristics of learners with physical disabilities which can be an indication to the teacher that something is hampering the progress of the learner. A learner may:

- a) tire more quickly than the others in the classroom,
- b) frequently be absent from school due to medical appointments
- c) experience difficulties to perform gross motor tasks
- d) be unable to, or have difficulties to complete manipulative activities, for example cutting or holding a pencil
- e) be socially delayed due to lack of interaction with other learners
- f) experience neurobiological disabilities.

Woods (1993) did not indicate how well equipped the teachers were to identify learners with these aforementioned characteristics of barriers to learning. Kapp (1994:29) notices that not all the disabilities are equally conspicuous, sometimes learners experience barriers to learning as neurological dysfunctions that are difficult to identify.

It is clear that the problem of a shortage of well-trained teachers and lack of knowledge regarding barriers to learning make it difficult for teachers to identify learners.

In South Africa, Gous and Mfazwe (2003: 21) among other scholars have identified the following signs and symptoms of possible learning difficulties that a learner may exhibit such as:

- a) Finds reading and writing tiring
- b) Writes letters too small
- c) Writes letters backwards
- d) Writes letters above or below the line.

A teacher who is not well equipped with knowledge will not be able to notice such signs and symptoms in a learner who is experiencing barriers to learning. The learner will experience failure which means that he/she is not coping with what the teacher is expecting of him/her. In this regard Lemmer and Badenhost (1997: 249) suggest that teachers should be well trained and knowledgeable. Poorly skilled teachers will not be motivated or enthusiastic; they may not even notice a learner who is experiencing a barrier to learning thereby frustrating the efforts of the Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System for all learners.

## 2.5 Theoretical Framework

The study of barriers to learning has prompted me to examine different theoretical assumptions by various authors namely:

- a) The Maturational stages of development theory by Piaget,
- b) The Modeling and Observational Learning by Bandura,
- c) The Stimulus – Response theory by Thorndike and Skinner's Operant Conditioning theory (*Behaviourism*),
- d) The Psychoanalytic theory by Freud and Erikson's Ego Psychological theory.

The above theories created a framework which helped me in the collection and analysis of data.

### 2.5.1 The Maturational stages of development theory by Piaget

Hyam (2004:84) states that Piaget considers the mental processes of the child as concerned with the understanding of concepts. The child learns more slowly than it is realized and it takes time for new concepts to form in the schema of the child. The child learns new concepts according to certain developmental stages. According to Lerner (1993: 183), Piaget believes that cognitive growth occurs in a series of invariant and interdependent stages, i.e., *the sensorimotor period; preoperational stage, concrete operation stage and the formal operational stage*. The child is capable of learning only certain cognitive tasks through each stage.

Based on the maturational stages of Piaget, Lerner (1993) states that the maturation theory proposes that there is a sequential progression in maturation of cognitive skills, and the individual child's ability to learn will depend on his current maturational status; it would be harmful to attempt to teach a learner skills too far advanced for the stage at which he/she is at. This is likely to result in barriers to learning. It is therefore clear that during the early stages of development, the mother or rather the entire family, plays an important role in the cognitive development of the child. For example, the provision of toys and other play contexts, provide the child with opportunities towards cognitive development thereby allowing the child to think in abstract terms. If the

home situation is unproductive and does not create opportunities for sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete and formal operations thought processes to take place, the child is likely to experience barriers to learning such as poor 'concept formation' and so on in a classroom situation. The difficulty to formulate concepts is a contributory factor regarding barriers to learning.

It is very important that teachers are familiar with the developmental stages that learners go through so that they create the necessary conditions for them to succeed. What then if some of these stages are held back by unknown factors, such as the teachers' lack of knowledge to identify the sources of the barriers to learning? It therefore, becomes important for teachers to be aware of the different developmental stages as explained by Piaget in order to enhance learning. This knowledge will enable teachers to identify barriers to learning that may obstruct the natural development of children.

#### 2.5.2 The Modeling and Observational learning theory by Bandura

According to this theory, learning takes place by observing other people's behaviour. Slavin (1994:174) argues that most of human learning is directly learned from a model.

Barriers to learning could also be a consequence of copied or observed behaviour; thus children who come from abusive and/or aggressive families may actively or passively exhibit and play out such behaviours in their classes. This means that teachers must be aware of the learners' environment and social circumstances beyond the school context. This would be aided by parental involvement with teachers, so that teachers are able to learn and understand some of the behaviours exhibited by learners in their classes. Some of the wayward behaviours are the sources of barriers to learning.

#### 2.5.3 The Stimulus – Response theory by Thorndike and Skinner's Operant Conditioning theory (Behaviourism),

The Behaviourism theory stresses the importance of stimulus, response and consequences. Slavin (1994: 156) argues that Thorndike viewed most behaviour as responses to stimuli in the environment. Lerner (1993: 526) indicates that behaviour is contextual, since the basic behaviour unit consists of a stimulus, response and a consequence. This basic behaviour unit occurs within an environment, and it is important to consider how the environment shapes the behaviour. Meyer, Moore and Viljoen (1995:187) cite Skinner's theory of Operant Conditioning as a method whereby any behaviour can be controlled by stimuli that succeed it.

According to Thorndike's *Law of effect*, "*a satisfying state of affairs leads to repetition of a given behaviour, whereas an annoying state of affairs weakens a response,*" (Mwamwenda, 1995:199). When a learner tries to gain the teacher's attention but in vain, the likelihood is that the learner will not attempt anything in future for fear of being ignored. This may result in the learner totally withdrawing from classroom activities. The learner's withdrawal could well be identified as a barrier to learning. The actions of teachers and parents do, to a greater extent affect children. According to Skinner, "*if an individual's behaviour is immediately followed by pleasurable consequences, the individual will engage in that behaviour more frequently,*" (Slavin, 1994:157). This change of behaviour is referred to as operant conditioning.

Pleasurable consequences such as praise or reward, reinforce behaviour whilst unpleasant consequences (aversive stimuli) such as punishment (corporal punishment), teach children to be uninvolved so as to avoid punishment (Slavin, 1994:161), because learners associate punishment with pain. Learners will try to avoid any action that would result in pain. Learners who come from abusive families or environments that are harsh, tend to behave in ways that do not foster learning. It is therefore, important to be conversant with the backgrounds of how children learn. Therefore, teachers must be very careful when applying punishment because punishment often causes anxiety and feelings of guilt that may contribute to barriers to learning (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1995:192).

#### 2.5.4 Freud's Psychoanalytic and Erikson's Ego-psychological theories

According to both Freud and Erikson, children pass through a sequence of developmental stages. Each stage, if not satisfactorily passed through, may result in psychological problems at a later stage that may cause some barriers to learning.

According to Freud, the first few years of life are decisive for the formation of personality (Hall & Lindzey, 1978:54). In Freud's view the child has to go through the oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital stages as he/she develops. When any of these stages are interrupted during the formative period, the child may later in life regress to any one of these stages or a combination thereof, thereby exhibiting some personality problems; for example, if the oral stage was not adequately passed through by a child, he/she would later display oral aggression in a form of argumentativeness.

Like Freud, Erikson's stage theory of development states that children go through a number of stages of development. Meyer et al (1995:158) list Erikson's eight stages of development as follows:

- Stage 1: Infancy: Basic trust versus mistrust: hope
- Stage 2: Early Childhood: Autonomy versus shame and doubt: will-power
- Stage 3: The Play Age: Initiative versus guilt: purpose
- Stage 4: The School Age: Industry versus inferiority: competence
- Stage 5: Adolescence: Identity versus role confusion: reliability
- Stage 6: Early Adulthood: Intimacy versus isolation: love
- Stage 7: Adulthood: Generativity versus self-obsession and stagnation: care
- Stage 8: Maturity: Ego integrity versus despair: wisdom

For the purpose of this study, only the first four stages were used to guide the data analysis.

According to Erikson in Meyer et al (1995:157), each stage has a developmental crisis as a nucleus, and that each developmental crisis must be worked through afresh during each stage in terms of an individual's total development at that point.

Unsuccessful resolution of a crisis at any stage complicates the handling of ensuing crises, while successful resolution thereof makes it easier to deal with later crises. Fourie and Goodyer (2004:20) explain the developmental stages as follows:

**Stage 1:** Age Birth – 1 year: Infancy (Basic trust versus mistrust): Hope

Poor bonding and neglect precipitate feelings of mistrust and cause the child not to trust the people around him. This can impede and damage the child's emotional development and leads to a sense of detachment about the future.

**Stage 2:** Ages 2 – 3 years: Early Childhood (Autonomy vs. doubt & shame): Willpower

This stage is characterised by the child exerting his/her own will to become independent. If caregivers are impatient, critical or want to do everything for the child, the child becomes insecure and doubts his/her own abilities. This may cause the child to become increasingly helpless, dependent and shameful of his/her activities and abilities.

**Stage 3:** Ages 3 – 6 years: The Play age (Initiative versus guilt): Purpose

In this stage the child takes initiative in learning actively about his/her environment through questions and activities. When a child is restricted by a rigid and strict control of the environment, he/she may begin to feel guilty, anxious and inadequate. The child becomes inhibited and would rather not act or take the initiative.

**Stage 4:** Ages 6 – 12 years: The School age (Industry vs. inferiority): Competence

During this stage the child becomes hard-working and industrious. The child needs to experience success at school and at home to develop a sense of self-worth. If the child's attempts and accomplishments are not positively supported or the child continually experiences failure, the child will then develop feelings of anxiety, failure and confusion about the school expectations. The child may become fearful of schooling and as a result develop tendencies to going to school. At this stage teachers have a direct responsibility for learner development.

In a classroom situation, the teacher should be able to identify barriers to learning by observing learners who are always withdrawn, isolated and who do not often freely

associate with the teacher and other learners. Such learners may show signs of some form of hatred, regression and fixation. This shows that one or some of the developmental stages were not adequately resolved. These, may lead to barriers to learning.

Erikson's theory acknowledges the interactions between the psycho- and social aspects of the individual's development. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that the internal and external factors may act as contributors to barriers to learning, thus teachers need to be constantly aware of, and understand the influences that the social context may have on the individual.

Lastly, Erikson's theory, takes into consideration the assumptions made by Piaget, Freud, Thorndike and Bandura to support the view that that child development is a process that is interdependent on various elements. This view is echoed by Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2004: 80) that *'the physical, cognitive and moral dimensions of development are implicitly integrated'*. This means that even though the main classifications of barriers to learning are internal and external, they are inextricably linked and both may be at play at any given time a barrier to learning is identified in a learner.

The knowledge of the theories is helpful to teachers because these theories give teachers a 'leg' to stand on whenever they attempt to identify barriers to learning.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion the literature review has enabled me to grasp discourses that are going on around barriers to learning and Inclusive education.

The following chapter discusses the research methodology and the procedures used in gathering data.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides detailed information on the research methodology, design, data collection techniques and procedures used to collect data on how Grade 3 teachers identified barriers to learning.

#### 3.2 The research approach

The study is largely qualitative in approach. Due to the nature and context of the study, I was of the view that for one not to miss the richness of the information from teachers, I had to spend sufficient time discussing with teachers on how they identified barriers to learning in Grade 3. Since the study depended more on teachers interpretations about the identification of barriers to learning, I followed Leedy and Ormrod (2001: 101) when choosing an appropriate approach for the study – the Qualitative research because

*it is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena, from the participants' point of view.*

Thus, in this study, a qualitative research was found to be suitable because I wanted to work with teachers, on a person-to-person level because the barriers to learning were experienced from a particular perspective as viewed by the Grade 3 teachers. This is in line with the interpretive social science approach which '*is rooted in an empathetic understanding of the everyday experiences of people in specific historical settings*' (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2005: 6).

The Qualitative approach is a procedure that studies phenomena in their natural settings attempting to describe and make sense of or interpret the phenomena in

terms of the meaning that people bring to them. According to Schumacher and McMillan (1993:372) *'qualitative research is a naturalistic inquiry, which uses non-interfering data collecting strategies to discover the natural flow of events and processes and how the participants interpret them'*.

According to Creswell (2003:182):

*Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. This means that the researcher makes an interpretation of the data which includes developing a description of an individual or setting, analyzing data for themes, categories and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically...*

My choice of the Qualitative approach is also underpinned by Creswell's view that *'the investigator looks for the involvement of the participants in data collection and seeks to build rapport and credibility with the individual in the study'*, for it was my view that I needed to interact with the teachers so as to gain more knowledge on the issue under study.

The study is also quantitative in nature in the sense that, since I wanted to back up my interviews with pre-determined aspects that constituted barriers to learning, I needed to use a more structured approach, that provided the research participants with fixed response options such as 'yes' or 'no' alternatives (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996: 95). This resulted in a questionnaire which covered well-known and established items that fell within the broader framework of barriers to learning and development. As teachers were interviewed, the questionnaire was put in front of them so that they could tick items that were relevant to them or rather barriers to learning that they were familiar with. Another justification for a wholly structured questionnaire technique was based on the assumption that many teachers would easily recognize the different types of barriers to learning as they see them in print form rather than recalling the barriers to learning. To this end, the questionnaire technique enabled teachers to identify some barriers to learning.

### 3.3 The design of the study

I was not interested in drawing generalizations about how teachers identified barriers to learning. Instead, I wanted to gain more knowledge and deep understanding of the problem under study and as a result therefore, I chose a **Case Study** as a design for the study because I wanted to study how teachers identified barriers to learning in *'depth for a defined period'* (Leady & Ormrod, 2001: 149), in a single Education Circuit. This as it turned out was a viable strategy that was based on time constraints and limited finances.

### 3.4 Population and sample of the study

The study was conducted at the Ritavi District near Tzaneen; Ritavi District has five Education Circuits<sup>4</sup>. From these circuits, I chose Circuit “2” as a single case that I had to study because of the already mentioned reasons and more so that I wanted to have an in depth understanding of the nature of the barriers to learning.

A sample was drawn from Grade 3 teachers at Circuit 2. This circuit had a population of thirteen (13) primary schools. The majority of the schools had two or three Grade 3 teachers. These schools were clustered into a single unit of study and analysis.

The non-probability sampling approach was decided upon because I did not want to make any claims about the generalisability of the findings. Since I was operating within a Case Study design that targeted a certain group of teachers who had *'typical attributes'* of the targeted population (De Vos & Fouché, 2005: 206 & 335), the **Convenience sampling technique** was chosen in line with the explanation offered by Leady and Ormrod (2001: 218) that the *convenience sampling technique makes no pretense of identifying a representative subset of a population. It takes people or other units that are readily available.* In this instance, the readily available people were teachers in Circuit 2.

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<sup>4</sup> For ethical reasons, the Circuits are referred to as Circuit 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Circuit 2 is where I work and also an area where many Foundation Phase Grade 3 teachers are known to me and therefore, easily accessible. Proximity was also an issue that I considered as an advantage when I decided on the sampling technique (Convenience sampling technique). As indicated by Welman and Kruger (2004: 62), convenience sampling technique, also known as **incidental sampling** technique, refers to: *'the most convenient collection of members of the population (units of analysis) that are near and readily available for research purposes'*.

As a teacher in Grade 3, I have attended many workshops on curriculum development with fellow teachers in the Foundation Phase in Circuit 2. All the teachers in Grade 3 are well-known to me. It is for this reason that all were chosen for the purpose of the study.

The thirteen schools whose names are not disclosed for ethical reasons are dispersed over different areas which are: rural, semi-urban, farm, remote and informal-rural settlements. Four schools are located in a semi-urban area, six in a rural settlement, one on a farm, and one in an informal settlement populated mostly by refugees from Mozambique and Zimbabwe. All the schools<sup>5</sup> have been taken for the purpose of this study.

The semi-urban area which is a township, has the following schools within its location; schools **2, 3, 6** and **11**. Schools **1, 7, 8, 9, 10** and **13** are situated in rural areas. School **4** is situated on a farm; school number **12** is in an informal rural area and school **5**, is located in a remote rural area.

The final sample was made up of the entire thirty-one (31) Grade 3 teachers. The sample is indicated on Table 3.1.

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<sup>5</sup> For ethical considerations, the Schools are given numbers instead of mentioning them by their names

**Table 3.1: Schools, Number of Grade 3 teachers and School location**

<b>School</b>	<b>Number of Grade 3 teachers</b>	<b>Circuit '2' Schools</b>
1	3	Rural
2	3	Semi-urban
3	3	Semi-urban
4	1	Farm
5	1	Remote-rural
6	2	Semi-urban
7	2	Rural
8	2	Rural
9	3	Rural
10	4	Rural
11	3	Semi-urban
12	2	Informal-rural
13	2	Rural
<b>Total number of teachers</b>	<b>31</b>	

According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delpont (2005: 201), if one operates within a Quantitative approach and when the population is between thirty (30) and forty-nine (49) the suggested sample size should be eighty percent (80%) of the population. Therefore, twenty-five (25) teachers would have been selected; however, for the purpose of this study and also operating within the Qualitative approach in the main, all thirty-one (31) teachers were taken to form the sample. De Vos et al. (2005: 334) maintain that: *“Qualitative researchers seek out individuals, groups and settings where the specific processes being studied are most likely to occur”*.

The decision to take all thirty-one teachers was informed by the above idea especially that it was within this area – Foundation Phase, that difficulties in identifying barriers to learning were experienced particularly in Grade 3.

### 3.5 Data collection techniques and procedures

A semi-structured interview technique was chosen because I did not wish to get into a situation where I did not have pre-determined questions. And, in addition, I did not wish to run into a situation where I would end up with massive qualitative data that would become very difficult to analyse. The semi-structured interview technique was preferred because I aligned myself with Welman and Kruger (2004: 161) when they assert that the semi-structured interviews, *offer a versatile way of collecting data ... allow the interviewer to use probes with a view to clearing up vague responses, or to ask for elaboration of incomplete answers.*

The interview schedule was made of semi-structured items in order to allow for further prompting and probing into the informants' responses when necessary. The interview schedule was used together with a structured questionnaire<sup>6</sup>. The questionnaire was put in front of the participants as we discussed. Participants chose to complete the questionnaire or I completed it as we interview progressed. The interview was flexible in terms of the medium of communication. English was preferred but the teachers were also allowed to express themselves in the language of their choice, i.e. Xitsonga or Sepedi.

The interview schedule was as follows:

In the introduction, I explained the purpose of the study and the procedure to be followed. Confidentiality was guaranteed. The following questions formed the interview schedule:

- (i) Have you ever had a learner or learners who experienced barriers to learning?
- (ii) What type of barriers to learning were those?
- (iii) How do you go about identifying children who experience barriers to learning?

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<sup>6</sup> A structured questionnaire is a data collecting technique consisting of a series of questions (Bhattacharyya, 2003: 354).

(iv) What do you do when you are confronted with learners who experience barriers to learning?

(v) Have you received special training regarding Special Needs Education or any form of training that enabled you to identify learners with learning barriers?

(vi) May you please explain how you identify the barriers to learning that you have ticked in Part 2

The above questions were posed to participants in an attempt to draw answers for the research questions asked in Chapter 1. Question items (iii) and (iv) were phrased the way they are because:

- a) I wanted to find out from teachers if in deed they had learners who experienced barriers to learning in their classes.
- b) If teachers were able to identify learners experiencing barriers to learning, how then did they do it? This questions also served as *'ice-breakers'* in the middle of interview.

The interviews were conducted after normal school hours. Two teachers were interviewed per day. Some teachers were also interviewed at their homes. The interviews were done on a one-on-one basis. Participants were also made aware that interviews will be recorded, those who felt uncomfortable with the recording were given the opportunity to say so, and their concerns were respected thus only a written record was taken.

As indicated earlier, the interview schedule was supplemented by a structured questionnaire. The framework of the questionnaire was as follows:

Part 1: Covered the Biographical details (Name were excluded)

Part 2: Comprised a list of barriers to learning which an individual teacher could easily identify.

Part 3: This listed the signs and symptoms that the teachers were familiar with.

Part 4: This is where the teacher had the opportunity to explain how he/she identified the barriers to learning as listed in Part 2. This also allowed each teacher (participant) the freedom to raise issues that were important to each one of them.

### **3.6 The pilot study**

As the main thrust of the study was on how Grade 3 teachers identified barriers to learning, I was confronted with serious issues of the reliability, validity and trustworthiness or dependability of the instruments which I had decided upon.

In order to avoid possible pitfalls inherent in many data collection instruments, I decided to pilot the interview and questionnaire instruments in four schools in the neighbouring Circuit, which was not part of the target population, i.e., Circuit '2'. The aim of the pilot study was to determine the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the instruments and to ascertain the appropriateness of the chosen data collection techniques (De Vos, et al, 2002; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

This was done on a small scale trial run of all the aspects planned for use in the main study, so as to establish if the interview schedule and the questionnaire were appropriate and valid. De Vos et al. (2005: 211) advise that the main purpose of a pilot study is among other things:

- a) To identify any difficulties that could arise during administration, with the hope to eliminate them before hand and
- b) To determine the time that it takes for respondents to complete the interview.

The pilot study did show the elements of validity, trustworthiness and reliability of the instruments to be used. Weaknesses revealed by the pilot study were eventually corrected.

### **3.7 Trustworthiness, Validity and Reliability**

The interview schedule did measure up to the issue of trustworthiness and dependability as most questions asked yielded the expected responses during the interviews.

The questionnaire items did draw what they were supposed to draw under the circumstance and did ensure reliability in the sense that there was an element of consistency in the responses given by the respondents

Validity, according to Creswell (2003:195), is the strength of a quantitative study, but is used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher.

In this study, the questionnaire sought to find out if teachers were in a position to identify barriers to learning as well as the signs and symptoms. Be that as it may, the questionnaire allowed the teachers to each respond negatively or positively thus allowing me to discern those who could from those who cannot identify the various barriers to learning, signs and symptoms.

The initial instruments were very long. Constructive criticism was sought from teachers and the final instruments were shaped in a manner that would not be tiresome to the actual target sample.

### **3.8 Gaining access to schools**

A letter was sent to the Manager of Circuit 2, to ask for permission to collect data from the Grade 3 teachers at the Circuit. Other letters of request were directed to the Principals of the Grade 3 teachers at Circuit 2. This was done two months in before

the commencement of the field work. I personally delivered the letters to the respective School Principals. Confidentiality was guaranteed and informants were thanked in advance for their participation. I have also committed myself that after the completion of the study, I will go back to them and share the results in a form of a communiqué.

### 3.9 Data Analysis

The two-pronged strategy to make use of the interview and the questionnaire techniques simultaneously to collect data, assisted greatly. As the interview progressed, participants had in front of them the questionnaire whose items were a catalogue of pre-selected barriers to learning. These barriers to learning were sampled from the literature review. The interview was in essence a strategy that ensured that all the questionnaire items were fully attended to hence, the response rate was satisfactory.

As a starting point towards the analysis of data, I looked at Part 1 – the Profiles of teachers interviewed, so as to establish if there were patterns of concern that would be decisive when teachers identified the barriers to learning. The research question - ***How well equipped are teachers to identify barriers to learning?*** received responses that indicated without doubt, that the majority of the teachers were not equipped with skills that were essential in pinpointing the different types of barriers to learning that were experienced by different learners. Part 1 served to solicit information on issues such as gender, teaching experience, number of learners in classes, medium of instruction (language of teaching and learning), location of school and teacher qualification(s). The information based on the profiles of teachers, was critical in the sense that the identification of barriers to learning, could also be linked to a larger extent, to the experiences and qualifications of teachers and perhaps but not necessarily to, other external factors beyond the control of the teachers such as the site of the schools. The teacher profiles that emerged from the biographical data are summarized in Table 4.2: Teacher profiles.

Part 2 was a list of a variety of barriers to learning that are classified as disorders that impinge on learning and development. Participants were requested to tick items that were most applicable to them; that is, by ticking in either the “yes” or the “no” option.

Part 3 of the questionnaire comprised of a list of signs and/or symptoms that indicated if a learner was experiencing some barriers to learning. Again, all the items were preset, based on the literature review. In response, the teachers were to indicate by means of a “yes” or “no” to indicate whether or not they were familiar with the various signs and/or symptoms of barriers to learning and development.

Part 4 was an opportunity for the teachers to elaborate on the barriers to learning that they had identified in Part 2. This is the section that gave me a deep understanding of what teachers seemed to mean by barriers to learning when they attempted to identify the listed barriers to learning. In Part 4, the participants were allowed again to speak to issues that could have not been captured during the interview and the questionnaire session.

All the data captured were grouped in categories and emerging themes and expressed in quantitative terms by means of tables as well.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

I undertook this study with the full knowledge that the majority of Grade 3 teachers, like many of my colleagues in the Foundation Phase, were not trained nor exposed to Special Needs Education curricula. This might have had a negative effect on their responses. Another challenge could have been that of the terminology and the language used during the interview. Although I had allowed teachers to express themselves in the language (Xitsonga or Sepedi) that they were most comfortable in, there were some responses that pointed to challenges regarding the labelling of learners experiencing barriers to learning.

This chapter gave an account of the research methodology used in the study. The next chapter concentrates on the findings and interpretation of the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the findings of the study both in the narrative and tabular forms. Findings from individual teachers are narrated and summarized in table formats. The narrative is guided by the emerging themes and categories. Letter codes for the sake of anonymity were used to conceal the identity the teachers.

#### 4.2 Interpretation of the findings

##### 4.2.1 Part 1: Teacher profiles

Data revealed by Part 1 of the questionnaire clearly shows that there are a number of serious concerns regarding the identification of barriers to learning. This was gleaned from the teacher profiles and affirmed by the interviews and the questionnaire as discussed hereunder:

##### a) Gender issue

The majority of the teachers is female and has been teaching for many years, ranging from five to thirty-two years, with an exception of one teacher who had only two years of teaching experience.

Out of the thirty-one teachers interviewed, only four were male. It emerged during the interviews that the four male teachers felt that they were lost in the pool of the Foundation Phase cohort, and as a result, lacked confidence, felt misplaced and demotivated. They held the view that female teachers were suitable to handle children in the Foundation Phase. Implicit in their views is a misconceived understanding of who should teach in the lower grades since as it was claimed, Foundation Phase teaching was meant for elderly female teachers, as one male teacher emphatically indicated during the interviews.

The myth that female teachers were suitable for the Foundation Phase has its origins from the initial training of teachers. The majority of male teachers were trained to teach at Senior Primary and Secondary schools. This may become a barrier to learning as these teachers lacked the motivation to teach in the Foundation Phase. According to some of these male teachers, the main reason for them to be in the Foundation Phase was due to a shortage of vacancies in the Senior Primary classes notwithstanding the fact that some of them had acquired a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma (JPTD).

Female teachers seemed to be satisfied to teach in the Foundation Phase because of the acknowledged stereotype that ‘mothers’, have a better understanding of children at a lower level. The issue of ‘femaleness’ was supposed to put these teachers in a good standing, regarding the identification of barriers to learning since most of them, are mothers, possess knowledge and experience of children’s developmental milestones. Many of them ought to know when and why *‘things’* are not working well with their learners

b) Teaching experience

The majority of the teachers have been teaching for many years. The following picture emerged:

**Table 4.1 Teaching experience (number of years) per gender**

Number of years teaching	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
32 – 37	1	0	1
26 – 31	4	0	4
20 – 25	7	0	7
14 – 19	7	0	7
8 – 13	7	1	8
2 – 7	1	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>31</b>

It is clear from Table 4.1 that the majority of female teachers have been teaching for many years, except one who had only two years teaching experience even though she had qualified ten years ago. The minority of the teachers who are male, have only taught for three (3) to eight (8) years.

Looking at the number of accumulated years in teaching, one would expect that the majority of the teachers would be masters of knowing with certainty, how learners learn, and what the factors that adversely affect children's learning were. It is important to mention that some teachers had accumulated a wealth of knowledge regarding issues that were a hindrance to learners' academic performance and growth. Most of them cited poverty, lack of parental involvement in matters regarding schooling and educational resources, just to mention a few external barriers to learning.

c) Number of learners in classes

The enrollment of learners in schools is also a factor that renders it very difficult for teachers to succeed in identifying barriers to learning. The number of learners in Grade 3 ranged from twenty-seven (27) to fifty-five (55) per class as indicated in Table 4.2. This is testimony to the fact that in more than twenty-five (25) Grade 3 classes, there was overcrowding. The numbers overwhelm teachers and make it difficult for teachers to take note of some children who experience barriers to learning.

The problem of overcrowding is rife in both the semi-rural and rural area schools. Participants in the interviews commented on how difficult it was to identify barriers to learning in overcrowded classrooms. The difficulty, as it was claimed by some teachers, is complicated by the high teacher-learner ratios.

Linked to overcrowding in classes, teachers complained about the high rate of truancy and absenteeism which impacted on the academic performance of the learners. They claimed that learners operate under the assumption that since

they were so many in their classes, it was going to be difficult to spot those who were playing truant.

d) Medium of instruction (language of learning and teaching)

The medium of instruction that is, the language of learning and teaching, in eight (8) of the thirteen (13) sampled schools is English whilst in the remaining five (5) schools, Xitsonga is the medium of instruction. The majority of the teachers in the eight schools saw English as a medium of instruction to be a serious barrier to learning. They argued that the majority of the learners speak Xitsonga, i.e., their home language; therefore, Xitsonga and not English should be the medium of instruction and learning. This argument is in line with the Policies on Languages and Language Learning (Revised National Curriculum Statement, 2003: 20 – 27) that: learners in the Foundation Phase should be taught in their home language. The non-compliance with the relevant policies could be a contributory factor to barriers to learning.

Teachers claim too that some schools were put under pressure to use English as a medium of instruction because many schools want to increase their enrollments by teaching in English. This demand to teach in English, it is believed, will dissuade many parents from sending their children to “former model C schools.” Parents as it is upheld by teachers want their children to be taught and learn in English.

Since English is not the learners’ mother tongue, the majority of them cannot express themselves in English. This creates a barrier to learning as many teachers have said.

e) The location of a school

The location of where the school is situated is also a matter of concern. Most of the schools are in disadvantaged communities. Teachers, by virtue of their socio-economic standing in society, view the majority of learners in rural

settings as backward. They fail to appreciate and understand the family backgrounds of their learners. As a result thereof, teachers have a tendency to apportion learners' underperformance to their parents. Instead of teachers trying to investigate the root causes of learners' poor academic performance, they are quick to label them as 'slow learners', 'naughty', 'lazy', 'noisy' and so on.

Teachers cannot be squarely blamed for this state of affairs since; I am of the opinion that teachers lack the necessary skills and support to follow up learners who exhibit behaviour that is wayward. Many of the learners come from homes characterized by wretched poverty, broken families, child-headed households and informal settlements (squatter camps mainly owned by refugees). These are socio-economic context based barriers to learning that have an adverse effect on learning. Therefore, many teachers lack the appreciative inquiry mind to understand the behaviours displayed by these learners.

f) Training in Special Needs Education

The qualifications of teachers show that many of them have stopped to further their studies. Only two have acquired Bachelor of Arts degrees which are not essentially relevant to the Foundation Phase. All the thirty-one (31) but one received some training in Remedial Education. Even then, she did not complete her training in Special Needs Education. Most of the teachers never received training in the identification of barriers to learning.

Some teachers indicated that they found themselves employed in the Lower Primary (Foundation Phase) schools due to a lack of appropriate vacancies in the Higher Primary (Intermediate Phase) and Secondary schools. The majority of the teachers could only find employment in the Foundation Phase. Teaching in the Foundation Phase demands certain forms of knowledge and skills. It is a level where many learners who experience barriers to learning could be identified.

Several teachers claimed that they chose to work in the Lower Primary schools because of a false notion that, it was easier to work with children in the lower grades. This was disturbing in the sense that the lower primary school was a place where a strong foundation had to be laid. If the foundation is not well laid, the educational future may not be easy for the learners.

It is my view that if one is not adequately equipped for a specific job, he/she is bound to commit fundamental errors in her/his day-to-day duties thereby becoming a barrier to learners' learning. Lack of appropriate qualification and a strong knowledge base, is a barrier in itself (Extrinsic barrier to learning).

Table 4.2 in the next page gives a clear picture of the teachers' profiles.

**Table 4.2 Teacher profiles**

School	Location of School	Teacher	Gender	Qualifications	Special Needs Education	No. of years teaching	Learners in Class	Medium of Instruction
1	Rural area	A	Female	SPTD <sup>7</sup>	No training	13	40	Xitsonga
		B	Female	PPTD <sup>8</sup>	No training	19	43	
		C	Female	SPTD & BA <sup>9</sup>	No training	11	44	
2	Semi-urban	D	Female	SPTD	No training	20	42	English
		E	Female	PTC <sup>10</sup>	No training	16	43	
		F	Female	JPTD <sup>11</sup>	No training	23	43	
3	Semi-urban	G	Male	JPTD	No training	5	54	English
		H	Female	HED <sup>12</sup>	No training	26	53	
		I	Male	SPTD	No training	3	53	
4	Farm area	J	Male	HED	No training	5	27	English
5	Remote rural area	K	Female	HED & BA	No training	26	44	English
6	Semi-urban	L	Female	PPTD	No training	17	45	Xitsonga
		M	Female	JSTC <sup>13</sup>	No training	14	41	
7	Rural area	N	Female	JPTD	No training	10	54	Xitsonga
		O	Female	HED	No training	18	55	
8	Rural area	P	Female	JPTD	No training	14	31	Xitsonga
		Q	Female	JPTD	No training	12	30	
9	Rural area	R	Female	HED	No training	22	46	English
		S	Female	SPTD	No training	23	46	
		T	Female	SPTD	No training	13	44	
10	Rural area	U	Female	FED <sup>14</sup>	No training	25	45	English
		V	Female	SED <sup>15</sup>	No training	24	45	
		W	Female	JPTD	No training	10	46	
		X	Female	FED	No training	20	42	
11	Semi-urban	Y	Female	SED	No training	30	38	English
		Z	Female	SPTD & RE <sup>16</sup>	Partial training	16	39	
		ZA	Female	HED	No training	32	39	
12	Informal rural settlement	ZB	Female	JPTD	No training	2	46	English
		ZC	Male	JPTD	No training	8	44	
13	Rural area	ZD	Female	JPTD	No training	10	49	Xitsonga
		ZE	Female	HED	No training	26	48	

<sup>7</sup> SPTD: Senior Primary Teachers Diploma

<sup>8</sup> PPTD: Pre-primary Teachers Diploma

<sup>9</sup> BA: Bachelor of Arts degree

<sup>10</sup> PTC: Primary Teachers Certificate

<sup>11</sup> JPTD: Junior Primary Teachers Diploma

<sup>12</sup> HED: Higher Education Diploma

<sup>13</sup> JSTC: Junior Secondary Teachers Certificate

<sup>14</sup> FED: Further Education Diploma

<sup>15</sup> SED: Secondary Education Diploma

<sup>16</sup> RE: Remedial Education

All the teachers described hereunder teach Grade 3 classes. They all possess a wealth of teaching experience. In spite of their teaching experience, to identify barriers to learning remains a big challenge. Since almost all of them never received pre- and in-service training in Special Needs Education, Remedial Teaching and recently, Inclusive Education, many of them, acknowledged that their knowledge of barriers to learning is inadequate.

The following is a profile of the sampled schools.

### **School 1**

The school is situated in a rural area. It has three Grade 3 teachers. The language of teaching and learning is Xitsonga.

Teacher A: Has been teaching for thirteen (13) years. She is currently teaching a class of forty (40) learners. She holds a Senior Primary Teachers Diploma (SPTD).

Teacher B: A female with nineteen (19) years teaching experience. She teaches forty-three (43) learners. She holds a Pre-primary Education Diploma. She is qualified to teach in the Foundation Phase.

Teacher C: She holds a Senior Teachers Diploma and a Bachelor of Arts degree. She has been teaching for eleven (11) years. There were 44 learners in her class

### **School 2**

This is a semi-urban area Foundation Phase School. There are three Grade 3 classes. The Language of Teaching and Learning is English.

Teacher D: A female teacher with twenty (20) years teaching experience. There were 42 learners in her class. She holds a Primary Teachers Certificate.

Teacher E: She has accumulated sixteen (16) years of teaching experience; there were forty-three (43) learners in her class. She holds a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma.

Teacher F: Has been teaching for twenty-three (23) years. Forty-three (43) learners were her responsibility. She holds a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma. She is suitably qualified for the Grade 3.

### **School 3**

The school is situated in a semi-urban area. There are three teachers in Grade 3. The language of teaching and learning at the school is English.

Teacher G: This is a male teacher who has taught for five (5) years. He has fifty-four (54) learners in the class. He holds a Senior Primary Teachers Diploma.

Teacher H: A female teacher with twenty-six (26) years teaching experience. She has fifty-three (53) learners in her class. She holds a Higher Education Diploma.

Teacher I: A male teacher with three (3) years teaching experience; he has fifty-three (53) learners in his class and holds a Senior Primary teachers Diploma.

### **School 4:**

It is situated on a farm. It has one teacher and the medium of instruction is English.

Teacher J: This is a male teacher with five (5) years teaching experience. He has twenty-seven (27) learners in his class. He holds a Higher Education Diploma.

## **School 5**

The school is situated in remote rural area. There is one teacher. The language of teaching is English.

Teacher K: A female teacher with twenty-six (26) years teaching experience. There were forty-four (44) learners in a class. She holds a Higher Education Diploma and a Bachelor of Arts degree.

## **School 6**

School 6 is situated in a semi-urban area. It has two Grade 3 teachers. The language of teaching and learning used is Xitsonga.

Teacher L: A female teacher with seventeen (17) years teaching experience. She was responsible for forty-five (45) learners in her class. She holds a Pre-primary Teachers Diploma.

Teacher M: A female teacher with fourteen (14) years teaching experience. There were forty-one (41) learners in her class. She holds a Junior Secondary Teachers Certificate.

## **School 7**

School 7 is situated in a rural area. There were two Grade 3 teachers. The medium of instruction is Xitsonga.

Teacher N: She has been teaching for ten (10) years. The number of learners in her class is fifty-four (54). She holds a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma.

Teacher O: A female teacher with eighteen (18) years teaching experience; she has fifty-five (55) learners in her class. She holds a Higher Education Diploma.

### **School 8**

School 8 is situated in a rural area with two Grade 3 teachers. The language of teaching and learning is Xitsonga.

Teacher P: A female teacher with fourteen (14) years teaching experience. She has thirty-one (31) learners in her class. She holds a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma.

Teacher Q: A female teacher with twelve (12) years teaching experience. She has thirty (30) learners in her class. She holds a junior Primary teachers Diploma.

### **School 9**

The school is situated in a rural area with three Grade 3 teachers. The language of teaching and learning is English.

Teacher R: A female teacher with twenty-two (22) years teaching experience. She has forty-six (46) learners in the class. She holds a Higher Education Diploma.

Teacher S: A female teacher with twenty-three (23) years teaching experience. 46 learners are in her class. She holds a Senior Teachers Diploma

Teacher T: A female teacher, with thirteen (13) years teaching experience. She has forty-four (44) learners in the class. She holds a Senior Primary Teachers Diploma.

### **School 10**

School 10 is situated in a rural area, with four Grade 3 teachers. The language of teaching and learning at the school is English.

Teacher U: A female teacher with twenty-five (25) years teaching experience, she has forty-five (45) learners in class. She holds a Further Education Diploma.

Teacher V: Teacher V is a female teacher with has just taught for two (2) years. She has forty-five (45) learners in class. She holds a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma.

Teacher W: A female teacher with ten (10) years teaching experience. She has forty-six (46) learners in the class. She holds a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma.

Teacher X: A female teacher with twenty (20) years teaching experience. She has forty-two (42) learners in the class. She holds a Further Education Diploma.

### **School 11**

School 11 is situated in a semi-urban area, with three Grade 3 teachers, the language of teaching and learning is English.

Teacher Y: She has thirty (30) years of teaching experience. She has thirty-eight (38) learners in class. She holds a senior Education Diploma.

Teacher Z: A female teacher with sixteen (16) years teaching experience. She is currently teaching a class of thirty-nine (39) learners. She holds a one (1) year certificate in Remedial Education and a Senior Primary Teachers Diploma.

Teacher ZA: A female teacher who has thirty-two (32) years of teaching experience. She teaches a class of thirty-nine (39) learners. She holds a Higher Education Diploma.

## **School 12**

The school is situated in an informal-rural settlement. It has two Grade 3 teachers. The language of teaching and learning is English.

Teacher ZB: A female teacher, with two (2) years teaching experience. She has forty-six (46) learners in her class. She holds a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma.

Teacher ZC: He has been teaching for eight (8) years. He is currently teaching forty-four (44) learners in his class. He holds a Junior Primary teachers Diploma.

## **School 13**

The school is situated in a rural area with two Grade 3 teachers. The language of teaching and learning is Xitsonga.

Teacher ZD: A female teacher with 10 years teaching experience. She has forty-nine (49) learners her class. She holds a Junior Primary Teachers Diploma.

Teacher ZE: A female teacher with twenty-six (26) years teaching experience. There were forty-eight (48) learners in her class. She holds a Higher Education Diploma.

The above descriptions reveal that the greater majority of the teachers are experienced to teach in the Foundation Phase. The number of years that the teachers have accumulated teaching in the Foundation Phase was supposed to mean that all of them ought to possess satisfactory knowledge about the identification of barriers to learning.

The majority of the teachers - 9 females to be precise, have acquired the then popular three-year Junior Primary Teachers Diploma. This group is followed by 6 teachers who possess the Higher Education Diploma. This group is not suitable to teach in the Foundation Phase.

#### 4.2.2 Part 2: Barriers to learning

This part of the questionnaire showed that the majority of teachers had an idea of what barriers to learning were, even though some of them were not confident to explain how they had identified them in a classroom situation. The lack of confidence was evident when asked how these barriers to learning would manifest themselves in learners. Some said: *“When a learner is limping or has a crippled leg or arm”*. But, when asked about Cerebral Palsy, many teachers did not know how to explain it even though this was associated with ‘limping’ or ‘crippled limb’.

The teachers’ responses are summarized in Table 4.3 below:

**Table 4.3: Part 2: Barriers to learning responses**

Response rate	Barriers to learning	Yes	Responses
26 - 31	<i>Writing</i>	31	<i>A greater majority of teachers indicated that they may easily identify these barriers to learning experienced by learners in their classes</i>
	<i>Reading</i>	31	
	<i>Mathematics</i>	31	
	<i>Hearing Difficulties</i>	31	
	<i>Physical Disabilities</i>	31	
	<i>Physical Abuse</i>	31	
	<i>Sexual Abuse</i>	31	
	Emotionally Disturbed	30	
	Visually Handicapped	30	
20 – 25	Intellectual Difficulties	28	<i>Many teachers could identify these barriers to learning because they were easy to observe as they claimed</i>
	Difficulty to imitate movements	25	
	Chronic Illness	23	
	Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder	23	
	Epilepsy	22	
14 – 19	Tendency to run/bump into objects	20	<i>Only 16 out of 31 teachers indicated that they can easily spot learners who are truant</i>
	Truancy	16	
8 – 13	Cerebral Palsy	13	<i>Very few teachers were able to explain what these barriers to learning were.</i>
	Aurally Handicapped	12	
2 – 7	Dyslexia	5	<i>Majority of the teachers did not know these barriers to learning</i>
	Dyscalculia	3	
	Autism	2	

I was pleased to note that all the thirty-one (31) teachers were able to identify the learners' inability to **write, read, count** (*Mathematics*) and **hear** (*Listening*) as barriers to learning. Adding to this list of barriers to learning were **physical disabilities, physical** and **sexual abuses** as well. The majority of the teachers (between 28 and 30) were unanimous that **intellectual difficulties, emotional disturbance** and **visual impairment** were barriers to learning that they could easily identify.

The above barriers to learning were ticked by teachers when they saw them on the questionnaire. When I made a follow up to ascertain how teachers identified the barriers to learning, their explanations were surprising and off the mark. For example, some teachers referred to some learners as '**mentally retarded**' when in actual fact these learners were experiencing some type(s) of external barriers to learning.

The table above shows that **autism** was the barrier to learning that the majority of the teachers did not know. Only 2 out of 31 could explain how they would identify a learner who was autistic. Therefore, 29 teachers did not know or figure out what autism was. This was followed closely by **dyscalculia** and **dyslexia**. Many teachers confused spelling errors with dyslexia and bad (illegible) handwriting. When I asked the teachers to explain this connection; on one hand there were teachers who indicated that many learners did '*not properly hold their writing tools*'. And, on the other hand, there were teachers who were emphatic about their views on **dyslexia**. They claimed that it was a '*spelling problem*'. This is not necessarily the case as indicated in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dyslexia>, *that dyslexia is separate and distinct from reading difficulties resulting from other causes, such as a non-neurological deficiency with vision or hearing, or from poor or inadequate reading instruction*; and <http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content3/dyslexia.html>. According to this source, *dyslexia as a condition resulting from neurological, maturational, and genetic causes (Medical point of view), and specific reading problems evidenced with no reference to causation (Psychological perspective)*.

As teachers were asked further about different types of barriers to learning, many indicated socio-economic problems such as poverty, child-headed families and lack of parental involvement in learners' school work and activities. One had this to say:

*“Some of the learners are disturbed intellectually due to poverty. When a learner comes to school with an empty stomach, it is very clear that that child will not perform well in class”.*

As the interview progressed, teachers were time and again directed to the nineteen items of Part 2.

#### 4.2.3 Part 3: Signs and symptoms of barriers to learning

Part 3 of the questionnaire was a predetermined list of signs and symptoms. These were generally viewed as barriers to learning that were common in Foundation Phase learners. Teachers were asked during the interview process, to indicate what they thought were signs and symptoms of barriers to learning. Many teachers ticked signs and symptoms of barriers to learning that were familiar to them. They explained how they observed these signs and symptoms in their day-to-day engagements with learners.

The responses of the teachers are captured hereunder in Table 4.4.

**Table 4. 4: Part 3: Symptoms and signs of barriers to learning**

Response rate	Symptoms and signs	Yes	No
26 - 31	Loneliness	31	0
	Absenteeism	31	0
	Cannot concentrate	30	1
	Confuses letters and words	30	1
	Reverses words or letters	30	1
	Speaks too loudly	29	2
	Rubs eyes	27	4
	Holds book very closely	27	4
	Easily distracted	26	5
20 – 25	Reverses numbers	25	6
	Tells the same story every time	25	6
	Often calls out of class	24	7
	Weight loss	23	8
	Unable to follow directions	23	8
14 – 19	Holds pens/pencils awkwardly	16	15
	Counts on fingers in Grade 3	15	16
	Difficulty in making him/herself understood	15	16
	Often falls accidentally when running	14	17
8 – 13	Complains of headaches and dizziness after activity	11	20
	Tilts the head to the side	11	20

As teachers discussed how they identified barriers to learning, Part 3 of the questionnaire enabled me to ascertain with a reasonable degree of confidence if in deed teachers were able to differentiate between barriers to learning and signs or symptoms thereof. In general the “**yes**” responses were lower than those of the barriers to learning as indicated in Table 4.3. This simply meant that teachers were not able to identify with confidence, the signs and/or symptoms than the actual barriers to learning. As a consequence thereof, a significant number of the teachers were not able to draw links between the signs and/or symptoms and the barriers to learning: barriers to learning were the same as signs and symptoms. This, in most instances resulted in teachers incorrectly labeling learners. For example, some teachers actually indicated that ‘**loneliness**’ itself, was a barrier to learning. In reality, ‘loneliness’ could be one of the symptoms of ‘**autism**’, which is a barrier to learning. Other teachers indicated that a learner who was an orphan, was always **lonely**, therefore, being an orphan was a barrier to learning per se.

All the teachers indicated that **loneliness** and **absenteeism** were barriers to learning. When probing on the above responses, some teachers asserted that learners who were always lonely or absent from school, missed out on critical learning and consequently performed poorly. Consequently, loneliness and absenteeism were barriers to learning. Unbeknown to the teachers, absenteeism for example, could be caused by a number of factors for example, chronic illness. Chronic illness according to Gous and Mfazwe (2003: 39) *is a long term illness with periods of sickness and recovery*. These periods are unplanned and take the learner away from school. Chronic illness is a barrier to learning than loneliness and absenteeism. Loneliness and absenteeism are merely signs of a number of barriers to learning.

The **lack of concentration, mixing of letters and words and the reversal thereof, speaking loudly, rubbing of eyes and holding of a book very closely to the eyes**, were some of the signs and symptoms that the majority of teachers identified, although as barriers to learning. It was clear in my deliberations with the teachers that many of the teachers viewed the signs and symptoms as barriers to learning.

More than half of the teachers also perceived the inability of learners to: **follow directions, tell the same story repeatedly**, and **holding pens/pencils** awkwardly as barriers to learning instead of clear signs of barriers to learning.

Teachers, observe the signs and symptoms as barriers to learning and use these terms interchangeably. Barriers to learning are constituted by a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic factors, and need to be observed over a period of time, and not as once off episodes.

Twenty (20) out of 31 teachers concluded that a learner who complained of **headaches and dizziness after an activity** was **hungry**. This is not necessarily the case because chronic and dizziness were symptoms of deep-rooted neurological problems. Teachers, more often than not label such learners as hungry, thereby aggravating the barrier to learning. Similarly, there were also 20 teachers who concluded that a learner who **tilts his/her head to the side** was said to be experiencing **physical** or **neck problems** instead of **visual difficulties**. These teachers explained these signs as an indication of laziness on the part of the learner, or that the learner was seeking attention, hence, the tilting of the head. Again, the tilting of the head to the side is a neurological problem.

The majority of teachers managed to identify the signs and/or symptoms associated with barriers to learning albeit the difficulty of ascertaining the exact type of barrier that the learners were experiencing.

#### 4.2.4 Part 4: Explanations of teachers on how they identified barriers to learning

All the teachers were able to identify learners who had difficulties with writing, reading and mathematics. They explained that the challenge was with learners' handwritings that were not readable and poor in mathematical literacy. Teachers added that most of these learners were often clumsy, had a limp or obvious physical disability.

Many teachers asserted that they were able to recognize **physical abuse** as a barrier to learning. To them, physical abuse was the easiest to identify because most of the time, the scars sustained by learners, were evident.

The majority of the female teachers maintained that **sexual abuse** was also identifiable in female learners. They stressed that sexually abused girls were always

very shy, withdrawn, constantly crying and had a sudden drop in academic performance.

It is worth to note that teachers had indicated that physical and sexual abuses were rife in their areas. Hence, it was simple for them to become aware of physically and sexually abused learners. Since, this was not the nucleus of the study; I did not pursue the discussion on physical and sexual abuses.

**Emotional disturbance** was also a barrier to learning that teachers were able to identify albeit with some challenges. Teachers explained that emotionally disturbed learners were forever *aggressive, immature, irritable, lonely and withdrawn*. The teachers' explanations were in keeping with the literature (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988; Donald et al, 2006).

A reasonable number of the teachers stated that they could identify **visual impairment** as a barrier to learning. They maintained that learners, who had sight problems, often want to sit in the front of the class and hold their books very close to their eyes. The teachers' observations were valid in the sense that Mahlangu (1989) gives a similar description.

#### **4.3. Conclusion**

The findings reveal that teachers are able to identify obvious barriers to learning in a haphazard or random manner without a fixed set of criteria or standard. The research question: ***What criteria do teachers use to identify barriers to learning?*** is not adequately answered. The lack of a standard criterion or a set of criteria that teachers could employ is evident. As a result thereof, one is unable to come with ways that teachers could employ to identify barriers to learning. Teachers resort to their own intuition to figure out what they suspect could be a barrier to learning that affects their learners' academic performance.

All these challenges, contribute to the difficulties of identifying barriers to learning.

The next chapter pulls together the study and presents the recommendations.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The study attempted to shed light on why *teachers find it difficult to identify barriers to learning* of learners in Grade 3. Therefore, the main thrust of the study was to investigate the challenges that the Grade 3 teachers encountered in the identification of barriers to learning that were experienced by their learners. The study aimed at:

- a) Finding ways and means which teachers used to identify barriers to learning in the context of Grade 3 learners, and
- b) To formulate criteria to be used by teachers when identifying barriers to learning

As a point of departure for the study, the research questions that arose directed the study:

- a) How well equipped are teachers to identify barriers to learning?
- b) What criteria do teacher use to identify barriers to learning?
- c) What do teachers do when confronted with learners who experience barriers to learning?

The discussion that follows is anchored on the research questions that gave direction to the study.

## 5.2 How well equipped are teachers to identify barriers to learning?

In an attempt to resolve this question, recurrent themes such as **overcrowding** and **training** emerged. These, support the notion that many teachers are not sufficiently equipped to identify barriers to learning under these circumstances:

### 5.2.1 Overcrowding

Overcrowding is one of the challenges that many schools experience. Linked to this challenge is a lack of essential resources such as adequate number of classrooms and teachers. Therefore, a well-trained cadre of teachers is a necessity that would enable schools to function effectively in overcrowded classrooms. This study has shown that due to a dire shortage of schools or classrooms, many schools are compelled to overstretch their classroom capacity and resources, thereby overburdening teachers with too many learners beyond the acceptable teacher-learner ratio. This view is in line with Donald, et al (2006, 117 -120).

Large numbers in the classrooms make it difficult for teachers to give each learner individual attention. Everyday teachers see 'new' faces, making it difficult to follow up cases where teachers have identified problems. In some instances, learners who have serious problems may be shy to meet with teachers because of fear in overcrowded classes. This was also echoed by the interviewed teachers.

In the context of the above state of affairs, the transforming education system and the influx of education policies that ought to be implemented in the schools, present a new set of administrative, management and educational challenges. As a consequence of all these important issues, the present cohort of teachers which has been trained before these new curriculum changes, such as the introduction of Inclusive Education, the Outcomes-based Education, the demands of the National Curriculum Statement, to mention a few, is hard pressed. Signs of teacher-burnout are surfacing. Teachers themselves are becoming barriers to learning because their training was limited in the areas of Special Needs Education.

## 5.2.2 Training

The greater majority of the teachers in the study acknowledged that they lacked profound knowledge and skills in Special Needs education. Many teachers were trained in the former Colleges of Education<sup>17</sup> for a period of two or three years. Their training was inadequate. The training of teachers was informed by the old apartheid education system that produced teachers who had limited knowledge and skills to adapt and adjust to new transformative challenges. It is not surprising that the present Government has embarked on a massive Professional Teacher Development project – the National Professional Education Diploma (NPDE) to upgrade all the under qualified teachers.

The NPDE is a diplomatic strategy that the Government has employed to compel '*professionally static*' teachers to move in terms of further education. The current NPDE curriculum, through Modules such as **Getting Practical** and **Being a Teacher**, empower teachers amongst other things, to be able to deal with '**Barriers to learning**' and '**Inclusivity**' through the National Curriculum Statement (Grades R-9) Policy documents. It is hoped that, the exposure to new programmes such as the NPDE, Advanced Certificate in Education (*Special Needs; Inclusive Education*) and the Bachelor of Education Honours (*Special Needs; Inclusive Education*), will assist teachers to face the plethora of challenges in the area of Barriers to Learning and Development.

Most of the teachers claimed that what they know regarding learning problems are concepts such as: *mental retardation, slow learners, genius, delinquents, truants and vandals, deaf, blind, physically handicapped*, to name a few. They were never trained in the areas that covered a wide range of learners in special needs such as learners with *neurological problems, epilepsy, Down syndrome, autism, intellectual disabilities etc.* The above-mentioned Professional Teacher development programmes are a panacea to the challenges faced by many teachers in the area of Special Needs Education.

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<sup>17</sup> Since 2001 many Colleges of Education have been closed or incorporated in Universities (Government Gazette Volume 426, Number 21913)

Teachers also indicated that there were fewer in-service training opportunities in Special Needs Education.

All of the above create and increase the inability of teachers to identify barriers to learning.

### **5.3 What criteria do teachers use to identify barriers to learning?**

Teachers seem to know how to identify barriers to learning by sheer observation. To explore the conditions or criteria that teachers used to identify barriers to learning, the following themes surfaced: *Academic performance (tests and/or examinations), attendance, behaviour, socio-economic status, language of teaching and learning, loneliness, signs and symptoms of barriers to learning.*

During the interviews, it became clear that many teachers found it difficult to differentiate between the identification of learners who experience barriers to learning and barriers to learning per se. Equally important was the demonstrated limited knowledge of the teachers about the different contexts where barriers to learning were located, for example, within the:

- a) learner (internal barriers),
- b) education system, family, the broader social, economic and political contexts (external barriers), and

#### **5.3.1 Academic performance**

Many teachers indicated for example, that when learners regularly failed to do their homework without any valid explanation, it was a clear indication that '*something*' was wrong. Linked to the issue of failure to do and complete given tasks, was the issue of tests and/or continual failure by students. Some teachers claimed that when learners failed repeatedly, they called them for 'short' discussions to ascertain what was happening or wrong. To the teachers, this was an important strategy to identify exactly the type of barrier to learning that the learners were experiencing. As long as

they could single out learners through academic results, teachers were satisfied that they were able to identify barriers to learning.

Another important aspect of note is that many teachers were unable to associate a specific type of barrier to learning to a specific form of behaviour exhibited by learners who eventually failed the tests and examinations.

The failing of examinations as a criterion is therefore very narrow and simplistic. Failure could be attributed to a number of factors either extrinsic or intrinsic. However, it is a precursor that calls on teachers to embark on a methodical investigation to find the source of failure. Using continuous assessment (particularly formative) could be an early attempt to find out if learners had barriers to learning unlike using examinations after a long period, which could be too late for any intervention.

### 5.3.2 Attendance

Many teachers claimed that truancy and absenteeism were yet another set of criteria that convinced them that those who committed this offense were *'troubled minds'*, especially when there was a pattern of truancy and absenteeism. For example, if a learner was always absent from school every Monday or Friday. This could mean that a learner was kept away by something. Teachers cited girls who were forced to do menial labour at home. Teachers were quick to say that this phenomenon was attributable to the learner's families. Many teachers did not verify the validity of their conclusions, in view of the fact that, there was also a possibility that the school (itself) could also be a contributory factor.

### 5.3.3 Behaviour

Teachers claim that the wayward behaviour or behaviour that is extreme is an accurate indicator of a barrier to learning. This is consistent with literature about behaviour that deviates from the norm (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988). Children who are always fighting, stealing other people's belongings, bullying, rowdy, etc, are easily identifiable however, the underlying causes are not easily identified by teachers.

Unless teachers are trained to systematically link certain forms of behaviour to well known and scientifically proven barriers to learning, such as epileptic seizures, many teachers would confuse the action that precedes an epileptic attack with faking or the learner being absent-minded or day-dreaming. Hence, some teachers will shout at the affected learner for attention. Unbeknown to the teacher is the fact that a loud noise may, under certain conditions trigger a severe epileptic seizure (Gous & Mfazwe, 2003).

#### 5.3.4 Socio-economic status

The social and economic standing of a learner is also used as a criterion by many teachers to identify barriers to learning. It was clear during the interviews that some teachers labelled learners with barriers to learning as those who come from poverty stricken and illiterate or 'uneducated' families. Most of these learners as they claimed, had a very low self-esteem, were shy and solitary. Some of these learners, they said, came from deep rural, remote and farm settlements and backgrounds that were not print-rich, hence most of these learners could not read or write. These then became an inhibiting factor to teaching and learning. Such contextual and poverty related issues are also reported by Donald et al (2006: 22 -24).

Teachers were sometimes spot on regarding this issue; however, there are exceptions. There are few learners who are performing well regardless of the harsh conditions under which they live. It is easier for teachers to use this criterion to label learners because it means less work for support. Who can change the socio-economic status of the learners under the present material conditions? So they asked.

#### 5.3.5 English as a medium of instruction

Some schools have adopted the use of English as a language of teaching and learning policy. In such schools, English as a medium of instruction has had an unfavourable effect on the performance of the learners. Some teachers reported that there are many learners who cannot read nor write at the required level of Grade 3.

In trying to find out further, as to why this 'barrier to learning'; many teachers claimed that most of the learners had not yet mastered to speak in their own mother tongue – Xitsonga. "*How then can they speak and write in English?*" Some teachers had retorted.

There were other teachers who held the view that; failure to write and speak in English, at Grade 3 level, was a barrier to learning. This is not necessarily the case. Most of the schools that use English as a medium of teaching and learning, have learners whose parents/caregivers/guardians are challenged when it comes to the English language. As a result, many learners do not get the necessary practice to speak in English. Therefore, it is inaccurate to label learners who cannot converse in English as experiencing barriers to learning.

From the interviews conducted, it appeared that teaching and learning for many schools in the area takes place through a language, which is not Xitsonga, the language of the majority of the learners and teachers in Circuit 2. This places learners at a disadvantage and being labelled by teachers as '**slow learners**' or '**a va twi**'<sup>18</sup> (Xitsonga).

#### 5.3.6 Signs and symptoms

Some teachers viewed some signs and symptoms (Table 4.4., Part 3) as a yard stick to recognize barriers to learning. They claimed that they often saw **loneliness, absenteeism, lack of concentration, and letter reversal** as criteria for the identification of barriers to learning. Added to this list, teachers also cited **attention seeking, laziness, noisemaking, and loitering** as barriers to learning.

It is clear that teachers used signs and symptoms as a tool to identify barriers to learning. Many teachers were less concerned about the duration of the occurrence of the signs or symptoms in an individual. How long had the signs and symptoms occurred to warrant that these were in deed barriers to learning? Remains, a challenge.

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<sup>18</sup> A direct translation of 'a va twi' in English is: They do not listen.

Almost all the teachers agreed that loneliness at all times, solitary eating (during break time), walking alone (without company from home to school or school to home) are indicators that they used to conclude that a specific learner was experiencing barriers to learning. This is a disorder called autism, a barrier to learning that many teachers did not know.

Teachers seem to use signs and symptoms as a criterion to identify barriers to learning.

#### **5.4 What do teachers do when confronted with learners who experience barriers to learning?**

Some teachers were also uninformed about their own limited knowledge as far as barriers to learning were concerned. This also shows that there is a lack of understanding of what is expected of them in the new dispensation of Inclusive Education. This inference is based on the teachers' complaints about Inclusive Education and that they were not qualified to deal with learners in need of special education and support.

Teachers indicated that when they were confronted with learners who experienced barriers to learning, they simply interviewed them, informed the Heads of Departments, discussed the matter with the Principals and lastly, approached the learners' family. There were teachers who claimed that they referred the affected learners to Psychologists. When asked: How they arrived at a conclusion that a specific learner must be sent to a psychologist? Many teachers responded in a way that demonstrated a haphazard manner of arriving at a conclusion that says: so and so must be referred to the psychologists.

All the teachers indicated that they held regular discussions with learners who they suspected, experienced learning problems. Unfortunately, none of the teachers had indicated any kind of intervention programme that they follow to supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning. When asked why they did not have such programmes, they indicated that they were overwhelmed with 'school work'.

By '*doing something*' about learners experiencing barriers to learning, teachers are on the right track towards building an 'Inclusive Education and Training System (Education White Paper 6, 2001). This is commendable considering the teachers' level of training and working conditions.

## **5.5 The findings of the study in perspective**

The literature reviewed for this study, concentrated mainly on the barriers to learning as such, and not so much on the identification of learners experiencing barriers to learning by teachers. The findings of the present study are consistent with other findings elsewhere. For example, in the United States of America it was found that some teachers struggled to identify barriers to learning, due to a lack of a common definition of barriers to learning. This challenge was resolved by the Mental Health in Schools Center project (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). The Mental Health in Schools Center project, managed to classify barriers to learning and even went further to classify appropriate buffers to the barriers to learning.

Aitken (1995: 7) reports that in New Zealand, the Education Review Office investigated and reported on the identification of barriers to learning, *that there were some teachers who lacked skills in classroom behaviour management, who were also unable to deal with learners with differing needs*. The teachers that were interviewed also implied in their discussions that, there were challenges in identifying barriers to learning in their overcrowded classrooms.

The findings of this study are also dissimilar to the United States of America and New Zealand because these countries have a long history in addressing issues of barriers to learning and development. The training that went into the initial teacher education had a strong grounding of Special Needs and Inclusive Education. The present study, found that the majority of the teachers were not adequately trained, hence, many teachers did not have the basic knowledge and skills that were critical in the identification of barriers to learning.

The major differences between rural schools in South African and many 'rural schools' in for example, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States of America are vast. What is rural over there compares well with what is urban in South Africa. This also goes for the quality of teacher training and education.

It should be noted too, that this study is similar to a study conducted by Bothma, Gravette and Swart (2002) in Gauteng and the Western Cape Provinces regarding the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education. The findings of the study show that teachers complained about the implementation of the inclusive education policy which they were not consulted on. They also indicated that they had neither the training nor the ability to handle learners with special needs. Though not part of the study, I found that the many changes that were taking place in Education such as the outcomes-based education, the new curriculum, introduction of many policies, abolishment of corporal punishment, introduction of Inclusive Education and many more, put a tremendous strain on teachers. Many teachers for example, vigorously complained about these changes and the demand put on them regarding Inclusive Education.

## 5.6 Implications of the study

The South African education system is undergoing serious transformation. Several policies have been formulated. The Education White Paper 6 is one of the many policies that aim to address the imbalances of the past. ***It acknowledges that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support*** (Education White Paper 6, 2001: 6). In the light of the above assertion, teachers need to embrace the spirit of the Education White Paper 6: *Building an Inclusive education and Training System*.

This study holds the following implications:

- a) Special Needs Education should form part of the initial teacher education qualification

- b) In-service training in Inclusive Education for teachers should be encouraged
- c) Foundation Phase teachers should be given priority to attend developmental workshops on Early Childhood Development and Inclusive Education
- d) The intentions of the Education White Paper 6, should be realized so that District Based Support Centres empower teachers with knowledge and skills to identify barriers to learning and deal with them appropriately

## 5.7 Recommendations

The majority of the teachers showed limited knowledge of barriers to learning. They also demonstrated a lack of foundational knowledge and practical skills essential in terms of the identification of barriers to learning. This limitation is a barrier that will frustrate the implementation of the Education White Paper 6, thereby violating one of the principles underpinning the National Curriculum – the principle of ***Inclusivity*** (Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9, Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, 2003: 5).

For Inclusive Education to work, a survey should be conducted so that planning should take into consideration what obtains in the schools. I, therefore recommend that:

- a) A study or a variant thereof in the entire Province be replicated as a baseline (needs analysis). This will assist the Limpopo Department of Education to understand exactly the nature of the problem, and to plan based on tangible evidence
- b) Short courses or modules in Inclusive Education so as to empower teachers in the philosophy and practice of Inclusive Education
- c) Practical strategies need to be adopted to change the teachers' mindset so that they embrace and celebrate diversity in their profession and practice.

## 5.8 Conclusion

The Foundation Phase teachers are the primary layers of a strong base on which future developments will be built. Therefore, it is critical to identify barriers to learning and development that could hamper the teaching and learning activities during this stage. By the time learners are in Grade 3, the Foundation Phase exit point, it could be too late for any constructive and mediated interventions to be effective. Appropriate intervention and support programmes ought to have been in place by then and be finalized during Grade 3. Grade 3 teachers ought to be empowered to carry on the Grade R, 1 and 2 teacher's support work.

No learner ought to be in Grade 3 without any form of basic knowledge and practical skills to write legibly, count and read with confidence. As it stands now, many Grade 3 learners experience problems in writing, reading and counting. Where is the problem? The answer lies in the early identification (diagnosis) of barriers to learning; early intervention and early support. And, in that way: '**A stitch in time saves nine**', and in Xitsonga (Proverb) we say:

***Songa rigogo ra ha tsakama.***

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<http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content3/dyslexia.html>

Government Gazette Volume 426, Number 21913

## APPENDIX 1

P.O. Box 165  
LETABA  
0870  
Cell: 083 700 6860  
26 September 2005

The Circuit Manager  
Att: Mr. P Halala  
Department of Education  
Nkowankowa Circuit  
Private Bag 1413  
LETABA  
0870

Dear Sir

### RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH

I hereby request your permission to carry out an educational research, which will involve selected school teachers in the district. I am currently doing a Masters in Educational Psychology (Special Educational Needs) with the University of Limpopo. The title of my dissertation is: "IDENTIFICATION OF BARRIERS TO LEARNING BY GRADE THREE TEACHERS IN THE RITAVI DISTRICT."

The research will be conducted in thirteen primary schools and their Grade three teachers, in this district. A copy of the findings of this dissertation will be made available to the department of Education, Limpopo. Attached herewith is a copy of the letter from the University of Limpopo.

I hope to receive you favourable reply.

Yours sincerely

---

Ntsanwisi, LNK (Mrs.)





A Vongani Street  
P. O. Box 165  
LETABA  
0870

05 November 2005

The Principal

.....  
.....

Dear Sir/Madam

**PERMISSION TO INTERVIEW GRADE 3 TEACHER ON BARRIERS TO LEARNING**

I request your permission to interview Grade 3 teachers about the views/perceptions about barriers to learning experienced by learners.

The interview will be limited to a period of twenty to thirty minutes and will be conducted between 12:00 and 13:00.

Let me assure you that confidentiality of the interviewees will be guaranteed and at the end of the project I promise to debrief the school about the findings of the study.

I hope to receive your favourable reply to carry out the research. Attached hereto is a letter from the University of Limpopo supporting my request.

.....  
LNK Ntsanwisi  
Cell: 0837006860  
e-mail: nwanati@Mweb.co.za

**The Interview Schedule**

i. Have you ever had a learner or learners who experienced barriers to learning?

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ii. What type of barriers to learning were those?

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iii. How do you go about identifying children who experience barriers to learning?

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iv. What do you do when you are confronted with learners who experience barriers to learning?

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v. Have you received special training regarding Special Needs Education or any form of training that enabled you to identify learners with learning barriers?

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vi. May you please explain how you identify the barriers to learning that you have ticked in Part 2

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### Questionnaire

#### Identifying Barriers to Learning

Your school has been selected to participate in a research programme that aims to find out how you, as a teacher identify barriers to learning. Your participation in this research will help us to determine how best we can identify barriers to learning at an early stage. Please help by telling me how you go about identifying barriers to learning.

Note that all questions request you to share your knowledge and experiences as a teacher in the Foundation Phase when identifying barriers to learning.

Please remember that this is not a test; there are no right or wrong answer. I would like to assure you that the information you give will be treated with complete confidentiality. Therefore, I humbly request you to assist me with this project by completing this questionnaire as we discuss.

I wish to thank you sincerely for your willingness to participate in this research.