How can educators in the Intermediate Phase be empowered to cope with the demands they face in an inclusive classroom situation?

BY
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Supervisor : Dr. A.J. Greyling
I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr AJ Greyling, for her guidance, interest, encouragement and unreserved patience. Her suggestions and ideas inspired me to continue with this research.

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To my language editor, Miss. M. Nel, thank you for your time and patience.

Lastly, praise to the Almighty God, who brought me this far, giving me wisdom and determination to make the success I have.
DECLARATIONS

I declare that this Research report is my own work. All sources or quotes used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Ysanne Danielle Bosman

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(Date)
Summary

The rationale of my research was to make sure that all learners are treated as equals in the education afforded to them. The researcher noticed that not all educators in mainstream schools facing learners experiencing learning problems could deal with the Curriculum and that many had difficulty in coping in an inclusive classrooms setting. Furthermore, the researcher noticed that many educators perceive that they did not have the knowledge and skills to identify and support learners experiencing learning problems. Consequently, the educators felt that they could not effectively help these learners in their learning progress. While the educators struggle to cope, learners ended up having to repeat a grade or being promoted to the next grade without having attained the necessary skills yet. The researcher set out to research what the available literature stated about how educators could be empowered to cope with teaching learners experiencing learning problems in an inclusive classroom situation.

For this research study, a qualitative approach was followed, as it best matched the type of interactive investigation considered necessary. Due to time, financial and resources constraints, purpose sampling was used as the most effective method of yielding data. The qualitative approach embraced a multi-perspective approach, in terms of which methods of data collection were used, such as collection questionnaires, conducting interviews and using observations.

The researcher trusts that her understanding as presented in the research findings and the recommendations made will benefit not only herself, but will empower all educators coping with the stress of teaching learners experiencing learning problems and improving their skills and self-esteem in the educational environment.
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1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Numerous South African learners in the Intermediate Phase demonstrate signs of a variety of educational problems and subsequently these learners generally find it hard to cope at school. Aspects of learning such as reading, writing, listening, thinking, spelling, calculating and comprehension are all part of the basic skills learners need in order to successfully progress to the next grade. In the school environment these learning problems may be caused by specific barriers to their learning. Turnbull (2004:18) affirms that no two learners will exhibit the exact same characteristics regarding learning problems. It therefore becomes a challenge for Intermediate Phase educators to teach learners who experience mild to serious educational problems to reach their full potential in an inclusive situation.

All humans, including children, are directly influenced by their environment (Green, 2005:10; Havelock and Hamilton, 2004:34). The environment in which the learners live has a direct bearing on their ability to progress and cope with the academic and social aspects of the school system. The unfavorable home situations of many learners are often of such nature that they contribute to the development of barriers to learning. Learners from households where poverty prevail and parents or caretakers cannot provide the necessary support to enhance learning, often find it hard to succeed in an academic environment (West and Pennell, 2003:118).

Learners experiencing any of the various barriers to learning will experience some negative impact on meaningful access to education, as the conditions both inside and
outside their schools often serve to undermine their general well-being. Considering that an aspect such as a safe, inviting and stimulating learning environment is paramount to effective learning, most of these learners are subjected to the negative conditions associated with schools situated in poor socio-economic neighbourhoods, which ultimately affect the quality of teaching and learning (West and Pennell, 2003:118). In nearly all of these poor socio-economic neighbourhoods, crime is usually statistically higher than in more affluent areas. Furthermore, these schools are often situated in unsafe and gang riddled areas, with criminal elements spilling over into the school situation (NCSNET, 1997:14). Gang activities and vandalism at schools often put fear in the minds of learners, crippling their learning to some extent.

In areas associated with high crime, parents often live well below the poverty line. High levels of illiteracy and unemployment have been associated with factors such as economic hardship, substance abuse, crime and violence. Many families find it hard to meet even their basic needs of food and shelter (NCSNET, 1997:13). In such unfavourable circumstances, school absenteeism is generally high; a fact that further hampers learner progress (West and Pennell, 2003:14; NCSNET, 1997:13-14).

Lack of recreational activities offered at schools or in poor neighbourhoods often contributes to children getting involved with gangsterism and vandalism since there are little or no activities to keep them occupied and stimulated during their leisure time (Greene, 2005:79; West and Pennell, 2003:10; Engelbrecht, Kriegler and Booysen, 1996:284). The peer influence in gangs is extremely strong and usually has a negative effect on the academic progress of learners involved in these gang activities.

Considering that factors such as crime, poverty, unemployment, low illiteracy levels among parents and low levels of parental involvement in school matters are often common in low socio-economic areas, it stands to reason that these will not impact only on the learners’ academic success, but also negatively influence educators’ morale, as teaching success is hampered. It may therefore be stated that the home and school are
the two most important sites where interaction with the environment directly impacts on children’s development and learning.

According to the *South African Schools Act*, (SASA, 1996), all learners have a right to education and must have access to quality education. This sentiment is confirmed by Cornwall (1996:64), who states that all individuals have an equal right to develop and achieve their full potential through the education system of a country. When an educational problem is detected, it is therefore of vital importance that the learner is provided with effective learning assistance (Greene, 2005:14), before he or she begins to lag behind his or her peers.

Where the learning problems are of a more serious nature (such as mental retardation and serious behavioural problems), the relevant learners could be assessed and a recommendation could be made to transfer them to a special class or special school. Unfortunately, due to a shortage of specialists such as remedial educators and psychologists, assessment is often long overdue and accommodation at the few existing special schools is very limited, with long waiting lists. As a result, educators are faced with large classes of learners who may experience mild to more serious learning and behavioural problems at different levels. Educators, who often have had no training in or knowledge of remediation, generally find it extremely difficult to deal with such a situation.

In addition, many educators were poorly trained under the previous political dispensation of apartheid. Given all these factors, many South African educators are just not up to the challenges of Outcomes Based Education (OBE), the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and the demands of catering for children who manifest a variety of educational problems and learning difficulties in an inclusive setting. The present educational system also seems to fail the educators, in that not enough training opportunities of high quality are made available to them. However, on the other hand, it could be argued many do not make effective use of the opportunities that are offered to them.
However, the NCSNET document (1997:17) acknowledges that in schools where there is little or no learning support structures and the needs of the educators and learners are not adequately addressed, a breakdown in learning may develop. Once a learning breakdown occurs, it is difficult for effective teaching and learning to take place and to turn the situation around. Developing support structures is therefore vital for educators in order for them to render support to and facilitate learning for all learners, but especially for those experiencing educational problems. With this in mind, and against the background of the shift from the National Curriculum Framework (C/2005) to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) that has been implemented, this study intends to investigate strategies to empower Intermediate Phase educators in an inclusive situation to be able to cope with the many challenges they face.

Moore (2009:259) concurs with Vahid, Harwood and Brown (1998:41), who view teaching as a stressful job and regard working with learners with educational problems as enormously demanding, frustrating and exhausting. Teaching could, however, also be rewarding and satisfying when the transition of knowledge is not hampered during the teaching and learning process (Marshak, 1997:49). Educators are, tasked to assist all learners in reaching their full potential in all aspects of development. This includes those learners with educational problems who enter the learning situation with their own unique strengths and weaknesses (Moore, 2009:3). The skill and the capacity to cope with large numbers of learners experiencing educational problems such as difficulties in reading, writing, listening, thinking, spelling, calculating and comprehension become very complex when factors from the environment that may initially have contributed to the development of barriers to learning are also taken into the equation.

Many educators are often not knowledgeable enough regarding teaching and learning theories or appropriately skilled to deal with learners who are experiencing educational problems. It is never easy, even for educators with the appropriate knowledge, expertise and skills, to remediate the variety of learning problems observed among learners; especially as the number of learners per class is usually also very high. Regrettably, because of Clause 32 of the National Assessment Policy (1998), learners
are being promoted even though they have not reached the appropriate levels of competency in the outcomes. Being in the teaching profession herself, the researcher experienced some of the problems personally, or observed similar situations at her own and other schools in the district.

Against this background, the following problems were identified:

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

A large number of learners, many of whom experience educational problems, fail to meet the learning outcomes set out in the Curriculum. At the same time, many educators struggle to meet the challenge of teaching learners with educational problems in an inclusive setting. Because of a combination of factors in the education system and the teaching profession, many educators develop feelings of inadequacy and helplessness and become demoralised and frustrated, failing to recognize their own personal strengths.

Aspects that further contribute to these negative sentiments are the tremendous stress many educators are subjected to due to overcrowded classrooms, inadequate support material, limited resources, poor development programmes and lack of effective in-service training, as well as disappointing parental involvement in their children’s learning.

Although many educators are making various efforts to improve their teaching skills in order to address some of the problems, specialised skills are still needed in specific cases to effectively intervene or make a difference. Educators are expected to provide instruction to a diverse learner body and are held accountable for completing the prescribed curriculum in a manner that ensures that most of the learners learn effectively. This is extremely difficult when a large percentage of learners experience some form of educational problems or learning difficulties and the educators themselves often lack the skills and knowledge to address these issues properly.
Based on this problematic scenario in the majority of South African schools, the following research questions were formulated.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.3.1 Primary research question:

- How can educators in the Intermediate Phase be empowered to cope with the demands they face in an inclusive classroom situation?

From the primary research questions, the following secondary questions were derived:

1.3.2 Secondary research questions:

- What are the different kinds of educational problems often experienced by learners in the Intermediate Phase?
- What factors in the teaching and learning environment need to be addressed to empower educators?
- How can these factors be addressed?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order for the research questions to be answered, the following objectives were formulated to guide the researcher:

1.4.1 Primary research objective

- To determine how educators in the Intermediate Phase can be empowered to cope with the demands they face in an inclusive classroom situation.

1.4.2 Secondary research objectives:
• **To determine what different kinds of educational problems are often experienced by learners in the Intermediate Phase.**

• **To determine what factors in the teaching and learning environment need to be addressed to empower educators.**

• **To determine how these factors can be addressed.**

### 1.5 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

As some terms are used differently in different contexts, a clarification of the key concepts used in this study is presented below.

- **Barriers to learning**

Glenn, Cousins and Helps (2005:2) state that all young children are born with a sense of curiosity about the world in which they live. Therefore, through the process of learning they acquire essential skills needed to live in a social world. Unfortunately for many children there are circumstances that impede on this learning process, creating hurdles or *barriers* that may prevent or impede their learning. These *barriers* are perceived as the obstacles or circumstances that will impede on communication and slow down effective learning (Landsberg, Kruger and Nell, 2005:27).

Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker and Engelbrecht (1999:129) cite the NCSNET document (10:1997), which explains *‘barriers to learning’* as being created by pervasive social conditions and attitudes, inappropriate education policies, unhelpful families or school conditions and norms, or a classroom situation that does not match the learning needs of a particular learner. Therefore, *barriers to learning* are usually created by the environment in which the learners find themselves, rather than by the learners themselves (Glenn, Cousins and Helps, 2005: v).

The Educational White Paper 6 acknowledges that some barriers are intrinsic to the learners themselves while other barriers are systematic, socio-economic or cultural (Burger, 2005:224). *Barriers to learning* could be grounded in socio-economic,
cognitive, physical, emotional and neuro-motor factors (Rosner, 1993:18-23). It is therefore crucial that one understands the specific characteristics of different barriers and identify the barriers that may prevent learners from accessing the curriculum and not experiencing effective learning (Jones, 2005:15).

For the purpose of this study, most medical barriers such as severe visual or hearing impairments, severe physical disabilities and profound cognitive limitations will be excluded as barriers to learning. Schools sampled for this study do not cater for learners with the aforementioned conditions and they therefore fall outside the scope of this study.

- **Curriculum**

The *curriculum* is defined as a course of study that moves towards a balanced learning experience that provides flexible access to life-long learning (Hawkins, 2001:128). It includes all aspects that influence the learner; from the educators and the work programmes, right down to the environment in which schooling takes place (Morris, 1996:1). Montgomery (1990:43) describes a *curriculum* as a programme of activities designed in such a way that learners will attain set educational objectives in a school setting.

The *curriculum* also sets out all the learning, intended or unintended, that is worth teaching; why it should be taught; how it should be taught; and the type of learning that should take place as part of the course design (Florian, 2007: 295; Posner and Rudnitsky, 1997:7-12). It could therefore be seen as the planned and unplanned learning experiences that learners undergo while in a school setting (Moore, 2009:18). For this study, the *curriculum* will encompass the objectives, content of what is being taught, methods of teaching and learning and the different functions performed by assessment practices, as suggested by Morris (1996:3).

- **Educator**
An educator is the person who guides the learner towards responsible adulthood and becoming an independent partner in society (Pretorius, 2005:15). The educator is a person whose tasks involve educating others so that they acquire knowledge and skills and bringing about learning. The educator could be either a teacher or a parent (Moore, 2009:2; Hawkins, 2001:166). For the purpose of this study, the term educator will refer to the person with professional, ethical and moral responsibilities and competencies situated in a formal school environment who is teaching and educating learners.

- Learning

Generally, learning is considered as a social activity that is internalised to later manifest as the knowledge and achievements of individuals (Lerner, 2006:119). Therefore, learning is the process of attaining skills and knowledge through studying, teaching, instruction or experience, in order ‘to get to know’ (Pritchard, 2005:2).

Typically, learning is considered as an active cognitive process that is happening inside the brain of an individual. Weiten (2007:215) further depicts learning as any relatively durable change in behavior or knowledge, due to experience. This implies that, for the active process of learning to occur, there must be an interaction between information and knowledge (Wearmouth, Soler and Reid, 2002:25).

- Effective learning

The concept effective learning refers to the ideal process of learning that centres of learning, such as schools, endeavour to create and sustain in order for learners to obtain knowledge (Hawkins, 2001:291; NCSNET, 1997:vi). Learners must be able to relate what was formally learnt to everyday life situations. Learners must therefore be actively involved in their own learning. In addition, for effective learning to have taken place, learners must be able to retrieve the knowledge and apply the skills acquired during the learning process in order to carry out tasks.

- Full-service schools
The Department of Education is working towards *full-service schools* that will serve as learning centres for all learners; which is a basic right enshrined in the South African Constitution (Burger, 2005:224). *Full-service schools* support education for all learners, irrespective of their differences, and offer an inclusive learning environment by minimising barriers to learning in terms of curriculum, teaching methodologies and the physical environment. This is done through the plan and structure of an array of interventions to develop the accessibility of these schools, the provision of material resources (assistive devices and other equipment), as well as the development of the human resources competences in these schools (Department of Education, *Education White Paper 6*, 2001).

- Inclusive education

All learners come to school with their own experiences, interests, strengths and barriers to learning that need to be accommodated in the classroom (Department of Education, RNCS, 2003). *Inclusive education* refers to educating learners with special educational needs in a general educating setting, integrating them with their peers, and encouraging and promoting positive classroom attitudes (Moore, 2009:63). Learners with special educational needs should be taught in an inclusive environment in order to build trust, acceptance and belonging in an interactive relationship within their environment (Karten, 2008:41). According to Karten (2008:104), *inclusive education* includes communicating with families about what learners’ needs are to assist the reinforcement of learning at home.

- Learning difficulties

All children have the potential to learn; however they may differ much in their ability to learn, their ways of learning and methods of expressing what they have learned (Guerin and Male, 2006:1). Learners with specific *learning difficulties* are as able to learn as other learners, except that they have difficulties in one or more areas of learning. For instance, they may find it difficult to recognise figures or to cope with numerical
concepts and therefore experience a breakdown in learning (Lerner, 2006:13). In a school situation, the term learning difficulty is used to explain difficulties experienced by learners in terms of their academic performance (Jones, 2005:10).

Not all people learn or absorb information the same way. Learning problems are revealed when learners cannot cope with presented information that has to be applied at a later stage. Therefore, these learners may need a modified or alternative form of teaching (Kapp, 1991:25).

- Learning disabilities

Learning disability is a term used for various types of difficulties in learning and could be genetic. Learning disabilities do not always appear on their own, but may occur along with other disabilities or conditions (Lerner, 2006:8). It is important to note that if learners have a learning disability, it does not mean that they cannot learn.

Guerin and Male (2006:130) describe learning disabilities as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language. This disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write and spell or mathematical calculations. Learning disabilities happen because of the way a learner’s brain takes in and processes information. As a result, the learning takes place in a different way from the norm.

- Professional developmental programmes

Professional developmental programmes keep educators abreast of new developments in the teaching field (Madaus, Kellaghan and Schwab, 1998:189). According to Loucks-Horsley, Love, Stiles, Mundry and Hewson (2003:43) professional development programmes are linked to educator expertise and provide opportunities for educators to learn new skills. These programmes hold important outcomes educators would want to acquire in areas of the education field that they feel a need to improve for example; Professional development programmes provide opportunities for educators to build their
subject matter knowledge and/or explore specific new teaching strategies. Through these programmes, educators gain the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and other experts to strengthen or improve their personal teaching capabilities. This also links educators to other members of the education system and provide educators with a variety of different opportunities for affirming their strengths and overcoming their weaknesses.

- Support teams

Support teams refer to the professional support services offered by the Department of Education (DoE). Dedicated support providers are employed by the DoE. The key tasks of the support teams are to support educational institutions, which include early childhood centres, schools, further education colleges, and adult learning centres. The duty of the support teams are to identify and address barriers to learning and to promote effective teaching and learning in local educational institutions. Furthermore, support teams focus on providing specialised learner and educator support, as well as curriculum, institutional development (including management and governance), and administrative support. However, within individual schools, staff could develop through teamwork, support to one another. This could be seen as informal, local support teamwork.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES

A research design is a plan that includes various aspects of a research approach, from the beginning of the problem through to the outcome of the findings (De Vos, 2002:124).

1.6.1 Research design

For this study, a qualitative approach was chosen as the most suitable for the topic. Qualitative research constructs findings that are not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (De Vos, 2002:15). Bogdan and Biklen
(2004:4) therefore describe qualitative research as descriptive in nature as data is captured in words and not numbers.

Merriam (1998:6) states that qualitative researchers look at people holistically; with their main concern to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, while McMillan and Schumacher (2001:266) explain how a qualitative research design answers questions such as ‘how’ and ‘when’, and reports on matters the exact way they are. Concurring with Strauss and Corbin (1990:19), McMillan and Schumacher (2001:266), state that the use of the qualitative research model gives the researcher access to the primary source of information; the participants which allows for the answering of the research questions posed.

In this research study, specific educators in the Intermediate Phase were identified with the focus on finding ways how they could be empowered to cope with the demands they are facing in an inclusive classroom situation. The researcher deals with people in their life-world and the perceptions they have about the different aspects of the research theme. To meet the objectives of this study, a qualitative research design was therefore selected as the most appropriate option.

1.6.2 Research procedures

Research procedures describe how a study will be conducted. For the purpose of this study, permission was sought from the Ethics Committee at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) and the Department of Education to approach schools in the district who experienced similar conditions. Permission was then sought from principals to conduct the research at their schools by visiting the schools and presenting proof of consent from the Department of Education.

The schools selected, met the terms of the research questions and the participants were able to supply the data needed by the researcher to fulfill the objectives of the study, as suggested by Lankshear and Knobel (2004:51). Schools involved were
appropriate to the demographical situation; all were situated in the same socio-economic environment in the northern parts of Port Elizabeth.

The educators in the Intermediate Phase at the schools approached were informed about the objectives of the study. Interested educators were invited to volunteer their participation in this study. Only those participants from the selected schools who indicated their willingness to partake, were used in obtaining the needed data.

1.6.2.1 Data collection

Multiple data collection strategies were applied to collect the data that assisted in opening up aspects of the problem and so guided the researcher towards finding solutions, in accordance with the suggestions of Dana and Yendol-Silva (2003:84). The data collection strategies used were questionnaires, observations and interviews. The combination of these strategies provided the researcher with a rich selection of information and description, as suggested by Schmuck (1997:53).

Data was not only sourced from educators who volunteered their participation; the researcher formed part of the data collection process by being one of the educators in the Intermediate Phase (Creswell, 2009:195). Although the interviews and observations were time consuming, they added valuable information that contributed to insight during analysis and interpretation and acted as a means of triangulation for cross-checking.

1.6.2.1. Data analysis and interpretation

Henning (2004:101) states that analysis is the ability to present the understanding contained in the data. Before data can be analysed, it needs to be prepared and organised from the spoken word to written text through an inductive process of organising it into categories and identifying the relationships between the categories (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:261). Once the raw data has been organized, it brings order that leads to meaning to the large volumes of written text. Creswell (2009:189) asserts that the meaning captured is the essence of the idea.
In qualitative research data interpretation focuses on holistic clarification, understanding and extrapolation (Struwig and Stead, 2004:172; Schmuck, 1997:73). The researcher brought personal experience to the research analysis process and interpretation, whilst also including information from the literature review in order to analyse and attach meaning to the captured data.

1.7 STUDY OUTLINE

This study consists of five chapters, divided as follows:

Chapter One focuses on the introduction to the study and provides a broad outline of the background, problem statement, research design, research procedures and chapter outline. The research questions and objectives are also formulated and presented in this chapter. The chapter concludes with an outline of the research methods that would be later implemented.

The theoretical perspectives are discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. In Chapter Two, the concepts of learning and possible barriers to learning and other educational problems are discussed. This is followed by Chapter Three, in which aspects that may influences educator empowerment are discussed.

Chapter Four focuses on the research design and methodology. The research design is key in this chapter, as it lays down the foundation for the study. A detailed discussion on how the sample was determined and how data for the study was collected, concludes this chapter.

After reporting on the research design and methodology in Chapter Four, the focus in Chapter Five is on the data analysis and the interpretation of the collected data. After all the data has been compared, analysed and interpreted, a discussion of the findings concludes this chapter.
Chapter Six relates the implications of the findings and suggests some recommendations. In conclusion Chapter Six concludes with a brief outline of the shortcomings of this study.

1.8 SUMMARY

For the researcher, recognising and remediating learning problems in the Intermediate Phase is a huge concern. The primary objective listed in this chapter was to determine how educators in the Intermediate Phase could be empowered to support learners who experience educational problems in an inclusive classroom situation. For this purpose a brief discussion on related matters and concepts from the literature was presented, in the context of the problem as experienced at the selected schools.

Chapter Two will focus on some theoretical perspectives on learning and how various factors influence the learning processes.
CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPT OF LEARNING, POSSIBLE BARRIERS TO LEARNING AND LEARNING PROBLEMS EDUCATORS ARE FACED WITH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

For educator to be empowered to render help to learners with SEN, they need to have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the concepts of learning and all related aspects thereof. This chapter therefore deals predominantly with the concept of learning as well as the factors that could become barriers to a child’s learning. Learners often show a variety of learning problems during the Foundation Phase of their schooling. However, such learning problems become even more pronounced during the Intermediate Phase, while many learners actually develop their learning problems only during this phase of their schooling.

The learning problems encountered during the Intermediate Phase are based in cognition, and include problems relating to reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic. Many of these problems in cognition could, however, be relayed to problems in other domains of development. Examples in the domain of physical development that could become potential barriers to effective learning include poor nutrition, ill health and stunted physical growth. These and examples from other domains will, at a later stage in this chapter, be discussed in more detail.

In order to discuss possible barriers to learning and learning problems, it is important to first study the way in which learning takes place. As a point of departure, the concept of learning will therefore be analysed first.
2.2 WHAT IS LEARNING?

Learning can be described as the way in which one makes sense of one’s environment, be it through auditory stimuli, visual stimuli or learning by kinaesthetics. According to Schunk (2004:1), learning occurs when the acquisition and modification of knowledge, skills, strategies, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour are experienced. It is generally accepted that acquirement of knowledge as a human experience starts at birth (Falk and Dierking, 2002:34). However, there are those proponents, such as Santrock (2001:153) and Pieterse (1999:4) who claim that learning takes place while a child is still in the mother’s womb.

Children are inquisitive by nature and from an early stage find the world an exciting place to investigate (Cowne, 2003:63). In fact researchers such as Dever and Falconer (2008:116) and Weiten (2007:215) proclaim that changes in behavior are due to knowledge gained through experience. Children learn from experiences by interacting with objects around them and copy other individuals such as parents and siblings in order to develop skills (Berns, 2007:556). This may happen deliberately or unintentionally. Furthermore, most researchers agree that learning is sustained and enhanced by good teaching, especially in the early years of a child’s development. The relationship between teaching and learning is complex, but the quality of teaching bears directly on the effectiveness of learning (Berns, 2007:555).

Young children have the competence for meaningful and sustained learning and the ability to meet the terms of intricate thinking (Zins, Weisberg, Wang and Walberg, 2004:34). If individuals are confronted with barriers to their development and experience problems with the acquisition and modification of knowledge, skills, strategies and behaviour, it will compromise meaningful learning (Hockenberry and Wilson, 2007:801).
2.2.1 How learning takes place

For learning to take place, the learner’s brain receives different stimuli through different senses. This process is referred to as *perception*. Perception is the processes through which meaning is given to the information that is obtained from the environment through the senses (Louw, Van Eede and Louw, 2005:11), therefore the importance of varying teaching methods.

All children go through the different developmental stages in the same sequence and according to the same general chronology. The development always takes place in an orderly manner and follows a well-defined path. However, humans are unique individuals; therefore, it is not surprising that when it comes to learning, every individual progresses at his/her own pace, while the way in which learning takes place, also differs from one individual to another. These differences can be apparent or subtle, depending on the individual. However, it is evident that learners present different skill levels in academic subjects and different interest levels in educational activities (Culatta, Tompkins and Werts, 2003:2). Therefore, the essence of a learning experience is the ability to keep individuals involved in the learning process (Nelson, 2006:150).

Learning takes place according to three definite stages. In stage one, receipt and processing of the information takes place. Information is saved in the memory from where it is used or stored for later retrieval. We learn by taking in experiences through our senses and layering it with an emotional response (Brearley, 2001:8). In the second stage, information is integrated against what is already known. Connecting old knowledge to new information leads to new insights and drawing of conclusions (Hardy, Heyes, Crews, Rookes and Wren, 1998:157). During the last stage, skills are used to express thoughts about the information. If there is interference in any of the three stages, learning problems will occur and appropriate teaching intervention will have to be applied to assist the learners. However, in order for any appropriate intervention to take place, is it important to take note of the learners' learning styles.
2.2.2 Learning styles

Berns (2007:559) refers to a learning style as a constant guide of behaviour and performance by which an individual advances towards learning. Every individual has an instinctive learning style but, according to Woolfolk (1998:135), one can probably develop an enviable likelihood of the skill in any of the domains in which there are potential barriers. While learning styles are not part of intelligence, they indicate how learning is approached (Vaille, Lysaght and Verenikina, 2005:109). Each individual has a specific learning style that includes a unique way of processing information in a learning situation. Learners tend to favour a particular learning style more when it suits them best, whilst it may also compensate for shortcomings in cognition. It is important that educators do not force learners to conform to a specific learning style, as learners should be given the opportunity to model, discuss, share and evaluate their own learning (Glynn, Wearmouth and Berryman, 2006:24).

The way in which individuals react to the different types of stimuli determines the differences in the way they learn and so affects the preferred learning style (Pritchard, 2005: 103). It is therefore important that the educator considers different learning styles and vary teaching styles in order to cater for individual learning styles (Berns, 2007:240-241).

- Learning by means of auditory stimuli

Auditory learners prefer to learn by listening and therefore this type of stimuli leads to verbal thinking (Pritchard, 2005:58). Reaction to auditory stimuli explains the learner's ability to hear and makes sense of sounds and language. This ability is a crucial factor in the learning of a language, as we use language as a primary means of communication. Auditory stimuli such as pleasant sounds influence the way we feel (Louw, Van Eede and Louw, 2005:174); specific sounds may therefore be deliberately used to change the mood we are in.
It is important to take note of the fact that learning by auditory stimuli entails much more than merely listening to sounds that may lead to verbal thinking. A preference for learning through auditory stimuli also implies that the learner retains the new information better and longer than by other ways of perception. If new information is retained for longer, learners’ academic achievement through this learning style is much greater. Although most learning takes place through auditory stimuli; it is, however, important to plan activities where more senses are involved to increase retention and insight.

- **Learning by means of visual stimuli**

Vision is an important source for gathering information (Louw, Van Eede and Louw, 2005:236), as visual stimuli lead to figural or spatial thinking. In fact, Bender (2004:86) states that most individuals learn by means of visual stimuli.

Vision furthermore plays a key role in linking different types of sensory information during the learning process (Lewis and Norwich, 2005:28). Some individuals respond to the visual impact of words, while others are more attentive to graphics or concrete objects (Ginnis, 2002:39). Individuals who prefer using visual stimuli in their learning, are generally also more dependent on this kind of stimulus to perceive, interpret and retain new information. In this regard, material displayed in a classroom may also be taken in at a subconscious level and retained for later retrieval and use (Bender, 2002:31).

Visual impairment serves to restrict both the quality and quantity of information available to individuals, thereby reducing their opportunities to acquire accurate information through sight (Lewis and Norwich, 2005:29). Fortunately, humans can adapt and in such an instance, the auditory sense may for example, become more finely tuned.

- **Learning by means of kinaesthetic stimuli**

Already as babies, humans develop the ability to relate to visual information and touch (Santrock, 2001:155). Louw, Van Eede and Louw (2005:160) emphasise the fact that
touch is a vital communication tool that provides an individual with information about the world around them. For example, through kinaesthetic stimuli, an individual learns from an early age to cope with pain, whilst taste is even present to a human before birth (Santrock, 2001:155-156). Unrestricted kinaesthetic stimuli can improve learning and therefore improve academic achievement.

2.3 FACTORS INHERENT IN THE CHILD AFFECTING LEARNING

There has been much controversy about the interaction between heredity and the environment and the relevance either has on human development and learning (Schunk, 2004:439; Woolfolk, 1998:121). One belief is that humans’ potential lies in their genes and is therefore fixed at birth. Contrary to this, there are those who believe that although genes play a part in learning, interaction with the environment also influences learning and development (Smidt, 2002:13; Sprinthall, Sprinthall and Oja, 1994:44).

Situated in both heredity and environment are many factors that could become barriers to a child’s learning as learning never takes place in a vacuum or in isolation (Jones, 2005:14). Possible barriers to learning can be categorised as factors internal to the learner and factors that have originated external to the learner.

Genes, which are contained in the chromosomal make-up of an individual are regarded as the smallest unit of heredity and are the carriers of the hereditary characteristics (Louw, Van Eede and Louw, 2005:103). Through genetics, characteristics are biologically passed on from parents to their children. Genetic influences affect inborn characteristics, by which learning may or may not be influenced. According to Woolfolk (1998:121), genes establish a range of possible reactions to experiences that the environment can provide to assist or hinder learning.

Apart from genetic inheritance, other inherent factors could also become barriers to learning and potentially cause learning problems for the learner. Some of these are inherited or acquired physical, cognitive, social and/or emotional problems.
2.3.1 Physical problems affecting learning

Learning may also be affected by the physical problems a child have. Some physical difficulties an individual may encounter, could be related to physical health, vision and hearing. The problems could be due to hereditary factors such as a heart condition or to a hostile environment during the mothers' pregnancy, such as the mother's health for example, measles, malnutrition and substance abuse.

Physical defects such as hereditary deafness, which in itself is not retardation, will interfere with a child’s normal language development, social relationships and, ultimately, education. Hearing is the ability an individual has to acquire and use for spoken language (Lewis and Norwich, 2005:28). Children with hearing impairments will most likely experience problems in developing adequate language skills, which will ultimately affect their schooling and lead to learning problems. This usually affects and distorts their emotional development, cognitive functioning and their ability to speak properly; consequently also affecting their learning.

Furthermore, both visual and auditory impairments are a cause for concern, as they make it difficult or impossible to share, interact or join in groups; and such lack of interaction is detrimental to learners’ social development (Jones, 2004:39). These difficulties also affect self-esteem and social development, which are both important for optimal learning experiences, and can lead to learning problems.

2.3.2 Cognitive problems affecting learning

A child develops in the context of family and culture; therefore, parents are respected as the primary educators and nurturers of the child (Roopnarine and Johnson, 2000:58). The home experience and the socio-cultural environment are crucial to cognitive development and in shaping specific mental skills.
In cognitive development, the ability to reason and comprehend is important, as both aspects play a role in scholastic achievement and the development of social and emotional skills and behaviour development (Berns, 207:79; Pritchard, 2005:33).

- **Cognition and scholastic achievement**

To learn, one must have the ability to take in knowledge, absorb or retain it and later reproduce it. Learning to read and write is one of the most critical processes to the success a child will have in schooling and later in life (Joyner-Edward, Ben-Avie and Comer, 2004:178). Learners who exhibit poor academic performance and poor reasoning and verbal comprehension skills often display poor socialisation or social behavioural problems as a result of their poor academic achievements (Bowen, Jenson and Clark, 2004:131).

- **Cognition and social development**

Good social development is evident when learners respond, interpret, perceive and act on a variety of social situations in a culturally acceptable manner with competence (Berns, 2007:495). Social development plays an important role in the cognitive development of learners. It is said that learners who attend pre-school are much better at socialising than those who have not; implicating the learning experiences they enjoyed have benefited them immensely in developing their social interactions and learning, as we ultimately learn from others and the feedback they give us.

Children’s social development can be understood as the foundation on which other types of learning can be built. Therefore, poor social environments can place children from disadvantaged backgrounds at risk for developmental delays, which may lead to learning problems and ultimately school failure. Hence, in a learning context, is it very important to support and motivate learners who demonstrate social behavioural problems, as these are directly linked to poor academic performance and learning problems (Kostelnik, Soderman and Whiren, 2004:373/374).
• Cognition and emotional development

There is never a time when we cannot learn, but strong emotional constraints can influence the way we learn. When the constraints are long-term, they often affect learning negatively (Brearley, 2001:IV, 47). Emotional turmoil, such as feelings of anxiety, sadness, anger, rebelliousness, depression, stress, grief, frustration and tendencies to act out, frequently leads to weakening of attention and memory over time. This in turn leads to poor academic achievement, learning problems and, often subsequently behavioural problems (Levine, 2002:262-263).

Educators in the learning environment must be sensitive and respectful in creating a stable emotional environment. Academic material should be planned so as to be inclusive and reflect diversity. Care should be taken when giving homework, as the accessibility of learning material and resources and the availability of help can influence learners’ self-esteem and emotional condition. Educators should also be sensitive to learners’ feelings as well as perceptive as to how their schooling may be influenced by the disadvantaged environments they come from (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2004:292).

• Cognition and behaviour

Children come to the schools’ learning environment with a repertoire of behaviours. Roopnarine and Johnson (2000:127) explain that most learners come to the school environment with behaviours that are useful to them in a learning situation, but too often there are also those who display behaviours that result in negative or aversive learning.

It is true that individuals’ behaviour influences their motivation for learning. Pritchard (2005:20) states that learning is a relatively permanent, observable change in behavior as a result of positive experiences. Poor behaviour is often associated with poor achievement, due to a lack of attention to detail and an understanding of the learning process. If learners are assisted in understanding the way in which they learn, they
should be able to mediate their own learning. This can change their attitude towards the learning process positively (Brearley, 2001:8) and improve their learning.

A well-planned and well-implemented curriculum can avert poor behavioural problems. A curriculum that is not balanced and appropriate for the developmental level of a learner can create confusion and frustration, resulting in misbehaviour, learning problems and poor academic achievement. Furthermore, a lack of positive learning experiences can trigger bad behaviour if learners find activities too challenging for their developmental scholastic level. They may attempt to escape by demonstrating inappropriate behaviour. This inevitably leads to more learning problems and poor academic achievement (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2004:291).

2.4 FACTORS FROM ENVIRONMENT AFFECTING LEARNING

Apart from the factors already discussed, there are factors from the child’s immediate and wider environment that may also have a serious and negative impact on his/her learning. These factors are now discussed in brief.

2.4.1 Home environment as a factor affecting learning

Individuals are influenced by their immediate surroundings, and home is the child’s first environment. Experiences at home will influence his or her cognitive development and lay the foundation for his or her performance in school. The structure of a family and the status of the home environment can significantly affect the attitude and behaviour of a child (Kay, 2006:65; Spinnelli, 2002:123), while a dysfunctional home environment, including a poor socio-economic setting, influences learning negatively (Lerner, 2006:96).

2.4.2 Aspect of poverty as a factor affecting learning

Many negative aspects associated with poverty play a significant role in the ability to learn and can have a profound effect on all aspects of a child’s life and development
(Kay, 2006:56; Spinnelli, 2002:123). Being born into economic hardship has an everlasting effect. Some aspects that significantly influence a child coming from a poor economic background are health and healthcare, finances, nutrition, housing, overcrowding and also factors relating to the parents’ or caregivers’ level of schooling.

- Aspect of health and healthcare as a factor affecting learning

There is a remarkable link between socio-economic status and health and healthcare, which affects the ability to learn (Papalia, Olds and Feldman, 2006:252), as good physical health is also part of one’s emotional wellbeing. Conditions relating to health and healthcare are influenced by living in a poor socio-economic environment and will directly influence a child’s general development and therefore also learning indirectly.

Children from poor socio-economic environments who are in need of medical attention do not always receive it, as their parents often cannot afford it. Due to illhealth, they repeatedly stay away from school, which ultimately affects their schooling, as they often miss valuable knowledge sharing sessions. Other learners, who attend school despite of their illnesses, are often ineffective in cognitive tasks and the learning process, due to poor concentration (Papalia, Olds and Feldman, 2006:234). These learners miss valuable learning experiences, a lack of which may ultimately result in poor academic achievements and possible learning problems.

Other issues for a child from a poor household, is the correlation with poverty and the high frequency of premature births (the child being a premature baby him-/herself), lack of immunisation, poor nutrition and iron deficiencies, to name but a few, rendering them susceptible to disease. (Kay, 2006:59) Health and healthcare problems for a child from a poverty-stricken household often begin before birth, as their mothers generally do not eat well, often abusing alcohol and also not receiving proper pre-natal care (Weiten, 2007:422).

All of these factors may lead to learners struggling and developing learning problems, which negatively influences their scholastic achievements.
Finances as a factor affecting learning

The economic status of a family can influence how learners perform at school. To be poor, means to get a poor start in life, as many learners from deprived economic backgrounds are unfairly influenced by their parental predispositions (Pretorius, 2005:301). Due to high rates of illiteracy and unemployment amongst family members, financial contribution in these environments into schooling and wellbeing is meagre.

Learners from poor economic environments are also subjected to little stimulus in and around the home environment. Since funds are meagre, they are mostly used for crucial essentials. The children are often not stimulated with books, magazines and other resources that can help them with their schooling and academic achievement. Parents may struggle to purchase reading materials, which would help with literacy. A child from a poor family also often has a significantly poorer vocabulary and less developed language skills than children from better socio-economic groups (Lewis and Norwich, 2005:97). A key factor in language development is the poor role-models his/her parents are regarding language usage, due to their own poor schooling. In this regard the type and level of any conversation will influence the range of the child’s vocabulary.

When children are not taken on outings and excursions by their families, they miss out on valuable knowledge and experiences, which will further slow down language development and learning. A lack of this and other learning experiences limit adequate stimulation and so the learners’ performance in the classroom may be hampered.

Another aspect to keep in mind is that due to their families’ financial situation, learners from poor households are also often subjected to wearing second-hand and worn school uniforms, which affects their self-esteem and feeling of self-worth. When learners’ self-esteem is affected, it influences their learning and academic achievement directly.
• Nutrition as a factor affecting learning

A healthy diet is important, not only for physical health, but also for optimal mental development and functioning. In order to function properly, the brain needs certain amounts of specific nutrients daily (Dever and Falconer, 2008:278). In fact, proper nutrition in the early years of a child's brain development is fundamental for development, learning (Papalia, Olds and Feldman, 2006:234; Pritchard, 2005:88) and academic achievement.

Furthermore, poor nutrition can affect and aggravate difficulties in behaviour, learning (concentration) or moods. It has been proposed that conditions such as Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, autism as well as mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and schizophrenia could all be embedded in nutritional intakes (O'Regan, 2006:107). A poor diet or prolonged lack of nutrition will ultimately lead to learning problems and poor academic achievement.

• Parents as a factor affecting learning

Families with limited resources due to unemployment, low academic skills, lack of finances and poor housing place a young learner at risk of poor achievement at school (Pretorius, 2005:301). As the morale and mood amongst parents of adversity are generally despondent and unenthusiastic, proper control and leadership is for the most part inadequate.

In economically deprived homes, often no or little guidance is given with homework or when watching television (if there is any available), while educational visits to, for example a library, may be non-existent. As parents are struggling to meet the basic needs of their families, it is difficult to take their children on trips and outings to gain personal experiences. These conditions negatively impact on the children’s holistic development (Dever and Falconer, 2008:107/145). As a result, such deprived learners are more likely to experience school failure, be placed in remedial and special education
programmes, or drop out of school at an early stage unless the school provides worthwhile learning experiences.

2.4.3 Parenting styles and errors as a factor affecting learning

Home is where a child learns first. Normally, within the household, the child will have his or her first encounter with discipline (Cummings and Davies, 1994:93). The parenting style influences how a child perceives adults and the world. According to Kay (2006:53), a parenting style is the determinant of a child’s behaviour within a specific context. How parents approach parenting, is often the way in which they have experienced it themselves as children. The most typical parenting styles and the possible influence thereof on the child’s learning and academic achievements are briefly outlined below.

- Permissive parents

Permissive parents set few boundaries on their children’s behaviour. Even though these parents give love generously, they easily give in to their children and are not persistent in guiding them. They allow their children to make decisions on routine activities, therefore the children are often confused on what they need to do. In the absence of boundaries, these children may not apply themselves to the discipline learning requires (Overall, 2007:109-110).

- Authoritarian parents

Authoritarian parents are often extremely restrictive and controlling; having numerous rules in place. They frequently focus on what is being done wrong and often punish their children harshly, while clear communications on rules are often absent. Children who grow up in such a controlled, restrictive environment tend to be passive and withdrawn; displaying signs of poor self-esteem and lacking the confidence to explore due to fear of not succeeding. Apart from not being willing to risk, such children may rebel against all forms of authority. These feelings of rebellion and aggression may be
carried into the classroom, where they would mar a sound relationship with the educators and this will further influence learning negatively (Papalia, Olds and Feldman, 2006:312-313).

- Authoritative parents

Authoritative parents explain their expectations clearly and explain rules for behaviour appropriately. These parents encourage communication and allow their children to actively voice opinions, to which they listen. This parenting style is underpinned by the attitude that both the parents and the child are equal in a sense of value. The children are given limited choices to help them learn and experience the consequences of their choices. By giving these choices, the parents balance their children's freedom with responsibilities. Such parents often tend to use reward rather than punishment to achieve their objectives. Due to this supportive environment, the children usually feel willing to explore and experiment within limits, and because of the emotional stability within the family, the children will most probably progress satisfactorily at school (Overall, 2007:109-110)

- Neglecting or uninvolved parents

Neglecting or uninvolved parents are parents who are uncommitted to their parental role and are often emotionally detached from their children. They do not provide consistent boundaries or expectations and seem indifferent to their children's views, opinions, progress and achievements. At the extreme end of neglecting parenting, the children are not provided with the basic physical or psychological needs (Kay, 2006:51). The children often have to fend for themselves while discipline and punishment are inconsistent and arbitrary. Since these children often become self-reliant quickly, they frequently display aggressive behaviour and have self-esteem problems. This becomes copiously evident in their learning (Overall, 2007:109-110).

It seems clear that interest, support and consistency in some parenting styles have a positive influence on learning, while overly strict or permissive parenting, along with
uninvolved parenting, will most probably develop into a barrier to children’s optimal learning experiences.

2.4.4 Abuse and neglect as a factor affecting learning

Another aspect of family life that may develop into a barrier to learning and cause learning problems is that of abuse. Abuse and neglect is a phenomenon that occurs at all socio-economic levels of society and affects children from all cultural backgrounds; but is often more prominent among children from poor socio-economic areas (Dever and Falconer, 2008:242).

- Abuse

According to Pretorius (2005:367), physical abuse is generally eminent when a child is physically assaulted and/or injured. Besides the physical and psychological consequences, the victims of this kind of abuse are often predisposed to a number of developmental problems and are vulnerable to social, emotional and cognitive impairments; all of which may develop into learning problems. They further often display aggressive or disruptive behaviour, which affects learning negatively (Bishop and Leonard, 2000:28).

Emotionally abused children may display anxiety, fear and feelings of sadness, which would put a damper on their enthusiasm and motivation to learn. Learning problems, such as language-related difficulties, attention difficulties, motor difficulties and social difficulties (Jones 2005:10) may be the direct result of abuse in general.

- Neglect

Neglect is present when a young child is not appropriately supervised and the basic needs for food, clothing and cleanliness are not adequately met. Neglect is also evident when a child is in need of healthcare that is not sought when needed (Papalia, Olds and Feldman, 2006:254-255). However, the most common form of neglect is that parents
simply do not care about and show no interest whatsoever in their children and their activities. Therefore, when not adequately looked after or lacking positive attention, these children may become insecure, and characteristics such as low self esteem, an inability to trust, concentration problems and withdrawn behaviour can lead to learning problems (Pretorius: 2005, 365).

2.4.5 School environment as a factor affecting learning

Beside the home environment, the school environment plays a significant role in how learning problems develop or are overcome. The school environment includes characteristics like the ethos of the school and the educator (Freiberg, 1999:24).

The school environment has a direct influence on the child’s learning, as schools are supposed to cater for development in all domains of the child’s being. It is therefore important to recognise learning problems that may develop from any negative aspect in the school environment itself.

- Ethos of a school

The ethos of the school forms an integral part of what norms and values learners will be exposed to. Furthermore, developing schools as safe havens for children from possibly problematic backgrounds, in which environments conducive to learning form part of the ethos of caring and supporting, should be a primary consideration. Through a positive ethos schools can embark on policies that would positively influence the learning and holistic development of learners.

Teaching and learning are at the heart of a school’s work. In the education process, children should be encouraged to develop an awareness of the universal moral principles of right and wrong, justice and fairness, and a proper concern for the fate of others and the world in general. If norms and values are lacking at school, the acquisition of knowledge that contributes to the holistic development of the learner may also be negatively influenced.
Policies that will enhance the ethos of the school and fulfill the improvement of learning are good curriculum policies in terms of which learners are taught knowledge, skills and information relevant to their development. Another important policy is the language policy. A solid school language policy will ultimately ensure that all learners, including those with language problems, (learning through a second language) are given an equal chance in their development and therefore in their learning (Department of Education: Policy Handbook for Educators, 2003:B31).

In schools that are situated in poor socio-economic environments, day-to-day hand-to-mouth living and a lack of familial support are common. As part of understanding the environment, educators should undertake home visits to and support these families. An unthreatening connection with the school will reassure and motivate parents to become more involved in their children’s school life; positively affecting learning in the schools. As nutrition is integral to children’s growth and development, a school with a good feeding policy will also assist families and learners who are negatively affected by their socio-economic circumstances.

School environments should furthermore enhance a connection and interaction with nature, culture and people. Learners spend many hours in the classroom and as part of the ethos of the school, educators should expand the learning environment beyond the classroom walls. Learners should be exposed to the outside environment through events such as career days and visits to places of interest, such as libraries, museums and factories. Excursions could include outings into nature and places where the learners could learn about rendering service and personally taking responsibility, such as nursing and old age homes. Learners could also participate in environmental cleanup campaigns (at school or further away, for example at the beach). All experiences contribute to building knowledge, insight and developing language skills and vocabulary, to mention the most obvious benefits only. At the same time, the community should be invited to become more directly involved in school activities by sponsoring or joining in on some of these.
When celebrating the cultural events observed in the community, families and other community members should be allowed to also share their traditions and customs in the class and at school. A good ethos will allow a sense of contentment amongst all the stakeholders involved in learning; that will create for good positive learning opportunities for learners with learning problems (Louw, Van Eede and Louw, 2005:358) and most possibly will curb, to a large extent, the influence the prevalent barriers to learning may have.

Developing and implementing policies that will enhance the outside of a school will inevitably have a positive effect on learning in general.

- Relationship between the school and home

Parental involvement must never be underestimated in a child’s learning and is often key to the success of children’s learning (Kay, 2006:134). Parents are learners’ main caregivers and the most influential adults in their lives. How parents nurture their children is central in the development of their attitudes and behaviour.

Parents' involvement in school matters and, ultimately, in the development of their children, is significant in how the children progress and develop. With the knowledge and collaboration of parents, learners with learning problems will ideally be identified early in their development so that intervention programmes can be put in place that will help them to overcome or limit their learning problems.

- Educators as a factor affecting learning

Learning environments must be orchestrated in ways that promote a positive emotional climate and provide enriched experiences in a physically comfortable space. As educators often host too many learners with different abilities, they should always be well prepared, as they are the human connection between learners and the learning content. How educators model in the way they speak and show their attitudes, knowledge and authority will influence how learners regard the classroom environment.
and the task at hand. To maximise learning, an environment needs to be established that allows for safe risk taking and in which positive learning is encouraged (Pretorius, 2005:301).

For effective learning to take place, educators should take a leading role in creating and maintaining a supportive learning community (Paul, Lavely, Cranstonstong-Gingras and Taylor, 2002:179), in which all educators, parents, administrators and learners are working in unison to support learning.

Educators must have the necessary qualifications and skills to manage and teach their learners (Lewis and Norwich, 2005:9). Educators who are under-qualified and poorly skilled may not be able to support learning adequately. Adding to this, educators who are impatient, rude, display poor classroom management styles and discipline will not find it possible to motivate learners or enhance learning.

2.5 WIDER SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT AS A FACTOR AFFECTING LEARNING

Children are not only confronted with their home environment or school environment, but also live within the wider socio-economic environment. Society plays an integral part in their cognitive and emotional development and learning. Experiences at home lay the foundation for performance in wider society, where the settings are influenced by the norms, values and the economic climate of that society.

2.5.1 Norms and values of a society

Learners do not live in a vacuum, but are part of a wider community that partly determines how their learning will proceed. While societal norms and values include the view of society of the role and position of the child, these very same norms and values, behaviours and attitudes influence how a child sees his or her environment and act in response to his or her experiences in that environment (Kay, 2006:61). In this way, crime could become entrenched in the child’s life world.
There is an indelible link between crime, poverty, inadequate housing and schooling. Crime plays a significant role in learning and learning problems. It is not only the crime that is witnessed in the community, but also the crime committed by the child himself or herself that influences the learner's progress at school. Children in any overcrowded home, and from poor families with little or no parental care tend to leave and live on the streets merely to survive. Many of these children drift into petty crime as a way to support their needs for food and clothing (Pretorius, 2005:299).

As schooling is low on these children’s list of priorities, they will quickly fall behind in their schooling and often end up in detention facilities. When placed back into formal schooling, their learning problems are reflected in poor grades and they often have to repeat grades. As a result, they are usually older than their class peers, a fact that often leads to low esteem, that has a further negative influence on their motivation and learning.

Another alarming fact is that young learners often become part of gangs controlled by adults. They are taught how to steal and bring the stolen goods back to their ‘protector’, who then acts as the ‘fence’ for the stolen property. The young thief is then given a small percentage of the money gained. This incentive further dissuades the children from ‘needing’ to learn (Pretorius, 2005:297).

2.5.2 Politics

Education has played a key role in South African politics and politics plays a major role in how children learn (Breen, 2006:xi). Political leaders all over the world often use the education system to promote their ideologies. In South Africa, this became very evident during the 1980’s with slogans such as *Liberation before education*, when many youths left school to become part of the ‘struggle’. The sentiments and attitudes of the society they were part of, fuelled the excitement of being part of the struggle, with schooling looking pale and boring in comparison.
In areas of high poverty, economic segregation is evident in low-income housing projects and lopsided wealth creation opportunities by government. Many children from such poor backgrounds experience a clash between home and school. This is apparent in the expectation educators have of these children, who not have the same wealth, health and environmental experience as learners from more affluent backgrounds.

2.5.3 Religion

Religion and religious practices have an important role to play in the education, learning and holistic development of children (Clough and Holden, 2002:64). When a family belongs to an organised religion, the children are introduced to the religion through religious ceremonies and practices (Berns, 2007:119).

Religious education generally improves the moral character of learners and controls the negative influences society places on them (Dever and Falconer, 2008: 307). The religious beliefs of many families influence the socialisation, discipline and moral codes of the children and through these, individuals establish identities that give meaning to their lives. This often ultimately gives individuals a goal that enhances their learning.

2.6 TYPES OF LEARNING PROBLEMS

In order to render help, educators also need a thorough knowledge of the different types of learning problems that may manifest in the classroom. Without basic academic skills such as reading, written language, spelling, mathematics and organisational skills, learners are destined for failure (Bowen, Jenson and Clark, 2004: 131). If there is any interference in any of the three stages discussed in 2.2.1., learning problems will occur and appropriate teaching interventions will have to be applied to assist the learners.

2.6.1 Specific learning problems

Specific learning problems are grouped into various combinations of language-related difficulties and attention difficulties. Language problems vary and affect learning in
many different ways. Children with language problems do not always communicate in ways that are easily understandable (Dever and Falconer, 2008:236-238). Language-related difficulties are discussed as problems with listening, problems with spoken language, problems with reading, and problems with written language and spelling, while attention difficulties are discussed under attention problems, working memory and long-term memory (Jones, 2005:10).

2.6.1.1 Language-related problems

Going through life, individuals interact with one another by using a combination of forms of communication/language. As children are unique, spoken language development will differ from child to child (Hannel, 2006:4). However, language is always learned in the sequence of listening, talking (spoken language), reading and writing. Language is seen as the most complex and difficult of all learning tasks and also the most difficult to remEDIATE.

Communication is spontaneous, through information communicated (expressed) and received (Kapp, 1991:83). As communication is a social tool, the topic of communication is selected, the thought process organised, and the correct words chosen to either communicate information or seek clarity or help (Dever and Falconer, 2008:96-97). If any language problems arise, it places an individual at risk of failure in social situations, at school or at home. Evidence of language-related problems becomes apparent when there seems to be a problem with listening, with speaking, with reading and with written language, including spelling (Kapp, 1991:85-97).

- Problems with listening

A pre-condition to understanding a language is to have a vocabulary. This is developed in a social setting in which a lot of verbal communication takes place. In order to construct a vocabulary, a learner must be able to listen and understand the spoken word and recall or repeat words/sentences that demonstrate their comprehension (Rosner, 1993:48).
Listening is a skill that is required in all communication. At home, listening skills are important, as they indicate interaction and communication with others. During play, social interaction takes place between learners, using listening skills to create opportunity for socialising and learning, while a lack in social skills may in fact reveal problems in listening (Jones, 2004:39). Listening skills enhance learners’ participation in classroom activities. They also help creative thinking and problem solving, thus improving learners’ ability to focus on relevant oral content and demonstrate auditory memory by repeating correct details in sequences as well as messages heard (Kostelnik, Soderman and Whiren, 2004:22; 334-335).

Problems in listening occur when a learner has difficulties processing, attending to, or understanding the spoken word. Listening problems are also identified when a learner has difficulty remaining focused on verbal presentations or following spoken sequential directions (Guerin and Male, 2006:16-17).

- Problems with spoken language

A language is transmitted from one generation to another (Louw, Van Eede and Louw, 2005:318). For this study, the discussion on spoken language will refer to the first language of the learners. Language development depends on how the learners were exposed and stimulated to the language. When learners express language difficulties, it indicates that something could have gone wrong in producing speech, either in the actual act of speaking or in the cognitive process, which often signals a serious and possibly long-lasting problem.

Spoken language problems occur for various reasons. One such reason is hearing loss resulting from an acquired hearing impairment or hereditary problems in the cognitive, sensory motor, psychological, emotional or environmental systems (Dockrell and McShane, 1993:56). Another problem is the dysfluency that occurs as a result of stuttering or hesitant speech. Further problems could also result from the mispronunciation of certain words (Kostelnik, Soderman and Whiren, 2004:315-316).
Therefore, learners with an expressive language problem will have difficulties in the ordering of words and consequently mispronounce them (Dever and Falconer, 2008:236).

When there is a problem with spoken language, there are also problems with several other areas of the language. If the spoken language problems persist and are not remedied early, emotional and/or behavioural problems may develop. Some of the specific areas of language that may cause problems are phonology, statement repetition, syntax, morphology, semantics and pragmatics (Hallahan, Kaufman and Lloyd, 1996:177-178).

- Problems with reading

Reading and writing go hand in hand (Rainforth and Kugelmass, 2003:104). Different tasks require different types of reading skills, such as reading with comprehension or decoding (Mortimore, 2003:124). As an interactive task, individuals can obtain information on many levels through reading. Strydom and Du Plessis (2000:233) state that reading is a passive contributor to knowledge. Learners who have few experiences with books and other print material develop learning problems, as they do not have the experience of building a vocabulary and knowledge of the printed word (Dever and Falconer, 2008:145).

Reading is strategic, as individuals are metacognitively active, setting goals and selecting strategies. Reading problems occur from a dysfunction of phonemic awareness, which is often a good indicator that a learner will experience a learning problem. If learners have poor phonological awareness, they will probably also have poor phonemic awareness and will be disadvantaged in reading if the problem is allowed to persist (Kostelnik, Soderman and Whiren, 2004:318). Poor academic achievement is often a result of problems with reading, which stem from shortcomings in strategic processing and metacognition (Schunk, 2004:399).
Language function is a basic requirement for good reading. If a language is not well developed, it leads to many learning problems in all subject fields; mostly due to poor decoding and comprehension. In the process of reading, the significance of decoding is deciphering printed symbols and recognising or identifying letter-sound to whole words. Comprehension, on the other hand, involves attaching meaning to printed information and using this information for a particular purpose (Schunk, 2004:399/401; Levine, 2002:248; Rief and Heimburge, 1996:319).

Difficulties with decoding fluently, recalling of the material read and comprehension are all characteristics of reading problems. Poor reading can lead to attention problems, and vice versa (Silver and Hagin, 2002:75;399). Problems with reading can lead to unenthusiastic feelings about learning; learning problems and a loss of interest in academic achievement.

- Problems with written language and spelling

Writing is the most challenging and frustrating academic task for learners with learning problems, as it makes the greatest demands on memory recall (Rief and Heimburge, 1996:326). It is also a very demanding and complex motor skill in terms of which letters and shapes have to be translated into linguistic symbols in print for academic accomplishment (Schunk, 2004:406). In spelling, sounds (phonemes) must be converted to written letters (graphemes). Strydom and Du Plessis (2000:233) state that in acquiring knowledge, spelling is the active contributor to the written word.

It is difficult to identify problems with written language, as they are contained in many writing skills, such as spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, grammar and prior knowledge (Levine, 2002:116/180; Hallahan, Kaufman and Lloyd, 1996:286-289). Good writing is a thought process that has to be organised, planned and revised (Schunk, 2004:407). When one learns the written structure, one also learns how to spell. Writing is a set of thinking processes that the writer has to organise while creating words and is therefore a means of knowledge construction. In the written structure, the rhetorical problem
includes the topic that must be functional and purposeful, also for the intended audience and the goal of a written piece (Spodek and Saracho, 2006:140; Schunk, 2004:407).

In the classroom, educators will introduce a topic, which the learners will interpret for themselves and use syntax to complete the written word. Learners who read poorly are often poor spellers. Therefore, learners with reduced phonology awareness are at risk for serious delays in reading, spelling and writing. In the process of keeping up with the demands of phonology, some learners become frustrated, and academic problems occur. Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness are the two most common factors that cause spelling problems and ultimately learning problems (Levine, 2002:130-131). Poor spelling becomes a frustration and embarrassment and poor academic achievements are experienced which further discourages learners in their schooling (Guerin and Male, 2006:47-49).

2.6.1.2 **Attention problems**

Attention plays an important part in what we learn every day. It is the mechanism through which an individual concentrates on completing a task without interfering stimuli (Louw, Van Eede and Louw, 2005:602). Attention problems are conceptualised as falling into two categories, namely attending and maintaining attention (Hallahan, Kaufman and Lloyd, 1996:372-374). Maintaining attention is when there is an inability to remain focused on the task. Problems occur when there is an inability to concentrate for certain periods of time and some new information is lost so that information in the memory is not retrieved in order to perform tasks. Consequently, learning fails (Hallahan, Kaufman and Lloyd, 1996:271).

The retrieval of memory (short term and long term) is needed for learning to be lasting. Recall breakdowns are the biggest memory struggles to remediate and are often why the reason why learners have poor academic achievement and subsequent learning problems.
2.7 SUMMARY

In order for educators to be empowered, a clear picture of what is essential to achieve educational goals, are needed. In Chapter Two, the researcher focused on the concepts of learning, possible barriers to learning and learning problems encountered by learners in the Intermediate Phase. Most of the learning problems encountered in the Intermediate Phase are problems based on physical, cognitive, emotional and academic development. Many of the problems in cognition could, however, be relayed to problems in some other domains of development, and educators need a thorough knowledge of the background of the problems before they can do something about empowering themselves to deal with these problems.

Having noted in this chapter the typical problems learners experience, the next chapter will deal with ways of empowering educators to deal with the problems facing them.
3.1 INTRODUCTION

Education remains one of the most meaningful activities in the process of establishing, developing and spreading an educational culture (Pretorius, 2005:106). Education, however, affects both what educators do in the classroom and general educational policies. For this reason, it is crucial that educators should be highly skilled, well trained and well informed individuals who know how to deal with the challenges the modern classroom presents, especially in the poorer socio-economic regions of South Africa.

Teaching *per se* requires a repertoire of skills and attitudes including commitment, motivation and positive relationships (Basford and Hodson, 2008:94). Educators are a unique breed of people who work for most of their teaching careers with learners who have different abilities (Smith, 2004:108). Teaching is furthermore a moral undertaking, as it sets out to change learners for the better and to equip them with knowledge and skills whilst also shaping their development holistically so that they will ultimately become better persons and model citizens.

During their careers, educators are faced with various experiences that will require them to make constant professional decisions that will influence not only their own teaching development, but also the success of their learners. Educators are ultimately key to learner and school accomplishments (Dillon and Maguire, 2001:7).

In the previous chapter, typical learning problems experienced by learners in an inclusive educational setting were discussed. Also briefly referred to was the influence educators have on learners experiencing learning problems. In this chapter, the focus
will be on aspects that may have a direct bearing on educators’ empowerment or disempowerment in the inclusive classroom situation.

3.2 PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

Educators enter the profession to contribute to the well-being of learners, to share knowledge and interests, to have security and stability, both professionally and financially, and to continue to work and learn. Educators are often overwhelmed by the many challenges within the inclusive classroom setting. Learning and change for educators and learners alike are synonymous with continuous development and growth in the academic environment.

Professional development for educators is a lifelong endeavour, for which educators must take personal responsibility and be committed. Professional development must align and support changes that promote learning (Loucks-Horsley, Love, Stiles, Mundry and Hewson, 2004:xxvi). When realising this, educators need to come to terms with the fact that they cannot succeed without adapting to the demanding changes presented in the educational system (Loucks-Horsley, et al., 2004:164); hence the need for opportunities that will support their professional growth and empowerment.

The school environment plays an integral part in the educators’ working day. An unwelcoming, unfriendly and unproductive school environment is detrimental to the success of all in and around it. Diverse factors, such as good quality buildings or playground facilities, proper fencing and healthy sanitation in the school environment, are important in ensuring a smooth and pleasing journey through the educational process for both learners and educators. Therefore, it is the duty of the management of the school to make sure that the environment in which educators work is supportive and encompassing, thereby creating an environment for the empowerment of the educators.

Schooling is characterised by an ethos and deep structure and shared expectations from all the stakeholders involved in developing the academic strength of the school (Goodlad and McMannon, 2004:28). Schools have their own ethos policies, which are
determined by the underlying beliefs and values (Smith, 2004:7). Educators and learners furthermore share a social reality that is influenced by issues inside and outside the classroom environment (Pretorius, 2005:88; McInerney and Van Etten, 2003:225). These issues are influenced by opportunities for educator decision making and the climate established for learning.

3.2.1 Educators’ decision making

Willen, Ishler, Hutchison and Kindsvatter (2000:2) state that the responsibility for decision making is a continuous personal behaviour that does not prescribe to rigid guidelines. Moore (2009:28) adds that good teaching requires decisions regarding planning and the effective use of classroom time. According to Smith (2004:43), when decisions are made, it always means that something has to happen. The decision-making skills of educators are therefore very important, as the various decisions taken directly influence their academic environment (Pretorius, 2005:205).

According to Smith (2004:43), decision making is a difficult process that involves change, conflict and the risk of being wrong. Educators make daily decisions regarding learning and teaching based, on their personal beliefs and the values they embrace in their personal lives, although Acheson and Gall (2003:75) state that decision making does not occur at a single point in time. Educators make various decisions before, during and after instructions, which influence learning. These values affect the decisions made and influence the way in which educators deal with issues in the academic environment.

When entering the education system, educators do not simply enter a classroom, but also an education community. In the educational system, not all decisions that influence the teaching and learning and ultimately the academic environment educators coordinate are exclusively made by the educators themselves. Some of these decisions come from within the academic environment, while others are imposed from outside. Decisions on directives imposed from outside by organisations such as the Department of Education and Unions are as vital as the decisions made by educators.
themselves in determining how well they will function in their job. The ideal situation that will support empowering educators, will therefore be to include them as much as possible in decision making. Keeping educators up to date through development programmes, journals, newsletters and circulars will also support their empowerment.

3.2.2 Learning climate

A positive classroom learning climate is essential in building a supportive learning environment which in turn encourages competent contributors to learning (Lewin, Samuel and Sayed, 2003:157). Such a climate encompasses issues such as the relationship between educators, learners and the subject matter, and establishing a culture within the school environment that contributes towards a positive learning experience (Willen, et al., 2000:25).

Unfortunately, the learning climate may be extremely poor in specific socio-economic areas. This may be due to a culture of non-learning in the community. Various aspects of poverty, such as illiterate parents, unemployment, squatter-camp housing and health issues all usually have a negative influence on learning. This requires from the educator to work so much harder to establish a positive classroom climate that supports learning and motivates the learners. Learners from poor socio-economic areas tend to have low self-esteem, which is a consequence of their underprivileged upbringing and environment (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2004:292). In this respect, educators are essential in creating an environment that nurtures active teaching and learning (Schoonmaker, 2002:3).

Learners entering a classroom bring with them a great variety of attitudes and developmental levels based on the experiences they encountered in their immediate surroundings. Schools situated in poor neighbourhoods have many learners who experience great difficulty in acquiring one or more of the basic skills such as reading, writing, spelling and mathematics and therefore often present with numerous learning problems. Educators ultimately play a vital role in shaping, creating and maintaining positive attitudes and motivating learning (Moore, 2009:9; Pretorius, 2005:179,
Schoonmaker, 2002:85/86). Creating a healthy, positive and mutually respectful relationship between learners and educators can furthermore contribute to an unmistakably pleasant classroom climate supportive of learning.

Subject content competently applied is fundamental in creating a positive and healthy learning climate. In planning the curriculum, suitable content can set the mood for creativity and eagerness to learn, helping educators to successfully mould and influence learners in the academic environment. Learners differ in their readiness to learn, in their ability to learn, and in their level of achievement. Although educators are constantly challenged by learners with learning problems, it is their duty to accept each learner for what he or she is. Therefore, creating a climate that has a significant effect on learners’ attitude and achievement and directing them to be positively involved in their learning and social maturity (Schoonmaker, 2002:89) could be incredibly empowering to educators. Empowering educators to competently apply content could be acknowledged through personal studies and by means of multi-series workshops, which the Education Department could subsidise. On completion, successful attendees could be certificated. Such personal studies could also serve promotional purposes.

3.2.3 Classroom management and discipline

Through schooling, educators must educate learners towards co-existence and achieving a rewarding academic accomplishment (Pretorius, 2005:106). At school, values are communicated and educators become aware of learners’ socialising skills, behavioural development and discipline. For many educators, discipline conjures thoughts of diverse behaviour. Discipline is a major concern for all educators, as it influences how they manage a teaching and learning situation.

Pretorius (2005:200) states that many educators measure their acceptance by colleagues by their own ability to maintain authority and discipline in the classroom. They further associate their ability to uphold discipline with their teaching competence, feeling that excellent discipline equates to quality classroom ambiance, which will in turn produce admirable academic accomplishments. However, not many educators are
good at maintaining discipline. They may find it extremely hard to ‘control’ learners who come from households and/or a society that is ‘out of control’ and where discipline is virtually non-existent. At the same time, good control alone is no guarantee for good teaching practices or adequate learning.

In many cases, educators find it difficult to maintain classroom rules and set boundaries, especially in inclusive classrooms. In these situations, educators are frequently taken advantage of and rules and boundaries are easily broken or bent as control is often difficult to uphold. Poor control of the classroom environment and frequently disciplinary problems, make the educational environment difficult and unpleasant for academic interactions. Proctor, Entwistle, Judge and McKenzie-Murdoch (1995:32) point out that orderly classroom ambience contributes to good relations and accomplishments and is conducive to creating and maintaining well-ordered and disciplined classroom environments and strengthening educators’ self-confidence and morale. Educators who are struggling with discipline in the classroom often develop feelings of disempowerment and despondency.

Learners growing up without positive role models of caring parents who instill good morals, attitudes, norms and values may develop strong feelings of hostility, resentment and anger that could explode in the classroom situation so that the educator and his or her disciplinary efforts are defied. In order to empower educators to be able to deal with behavioural issues, specialised efforts will have to be introduced for both the educator and the learners. Therefore, establishing a routine for handling discipline with which both the educator and the learners feel comfortable, is essential if learning is to proceed smoothly in the classroom. Routine and consistency in handling discipline endorse efforts of good classroom management and therefore allow successful learning, which empowers educators to take charge of the learning situation.

Learning to implement good disciplinary practices is not easy and educators should focus on aspects that may contribute to poor discipline in order to avoid the development of disciplinary incidents. It is therefore important that educators carefully
plan lessons and activities in order to keep learners actively involved, interested and motivated. Often, poor discipline originates from boredom and a lack of motivation.

The physical outlay and conditions of the learning environment can help educators prevent the development of many problems in an inclusive classroom. Overcrowded classrooms influence not only learners’ ability to pay attention and learn, but ultimately how educators deal with situations and often lead to disciplinary problems. Many educators experience overcrowded classrooms as overbearing, resulting in them feeling incompetent and vulnerable. Moreover, in this situation, educators’ initiatives, creativity, problem-solving skills, communication, networking and people skills are tested to the limit.

3.2.4 Curriculum considerations

School authorities and parents expect educators to cover the prescribed curriculum for a specific grade. The structure of knowledge is demonstrated in facts, concepts and generalisation in the school curriculum. Therefore the learners’ learning is ultimately planned in the school curriculum, which is one of the school’s most important programmes (Moore, 2009:28; Roberts and Constable, 2003:11). The curriculum consists of all the formally planned as well as accidental learning learners experience at school.

It is taken for granted that when educators teach, they possess certain skills and can impart knowledge to learners, notwithstanding the fact that learning differences may be exhibited by the learners. In the expectations of the school authorities and parents alike, it is taken for granted that educators will produce positive learning outcomes, despite the fact that many of their learners may experience learning problems. As this does not happen in many cases, educators feel disheartened by these unrealistic expectations. Educators who cannot match up to these expectations, feel greatly disempowered by not having achieved expected objectives, due to perhaps a lack of knowledge on how to deal with these learning problems or to not having the required
personal insight in and knowledge of the content or the required skill to teach the subject matter.

As educators, they are responsible for guiding the learning experience. The curriculum is articulated by what the school wants learners to learn, what skills they have to master, and what values and attitudes they have to acquire. Through understanding curriculum matters, educators appreciate what knowledge is important for learners to know, what the purpose is of utilising the curriculum and how this will provide in the needs of the learners (Schoonmaker, 2002: 115; Willen, et al., 2000:97).

Following the introduction of South Africa’s first democratic government in 1994, major changes in the education system and the curriculum have taken place. Since the inception of these curriculum changes - first Outcomes Based Education (OBE), then the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and, most recently, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) - many educators in certain disadvantaged schools have not been afforded the opportunity to develop themselves in the implementation of the new curriculum. Due to their lack of understanding and training in the curriculum, not many educators interpret the curriculum appropriately. Therefore, their lack of knowledge and poor interpretation of the new curriculum place these educators under tremendous pressure, causing them to feel discouraged and significantly disempowered.

In many schools, educators work in isolation. Colleagues’ expectations of Grade educators effectively completing the curriculum are often not met, as the abilities of learners vary greatly. Often, due to educators’ insufficient knowledge of the RNCS, some schools develop a curriculum that is so demanding that it evokes a fear of failure in learners. Therefore, a proper understanding of an inclusive curriculum can be achieved only if schools have solid school policies, and school developmental plans are in place that are geared towards diversity and achievements for all learners (Cowne, 2003:59; Greene and Kochhar-Bryant, 2003:42). Unfortunately, educators are often not directly involved in the drawing up of these policies and developmental plans.
If educators worked closer together and were more familiar with curriculum practices, colleagues would understand the challenges they face in the inclusive classroom. It is not surprising, due to the lack among individual educators of proper understanding of curriculum practices, that colleagues do not often support one another in this regard. This generally places undue stress on individual educators as they attain poor academic achievements in their classrooms, while their colleagues place unrealistic expectations and demands on them. With no collaboration and sharing of educational knowledge, educators are often disillusioned in the learning environment and develop feelings of disempowerment.

3.2.5 Educators’ preparedness for teaching

Teaching involves careful planning and preparation. No educator should enter a classroom without prior planning; there are set targets to be achieved through the coordination of the individuals involved in the teaching and learning process. Pre-planning ensure that learners work purposefully and immediately once teaching has been completed (Pretorius, 2005:207). Unfortunately, due to a lack of professional development and pre-service training, not all educators have the technique and discipline to prepare carefully and purposefully for the teaching activity. Therefore, due to their shortcomings, many educators struggle in the inclusive classroom and fail to produce noteworthy academic achievements with their learners. As good academic achievement is resultant of thorough preparedness for teaching and learning, many educators feel despondent when not achieving the expected outcomes, failing to understand the importance of personal commitment and accountability.

To empower themselves, educators need to be afforded the chance to improve their preparation techniques and discipline by involving themselves in professional development programmes. These development programmes could entail that educators take charge of their own shortcomings by attending study programmes or workshops presented by specialists in the field. However, the most simple and effective way is for educators to take time to sit down with experienced and successful educators teaching
in the same phase/grade, and plan well in advance of the lessons. This, unfortunately, does not happen in many instances.

According to Goodlad and McMannon (2004:129), sound planning contributes to a good place of learning and teaching and minimises confusion, off-task time and interruptions. Disappointingly, many schools do not follow their timetable schedules, due to poor administration and ill-discipline. Therefore, educators often do not become familiar with the rules and regulations that govern the teaching experience or become acquainted with issues such as subject material, time spent on lessons, textbooks and guideline for learner promotions (Moore, 2009:14). Consequently, educators’ preparedness for the teaching process suffers, negatively influencing the academic accomplishments of their learners (Pretorius, 2005:207). The poor result obtained, are not disheartening only to the learners but also to the educators.

3.2.6 Skilled instruction

Different individuals may prefer different modes of learning, and instructional techniques could therefore influence learning. These techniques must be planned to cater for the different modes of learning (visual, auditive or tactile) and to captivate the interest of learners and motivate them to learn (Moore, 2009:10). Educators’ understanding of lesson-presentation skills of entry and closure’s, the use of learners’ ideas, and reinforcement are important instructional components. However, many educators trained during the previous education system received inferior education and training. As a result, many struggle with the poor instructional techniques and teaching styles that they learnt during their pre-service training or remembered from their own school days.

Universities and colleges have programmes in place that will improve educators’ knowledge and skills on instructional techniques and teaching styles. Although many of these programmes are on offer on a full-time, part-time or distance education mode, many educators find the idea of studying very daunting.
For successful instructional processes, educators must be confident in techniques such as motivating, questioning and supporting and be skilled in the methods and strategies at their disposal to make decisions about how to plan and meet objectives in the classroom (Willen, et al., 2000:194). The greatest challenges in instructional planning extend beyond the logistical considerations; but are in the actual teaching process, over which the educator has limited control (Bluestein, 2008:153).

Discussion is one of the most significant instructional methods educators can apply in the teaching and learning environment. It has the potential to stimulate learners’ application of knowledge and active involvement in learning at a variety of levels of thinking (Willen, et al., 2000:232). Providing immediate feedback is a great motivator and will encourage and keep learners involved in their learning. Using continuous feedback demonstrates educators’ flexibility and spontaneity in giving learners learning opportunities (Moore, 2009:10). Constantly trying new and varying instructional techniques and teaching styles in the inclusive classroom and honing in on methods that can alleviate disheartening situations will not only improve learning success, but learning success will in turn build confidence in both learners and educators; a fact that in itself supports empowerment.

3.2.7 Resources and support material

Learning and teaching success is often based on, amongst others, the resources and support material that bring enthusiasm into the learning situation. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2004:204) mention that the availability and use of resources in the classroom are of key significance in learning. Therefore, it is important for educators to select and develop appropriate resources and support material that will support learning at the level of the learners involved (Cunningham, 2005:48).

Many very valuable teaching media and support material could be developed by educators to fit specific learning situations. However, in a demanding situation, creativity often gets lost. It is therefore important that the educators have workshops, work in teams and have access to, for example, a Teachers’ Resource Centre where
ideas could be copied and guidance is made available on making or developing such media.

Although textbooks are often regarded as the primary resource, most schools do not receive textbooks from the Education Department. Unfortunately, these textbooks and some other resources, such as prepared worksheets, are not appropriate to all learners' abilities and learning situations. Educators often work under fixed time constraints, having to follow timetabling schedules. This does not always allow enough time to amend, refine and update handouts and worksheets from the currently used textbooks.

Unfortunately, in many cases no textbooks are available, or the textbooks are late in arriving at schools. Not having the core of the subject matter available as a point of departure, is extremely disempowering to most educators, as most are not trained to develop learning material on such a level or have the required skills and finances to type and duplicate the essential material found in textbooks. It is therefore clear that the availability of textbooks and other support material does play a significant role in the empowerment of educators.

The appropriateness of teaching and learning material is often not given the necessary weight in evaluating the success or failure of learning activities. Furthermore, although resources and support materials are valuable and may be available at some schools, educators are not always fully equipped to use the material without prior training. This is very discouraging to educators, and the support material provided to schools should ideally always first be demonstrated for proper and correct implementation. Insight in how to use the resources and how it could support learning will increase the motivation and confidence to use it, and gaining confidence is empowering in itself.

3.3 QUALITY AND LEVELS OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher education entails far more than merely a four years’ qualification during pre-service education; followed by a noble career of in-service training and teaching. The teaching profession is largely geared towards schooling institutions and consequently
the learner performances it can produce (Goodlad and McMannon, 2004:28, Schoonmaker, 2002:119). The standards of training afforded to Black, Coloured, Indian and White educators differed enormously during the apartheid era. This influenced the quality and subsequently the teaching skills the different racial groups mastered. During the apartheid era, the choice of institution of Black, Coloured and Indian individuals who wanted to be trained as educators was limited, but this have since changed (Lewin, Samuel and Sayed, 2003:177). After 1994, all teachers training colleges, universities and technikons were opened to all racial groups. As this study is carried out in peri-urban disadvantaged schools in Nelson Mandela Bay, all of the educators in the research either came from the Bantu Education system or the Coloured Education system, in terms of which educators were poorly prepared, due to the low academic standards in place at the institutions reserved for their training.

Although more and more educators are nowadays fulfilling the qualification standards set by the Education Department, the kind of educators produced does not always match the type of skilled educators required to teach learners experiencing learning problems (Kruss, 2008:3). Many educators, especially the older individuals, still feel ill-prepared to cope with inclusive classroom practices, since during their initial training, insufficient focus was placed on the specific skills needed for effective classroom management (Proctor, et al., 1995:32).

For practising educators to better their teaching qualifications, many of the universities and technikons have embarked on study programmes to improve educators' qualifications, subject knowledge and skills in order for them to embrace the changes taking place in the education system. These programmes provide the opportunity for educators to explore disciplines and content learning in a high-quality learning environment (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006:69) and the Education Department supports these initiatives by providing many bursaries to motivate individuals.

Some of the many programmes educators can use to improve their knowledge and skills are Advanced Certificates in Education (ACE) and B.Ed. programmes. These
professional development programmes may be attended on a part-time or full-time basis at universities. The qualification gained could be used for professional and financial gain, as well as for promotional purposes. Educators can also be empowered by school, institutional and departmental workshops.

Many educators have appropriate teaching qualifications, but not many of them are trained to teach learners in an inclusive classroom setting; therefore, they are in need of continuing and pragmatic professional development as required to value and respect their teaching competencies. Teaching qualifications gained through institutional programmes are mostly based around the knowledge, skills and disposition that characterise professional educators (Kruss, 2008:18). However, frequently these programmes lack the core of why educators aspire to develop themselves in the first place: working with learners in inclusive settings within mainstream schools. Specifically, professional programmes should therefore help in assisting educators in overcoming tricky teaching situations (Goodlad and McMannon, 2004:130/131), often by merely varying a tested teaching method.

3.3.1 Professional developmental programmes

Educators need to stay abreast of new developments in education. To help educators in this task, school districts, professional associations and educational institutions offer in-service training or professional development programmes. All educators should ideally belong to a professional association, such as SADTU, NAPTOSA, CTPA, to name a few. Professional associations keep educators informed of new developments by means of journals and newsletters. These associations also sponsor many national and regional conferences, during which a sense of personal accomplishment is enhanced. These associations also work hard to improve the status and working conditions of educators.

Continued learning is a mark of most professions; and education is part of that practice (Bartell, 2005:23). In education, professional developmental programmes and training programmes empowering educators enhance quality teaching and motivation (Bush and
Empowering individuals through professional growth, provides vigor to improve the self as part of academic sustenance. Educators need to take ownership of their own professional growth and so gain competence in creating an appropriate learning environment for their learners. Educators must be made aware that professional development does not end when one is accredited with a certificate or skills, but is in fact a career-long effort (Acheson and Gall, 2003:13).

Professional development programmes should furthermore target growth towards educators’ specific developmental needs related to an inclusive classroom setting (Bartell, 2005:21,41). Therefore educators must be aware of and understand how they can develop their teaching skills over time. If these skills are not constantly developed, reinforced and enhanced in relation to learners’ varying learning abilities and problems, educators may find themselves disempowered in the learning environment. Educators have a direct impact on learners’ learning and therefore the knowledge educators impart, influences learner achievement. Programmes and workshops focusing on specific problems encountered, presented by specialists or experienced, successful mentors and/or colleagues, could be a valuable source of learning for all educators, as learning also takes place in the sharing of views or novel ideas.

In Booth, Nes and Stromstad (2003:15), Ainscow argues that educators’ development must underpin initiatives in developing good teaching practices in schools. The development of good teaching practices should address both barriers to learning as well as learner achievement. Developing educators in the educational system implies that educators understand the classroom situation, professionally and/or personally (Bush and Middlewood, 2005:28). Helping educators understand these systems through developmental programmes provided by experienced support structures, should help individuals affirming their strengths, yet at the same time honing in on the skills that they are lacking (Bartell, 2005:23), thereby empowering themselves.

Although there is a commitment to teacher development programmes by the Department of Education to raise the teaching quality levels of the corps of existing
educators, the limited availability of information on Inclusive Educational practices does not benefit these programmes (Kruss, 2008:132). Educators have different needs at different stages of their teaching careers. As professional, they are constantly seeking ideas and better ways of helping learners with varying abilities in their classrooms. Without professional developmental programmes that provide the kind of assistance that is desired and most urgently required to help make the necessary adjustments to include inclusive learners in their classrooms (Bartell, 2005:23/41), educators will continue to struggle and be discouraged. To empower educators, incentives should be attached to personal developmental programmes. Educators should be motivated to attend these programmes in order to gain and develop the skills needed in the inclusive classroom setting. Workshops usually focus on particular issues and involve participants in some type of ‘hands-on’ activity.

Bartell (2005:64) points out that a single isolated workshop rarely provides educators with deep, meaningful learning. Workshops that present training in transformational and conceptual advancements in instructional processes, which can be taken into the classroom and provide value to the learning environment, often have no real accomplishment value or lead to no personal career benefits for educators (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006:71), however workshops that remind educators, and reinforce good teaching practices that are taking place re-affirms that ‘I am doing the right things’ and this in itself is re-assuring and empowering.

The once-off programmes are appropriate for introducing concepts, for demonstrating the use of topic specific material, for reviewing policies or for boosting morale. However, for a thorough change and in-depth understanding of topics for appropriate and effective deep learning an interrelated series of workshops must be coordinated. In addition, educators should be involved in determining and planning in-service programmes.

In many instances, out-of-school workshops offer educators high quality training that enables them to rethink their own established teaching ways. This is an opportunity to
improve classroom instruction and educators’ ability to lead change in the school community. Although development in the learning environment is not always guaranteed when educators are removed from their classroom to attend out-of-school workshops, experienced facilitation is key to the success of educator achievement. During out-of-school workshop programmes, educators have the opportunity to observe how their colleagues in different school environments collaborate to design, implement and evaluate instruction in their classrooms (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006:66-69). Taking note of and practising these techniques, educators normally return with newfound vigor, motivation and first-hand experience to try these newly acquired instructional techniques out in their own classrooms. Implementing these improved teaching techniques and styles successfully has a profound and positive influence on inclusive classroom situations instilling the educators with greater optimism for improved academic achievement and a feeling of empowerment.

Karten (2008:233) states that attending topic-related workshops and planning sessions will guide and build skills in educators dealing with learners who experience learning problems, rendering them more confident and flexible in their approach. Goodlad and McMannon (2004:103) suggest that obtaining as much information and skills on good teaching and inclusive education as possible will ultimately empower educators teaching learners who experience learning problems and that such workshops should therefore be compulsory.

3.3.2 Upgrading and in-service training programmes

There are different ways in which educators can advance their academic careers. In February 2000, the Norms and Standards for Teacher Education introduced a new qualification framework, in terms of which educators can participate in upgrading programmes (Kruss, 2008:130). This was especially helpful to primary school educators with a low level certificate or diploma, as it enabled them to improve their teaching qualifications and gain subject specific knowledge and learn new teaching strategies. This qualification framework has also provided appropriate opportunities to
experienced educators to improve their knowledge of and insight in the latest developments in education. Through participating in these upgrading programmes, educators will not only improve their qualifications and professional knowledge, but may also gain more respect from the society they serve. This in effect means that they will be able to act with more confidence and more assertively, which will help to make them feel more empowered.

In-service education can take place through studying for the qualifications offered at educational institutions such as technikons and universities. Many of these courses can be attended on a part-time basis. Some of the qualifications not only improve personal growth but enable educators to receive pay increments. These qualifications therefore, not only empower educators financially, but provide them with knowledge and skills needed to orchestrate effective academic achievements in an inclusive classroom.

3.4 INFLUENCES FROM THE LEARNERS’ HOME ENVIRONMENT

Basford and Hodson (2008:134) reiterate that parents are their children’s first educators and that the home is children’s first ‘school’. As social change is continuously taking place, schools cannot be held solely responsible for children’s education. Parents also have to accept an active role regarding their children’s school education (Brolin and Loyd, 2004:98-99). Moore (2009:12) remarks that parental and community involvement is as important a factor in improving the academic learning of learners as the role of educators in the classroom.

Parents in lower socio-economic communities are often not as concerned about parent-educators relationships or how these will influence their children’s achievement in the school environment. Often, the reasons for non-compliance and lack of interest in school activities from parents are their own inadequate school credentials of no culture in learning; a low value attached to academic achievements; little or no employment; or violence in the home environment. Therefore, creating purposeful and effective collaboration between the home and the school is vital to the children’s approach to learning. These aspects are briefly discussed below.
3.4.1 Parent-educators collaboration

Individuals from the community, especially parents, form part of an outside group of people that influences teaching and learning in the school environment. Part of parents’ responsibility is to choose a school for their children (Sirotnik, 2004:75). Ultimately, learners are subjected to parental control (Lewis and Lindsay, 2000:36) and as such are influenced by their parents’ attitude and values. Parents, who themselves failed or never had the opportunity to achieve academically, may portray a lack of respect for learning. In such a culture in which there is little motivation to learn, learners will be inclined to adopt a similar attitude to think the same.

Involving parents in planning support for their children in the learning process is key to the latters’ academic achievements and life success. To establish strong collaborative partnerships between educator and parents, strategies need to be found to bring the two parties together and involve the parents in their children’s schooling. Parental involvement greatly influences learners’ attitudes and to interest in school, attendance and their own academic progress. Greater parental interest in children’s schooling will support educators in discussing learner problems. Parental cooperation can assist educators in learning more about the needs of the parents. In this way, trust can be established to communicate freely on their children’s educational progress and learning problems (McDermot, 2008:78).

Another key aspect of parent-educator collaboration, is that parents’ must accept their responsibility and duty to see that after-school programmes for learners, such as homework and studying, are completed. McDermot (2008:6) points out that parent’s must purposefully be encouraged to provide their children with support at home with their homework, while the learners must be encouraged to involve their parents in their after-school and homework activities. This closer partnership should improve the learning and teaching environment for educators and limit the issues that normally hamper educators’ empowerment.
3.4.2 Influence of literacy levels of parents

Parent involvement in their children’s schooling is a process wherein parents and educators are encouraged to cooperate and support the academic processes of learners (Moore, 2009:12). For that reason there should be a relationship between parents and educators to ensure that the learners’ education is not harmed or negatively influenced by unpleasant behaviour or unlikeable teaching and learning practices. Parents come with varied experiences, literacy levels, resources and beliefs (McDermot, 2008:78). Educators need to be content with families in their school community that have poor home experiences and poor expectations of their children’s schooling and scholastic achievement. Most parents have little or no formal education and educators have to deal with these parents’ lack of involvement in their children's schooling (Roffey, 2004:82). Due to parents’ personal experiences, the education of their children is often not a priority.

Parents and educators often live in different socio-economic milieus; therefore, achieving a constructive parent-educator relationship is of paramount importance. Establishing such a relationship will ensure that learners are provided with excellent teaching and learning support structures, both at home and at school, which will surround them at all times (Bluestein, 2008:242; Sirotnik, 2004:92). Parents may not realise the importance of their own role in supporting their children's learning and may therefore lack the confidence to become involved. In addition, they may have difficulties in for example, reading and writing (Basford and Hodson, 2008:136).

The relationship between illiterate parents and their children are often indifferent and there may therefore be no parental support towards academic progress. These learners may seldom, if ever, be helped with homework, as the parents themselves are not at a schooling level to assist their children. Even though homework in itself does not guarantee academic success for learners, it can, if selected carefully and properly monitored at home, make the teaching and learning environment much more effective and pleasant for both educators and learners (Willen, et al., 2000:33). It is therefore
extremely disappointing and disempowering for educators if homework assignments and other activities are not completed, as this hampers smooth and successful teaching and learning.

A further factor in alienating parents is language and communication challenges, which play a key role in why parents are absent from their children’s schooling. Parents' confidence and self-belief is low because of their own low level of command of the language of communication; therefore, they tend to disengage themselves from their children’s schooling (Basford and Hodson, 2008:136).

3.4.3 Influence of unemployment

Often, the unemployment of parents contributes to the strained parent-educator relationship. Whilst many schools are deemed to be no-fees schools, where parents are not compelled to assist in the financial burden of the school (Sirotnik, 2004:78), parents are still not eager to be involved in the children's education. Such parents may have a perception that educators do not believe in their children's potential and therefore they stay visibly absent from engaging in school activities and the learning processes of their children (McDermot, 2008:165). This attitude negatively influences the teaching and learning environment and leaves educators feeling frustrated and powerless.

Lack of income is a further consequence of unemployment that directly influences children’s academic success and educators’ teaching success. If parents do not have the money to buy the needed resources, such as books, pens and pencils, educators cannot always step in to assist. The question arises how learners will proceed and partake in all the learning activities. Such learners may not complete tasks and classwork and will therefore fall behind in their schooling, leaving educators feeling frustrated and powerless.

Furthermore, lack of income will influence the food intake and subsequently the overall health of the learners. No learner can concentrate properly on an empty stomach. Due
to poor diets or a lack of nutritious food, learners often suffer from poor health, which also contributes to poor concentration and academic failure. Learners who suffer from poor concentration in class and poor health, tend to stay absent from school and consequently fall behind in their schoolwork. Some schools offer feeding programmes through the Education Department, but these are often not sustained. Some of these learners come to school only when there is some feeding available. Academic progress is negatively influenced through learners’ absenteeism when feeding is not available, and educators are left frustrated and feeling disempowered.

3.4.4 Influence of violence and overcrowding at home

Violence in and around the home environment has major psychological consequences and influences how learners perform at school and interact with their educators and peers. Learners affected by violent conflicts often display poor discipline. These learners are often abused and neglected at home and have to fend for themselves. As parents play little or no role in positive rearing or modeling acceptable behaviour, educators are often faced with disruptive behaviour in the class.

3.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the researcher focused on aspects that may demotivate and disempower educators. In Chapter Six, suggestions and recommendations will be presented on how to overcome the negative influences of the aspects discussed and what has to be done to empower educators.

In the next chapter, the research design and research methodology will be discussed comprehensively.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapters Two and Three, a literature study was conducted in order to discuss the relevant theoretical perspectives, including theories of learning. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive explanation of the research design and methodology and to affirm the research problems and objectives. Data analyses as well as ethical considerations are also discussed.

Lankshear and Knobel (2004:21) concur with Wellington (2000:46), who describes the research design as a broad strategic approach for conducting research, while Swann and Pratt (2003:3) agree with McMillan and Schumacher (1997:34) that the research design is a way of investigating a topic and then analysing the gathered data for the specific purpose of finding evidence to answer the researched questions posed. This purpose would therefore be a controlling force from which all decisions about design, measurement, sample, analysis and reporting emanate.

In setting up the research design, careful consideration should therefore be given to each aspect of the research methodology in order to meet the planned outcomes of the study (Henning, 2004:141).

4.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Large numbers of learners in a classroom, many presenting with educational problems, contribute towards educators not succeeding in meeting the expected learning outcomes. Educators and learners alike find it problematic to complete the learning and teaching programmes set out in the school curriculum. Many educators are struggling
to meet the challenges of teaching learners who experience educational problems and are finding it increasingly difficult to cope. Many feel demoralised and overwhelmed by the demands Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and Inclusive Education practices put upon them, as they experience or perceive themselves as lacking the required skills and relevant knowledge to cope with the demands facing them.

A well-phrased research question is a key component to a successful research project (Mertler, 2006:88; Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:25). Therefore, based on the challenging circumstances educators are facing within the majority of South African schools, the following research questions were formulated:

4.2.1 Research questions

4.2.1.1 Primary research question:

- How can educators in the Intermediate Phase be empowered to cope with the demands they face in an inclusive classroom situation?

From the primary research question, the following secondary questions were derived:

4.2.1.2 Secondary research questions:

- What are the different kinds of educational problems often experienced by learners in the Intermediate Phase?

- What factors in the teaching and learning environment need to be addressed to empower educators?

- How could these factors be addressed?

4.2.2 Research objectives

In order for the research questions to be answered, the following objectives were formulated to guide the researcher:
4.2.2.1 Primary research objective

- To determine how educators in the Intermediate Phase can be empowered to cope with the demands they face in an inclusive classroom situation.

4.2.2.2 Secondary research objectives:

- To determine what the different kinds of educational problems are that are often experienced by learners in the Intermediate Phase.
- To determine what factors in the teaching and learning environment need to be addressed to empower educators.
- To determine how these factors could be addressed.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is determined by the research problem which, in this case, is the fact that South African educators are struggling to meet the challenges of teaching learners who experience educational problems and find coping with these challenges increasingly difficult and demoralizing. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:33), agreeing with Gay and Airasian (2000:107), affirm that a research design is a general plan of study that includes when, from whom, and how data is collected. For the design of any research exercise to actually take place, careful planning and the translation of general ideas and concerns into specific and researchable questions must first take place (Fulcher and Scott, 2003:75).

For this study, the research design provided a logical plan of action regarding data collection, analysis and interpretation according to the parameters for a qualitative research design paradigm (Gorard, 2001:8).

4.3.1. Qualitative research

Qualitative research is typically preferred for an educational study, as the environment wherein the research takes place is a contextualised social setting (Scheyvens and
Emphasis is placed on the perspectives, beliefs and behavior of people and description of events, as suggested by Struwig and Stead (2004:17).

Qualitative research may mean many things to different people (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:4), but is ultimately characterised by the commitment to seek an understanding of the world through interacting with the participants and interpreting their actions and perceptions by concentrating on the qualities of human behaviour (Creswell, 2009:175; Wellington, 2000:198). In this regard, Creswell (2007:37) defines qualitative research as an interpretive and naturalistic approach that explains social and human problems. The researcher then has the task of interpreting the phenomena in terms of meaning created by the participants themselves. She is therefore directly involved and instrumental in creating new meaning by means of interpretive analysis (Gay and Airasian, 2000:19). Qualitative research enables participants to share what they understand and their ideas and perceptions of the relevant issues (Henning, 2004:141). Their beliefs and values about the phenomenon are therefore identified by means of narrative and descriptive data captured in their own words.

In this research, data was collected in a natural setting as per the guidelines for qualitative research recommended by McMillan and Schumacher (2001:37). Typical of this kind of research, the data collected was captured and reported on in a form of rich verbal descriptions (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:37), and subsequently be interpreted after a holistic picture had been built of what was being studied. For this study, a qualitative, explorative and descriptive approach was chosen as the most suitable for the topic.

In a qualitative research approach, research methodology needs to be planned in accordance.
4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology is the way in which a researcher collects and analyses data. In methodology, theory and method come together in order to create a framework for the research design (Henning, 2004:15; Wellington, 2000:198). Through the methodology, the researcher describes the characteristics of the participants from whom data is gathered: the techniques used to gather the information; and how the data is collected (Creswell, 2009:179). Therefore, in this study, methodology included a way of looking at the phenomenon and specified how chosen instruments captured data from the participants, which were selected according to a specific sampling method (Mason, 2002:227).

4.4.1 Ethnographic research

Ethnography dictates that a researcher enters into the world of the participants being studied to describe social interaction (Creswell, 2007:125; Mertler, 2006:9). It then focuses on cultural descriptions and embraces qualitative research methods to obtain in-depth data on participants’ perceptions (Struwig and Stead, 2004:238). Ethnography further refers to ‘a social scientific description of people and the culture basis of their peoplehood’ (Henning, 2004:43; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:25).

Through the method of ethnography, the researcher relies on one or more data-collection instruments for gathering data. The main data collecting instruments used to construct and understand the research phenomena in this study were questionnaires, interviews and observation. These methods required that the researcher allowed participants to ‘speak for themselves’ (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003:65).

4.4.2 Sampling

Research is mostly constraint by a lack of time and resources and subsequently it is not always possible to gather data from a whole population. The purpose of selecting a sample is to present a population from which we seek information (Gay and Airasian,
Sampling is therefore the basis of all research (Gorard, 2001:9). A sample consists of individuals selected from a larger group and should be representative of the larger group or wider population (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:147; Wellington, 2000:54).

In this study, purposeful sampling was used to select information-rich individuals and to increase the utility of information from such a small sample as suggested by both Creswell (2007:128) and Henning (2004:43). The advantage of using this method is that a small number of participants would yield many insights about the topic (Gay and Airasian, 2000:140; Wellington, 2000:200).

The researcher visited five schools similar in demographical background in Nelson Mandela Bay where Intermediate Phase educators experienced challenges dealing with learners who manifested educational problems in an Inclusive classroom situation. All the schools were situated in the peri-urban area of Nelson Mandela Bay, with unemployment and poverty rife in the surrounding neighbourhood. The language spoken in the area as well as at the schools was predominantly isiXhosa, with the language of learning and teaching primarily English, which was one of the prerequisites. For this research, the method of purposeful sampling was used, as the researcher identified five schools in which the prospective participants fitted the criteria desirable for the study (Henning, 2004:71; Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:148).

At the selected schools, educators teaching in the Intermediate Phase (Grades Four, Five and Six) were informed of the purpose of the study and invited to volunteer. Not all educators were eager to participate, but those who were interested and volunteered, were included to be part of the study. As participation was voluntary, educators could at any time withdraw from the research study if they so wished. The sample for the study consisted of nineteen educators in the Intermediate Phase at the five selected peri-urban disadvantaged schools in Nelson Mandela Bay. The schools and participants fitted the criteria for the research objectives of the study.
4.5. RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research procedure indicates how a study was conducted. Through the research procedures, researcher specifies ethical considerations, the data collection tools used and ultimately the analysis of the study. As human beings were involved in this study, it was logical that ethical issues would be encountered and therefore some ethical principles had to be considered.

4.5.1 Ethical considerations

Ethics in research is an important consideration and should be taken seriously (Creswell, 2009:89; Gay and Airasian, 2000:93; Wellington, 2000:54). Before embarking on this research study, the researcher obtained ethical clearance in accordance with the relevant policy of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

The following principles of research ethics, as stated by Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2001:158), were adhered to in this study:

- The researcher explained the research and the implications of participation to all volunteers. Participation in the study was voluntary and it was made clear that participants might withdraw at any time and that their identities would be kept confidential (Henning, 2004:43). They were further informed that the data collected would be kept anonymous and confidential.

- The researcher obtained permission from the Department of Education in Nelson Mandela Bay and from the principals from each of the selected schools of which participants volunteered. As the schools met the criteria and the educators addressed were all from the Intermediate Phase, all those who volunteered were included as participants. Most of the volunteers were information-rich participants, as they had the insight, knowledge and experience about the Intermediate Phase required by the researcher. Participants volunteered mainly
to gain insight into the challenges that they were experiencing in teaching learners with educational problems (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:228).

The researcher took ultimate responsibility for the ethical compliance of the research study.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:451) and Mouton (2001:108), data appears in different formats and has different properties. Accurate data capturing for any qualitative study is essential for accurate findings and conclusions to be made. As qualitative research relies heavily on descriptions, the main data instrument for data collection is therefore the researcher (Creswell, 2009:175; Gay and Airasian, 2000:201). The purpose of the data collecting process is to gather and capture data in a format that is appropriate for the research task and analysis to follow.

Qualitative research as a naturalistic inquiry dictates the use of non-inferring data collection strategies in order to discover the natural flow of events and processes and how participants interpret them (Gay and Airasian, 2000:212). Constructing an appropriate and accurate instrument for collecting data was therefore absolutely necessary for this research to succeed.

How information is sourced, is determined by the type of data needed for the research. For this study, primary data was most appropriate, as it was obtained from the participants and directly geared towards answering the questions posed by the researcher, as suggested by Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2000:111). Such primary qualitative data was significant in reaching insight in and understanding of the perceptions and ideas participants shared, as suggested by Fulcher and Scott (2003:88).

Qualitative data collection methods include a variety of techniques. For the purpose of this study, only questionnaires, interviews and observations were implemented. Each of
these techniques yielded its own body of data that contributed to powerful insights into the life-world of the participants.

4.6.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are printed lists of interrogative or declarative statements to which individuals respond in writing (Schmuck, 2006:42; Wellington, 2000:54). Questionnaires have a variety of uses. It offers the advantage that it is a time-saving technique to elicit information, in terms of which a number of people complete the questionnaire in a short time. More participants can be reached to validate the results (Bogdan and Biklen, 2004:154-158). Information is sought on a number of matters, by asking the same questions to all the participants and then collating the answers in order to form a general picture (Fulcher and Scott, 2003:79). Allowing participants enough time to complete the questionnaire usually ensures quality answers, which are important in implementing qualitative research.

The design of questionnaires is most important, and the researcher has to be skilled and aware of the potential pitfalls (Creswell, 2005:362). Questionnaires should contain precise and clear instructions on how to answer the questions appropriately and candidly. It should therefore start with questions that are easy to answer, and the wording should not influence the responses in any way. Questionnaires should begin with the basic and least intrusive questions, progressing to more sensitive and complex questions. Questions should be divided into logical sections by subject, proceeding from general to specific questions. Personal or sensitive questions should be put last, always keeping it simple and unambiguous (Struwig and Stead, 2004:89-90). The researcher followed these recommendations in constructing the questionnaires implemented in this study.

The first part of the questionnaires covered demographic information about participants; including optional information (the participant’s name and school; teaching qualifications; learning areas taught; and years of teaching experience, including the participant’s teaching experience in the Intermediate Phase). The last section
contained open-ended questions to allow participants the opportunity to express their ideas freely and in their own words as suggested by Schmuck (2006:47), McMillan and Schumacher (2005:360) and Struwig and Stead (2004:92).

As the main data collection technique, questionnaires were administered to all participants. Participants were allowed to answer the questions in privacy, in their own time and at their own pace. This allowed them to truthfully express their views, while remaining anonymous. The researcher informed participants beforehand that the information sourced would only be used for research purposes only.

4.6.2 Interviews

The interview is a favourite data collection tool among qualitative researchers (Gay and Airasian, 2000:219). Interviewing follows a pattern of asking questions and initiating topics for discussion (Schmuck, 2006:49; Gay and Airasian, 2000:233). This technique of interviewing is considered the most widespread and influential tool used to understand human beings (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:198).

The purpose of interviewing is to allow appreciation for the perspectives of others (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005:65; Patton, 2002:340) while keeping a close eye on the research objectives. Interviews can start out with ‘closed questions’, depending on the data sought, but may ultimately evolve into open-ended questions, where more clarification is required (Creswell, 2005: 364). Care has to be taken so that participants are not influenced in any way while responding, as interviews are often seen as contrived social interactions (Henning, 2004:66; Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:199).

Using the interviewing technique helped the researcher in this study to establish rapport and closeness with participants, while collecting supporting data for the study (Schmuck, 2006:49). It furthermore allowed the researcher to seek clarification from participants, while they could express themselves in more detail. Without influencing the participants' views, the researcher was able to probe and so elicit richer data, as suggested by Schmuck (2006:49) and Gay and Airasian (2000:291).
For this study, a semi-structured interview approach was used, with the same line of inquiry followed in respect of all participants (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993:163). As the interview technique is flexible, questions not reacted to in the questionnaires could be rephrased and readdressed through the interviewing approach. By asking semi-structured questions, the participants were encouraged to share their opinions more candidly. Semi-structured questioning aided with prompting and probing elicited more valuable data, as suggested by Gay and Airasian (2000:291/292). This provided a standard framework for the comparison and analysis of the obtained data at a later stage.

All interview sessions were recorded by means of a tape recorder. Responses were transcribed after the interviews were completed (Gay and Airasian, 2000:291/292). The researcher retained all transcribed recordings for safekeeping so that the written responses could be used to verify the data, if needed.

Interviews were held in settings in which the participants felt comfortable and relaxed. In this study, the participants selected, were interviewed at their respective schools. This allowed participants to feel at ease and promoted honest and open responses.

4.6.3 Observation

Observation must have a clear purpose, what and how the observations will take place, must be stated clearly (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:221). It must be executed in a systematical manner and can be applied as a means to establish if there is any transformation in social and/or behavioural performance (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:729). This technique requires the researcher to identify when and where to observe and to ensure that the observations captured exactly those things that are of interest to the study (Fulcher and Scott, 2003:89).

Observations were therefore chosen as another technique to be used in this study. The researcher conducted the observations within the natural setting. This technique captured how people behaved by mean of observing and recording what they did and
said (Schmuck, 2006:52; Rosnow and Rosethal, 1996:77). The researcher became part of the participating groups in their natural settings by observing the educators trying to cope with learners experiencing educational problems in the Intermediate Phase. Even though observation is a very demanding way of gathering data, it provides an accurate means of collecting raw material and valuable information to support findings from other sources.

The recording of what was being observed, was systematic and objective. Observations were made without bias. As a mechanical device was not available, an observation schedule was utilised. This was devised to capture aspects relevant to the focus of what had to be observed, as determined by the research questions, in accordance to suggestions by Henning (2004:89).

The purpose of observation, including consistent and constant observation, could increase control of the observation process and in so doing the validity of the research (Gay and Airasian, 2000:300). The researcher's observations should be free of bias.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Mouton (2001:108) states that all research concludes with the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. Data analysis requires the researcher to be thorough, systematic and meticulous (Wellington, 2000:147). This enables the researcher to organise and bring meaning to a large volume of information (Gay and Airasian, 2000:237). After a thorough data analysis, conclusions can be drawn from which recommendations may be formulated (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006:259).

It is important to make sure, before embarking on data analysis, that all questionnaires, interview materials and observation notes are completed and available (Gay and Airasian, 2000:239). When writing up interview transcripts, no changes or paraphrasing for correcting grammatical errors is allowed. Any data that has been summarized, becomes new data and therefore is it important to always make the original raw data available for scrutiny (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993:148).
As a starting point in data analysis, all information collected is studied to determine if any themes have crystallised (Henning, 2004:117; Wellington, 2000:149). The data should then be grouped into themes and sub-themes and coded for easy referencing (Struwig and Stead, 2004:169; Gay and Airasian, 2000:242).

In this study, the analysis, the interpretation of the data followed, in order to establish if the research questions had been answered. It was therefore important that the interpretation was coherent and focused on the topic in question and that it accounted for all data collected, as suggested by Henning (2004:120).

However, data analysis entails more than merely finding answers to the research questions; it also assesses the trustworthiness of the data and the findings (Swann and Pratt, 2003:116). Trustworthiness will be discussed below.

4.7.1 Trustworthiness

De Vos (2002:348-351) refers to the model of trustworthiness by Guba, which tries to eliminate bias in qualitative analysis. Conrad and Serlin (2006:412) state that the establishment of trustworthiness is demonstrated by the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of research findings. Trustworthiness refers to the accuracy and believability of the raw data compiled in the collection process (Mertler, 2006:101). Lyons and Laboskey (2000:6) concur with Conrad and Serlin (2006:410) perceiving trustworthiness as validating qualitative data. A model developed by Guba to ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research includes the following:

- Truth-value

According to Kvale (1996:50), truth-value is a principle that assists the researcher in taking action that produces the desired results. To ensure the truth-value of the gathered information, the researcher must try to establish a correlation between the verbatim accounts of the participants and the analysis of the study. In this way, truth-value discovers the credibility of data collected from participants (Conrad and Serlin,
In terms of the evidence the researcher can produce to support an argument, and the careful selection of appropriate sources, the sources will inevitably influence the credibility of data (Creswell, 2005:252).

Creswell (2005:252) adds to Terreblanche and Durrheim’s (1999:433) view that truth-value presents an account of the contributions as accurately as possible, corresponding to the underlying qualities in a real situation (Neuman, 2000:164). Mouton (2001:109) refers to the truthfulness of research as validity that is characterised by the avoidance of false or distorted accounts that could hamper the credibility of the research.

Data was translated verbatim. It was then checked with participants to make sure it was a true interpretation of what said. Different data collection techniques such as questionnaires and interviews were applied to cross-check truth-value.

- **Applicability**

Babbie (2001:112) agrees with De Vos (2002:349) that applicability refers to the degree to which the findings can be transferred to other contexts and settings. Presenting descriptive data allows for comparison and ensures applicability. Data can therefore be scrutinised to establish whether it is adequately similar to be relevant for comparisons with other research studies (Conrad and Serlin, 2006:415).

According to De Vos (2002:349) as well as Schurink, Schurink and Poggenpoel (1998:331), the purpose of applicability is to describe a particular phenomenon or experience and not to generalise it to others. Applicability can be viewed from two perspectives; the first being that qualitative research does not generalise the applicability of the research in all settings, because each setting is unique and cannot automatically describe another setting (Conrad and Serlin, 2006:414); the second perspective being the degree to which discoveries in qualitative research could be applied to similar contexts (Creswell, 2007:206; De Vos, 2002:331).
• Consistency

The third criterion of trustworthiness, as suggested by De Vos (2002:350), entails checking whether the obtained findings will be consistent when the research is replicated using the same participants and data collection measures. Consistency is further exposed when one account of a specific aspect does not contradict another account of the same aspect.

• Neutrality

The last criterion for trustworthiness as affirmed by De Vos (2002:350) and Poggenpoel (1998:350), refers to neutrality. The concept of neutrality refers to freedom from bias in research procedures, such as data collection, sampling and reporting of results. It further confirms the degree to which the findings are based on information regarding the participants or situations, without any contamination by any prejudice, motivation and perspectives the researcher may have. In qualitative research, the emphasis on neutrality shifts from the researcher to the data.

4.7.2 Triangulation

Both Struwig and Stead (2004:145) and Wellington (2000:201) explain that triangulation refers to independent measures that confirm or contradict findings. Triangulation refers to the concept of using multi-methods of data collection as a technique to further increase the validity and reliability of data collection and interpretation, in order to establish trustworthiness (Mertler, 2006:9; Henning, 2004:103; Gay and Airasian, 2000:252).

Triangulation cross-validates, recording the views of different participants and observers in different roles (Mason, 2002:171; Wellington, 2000:129). Triangulation can capture a complete, holistic portrayal of the units under study. In addition to completeness, triangulation enhances the quality as well as the credibility of research (De Vos, 1998:351).
In this study the researcher performed methodological triangulation by using three different methods of data collection, namely interviews, observation and questionnaires, to compare and validate the data collected.

4.8 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the framework of the research design and research methodology, based on a qualitative research paradigm. Discussions included the rationale for choosing methods of sampling and details of the research procedures and ethical considerations. Also presented in this chapter were the data collection strategies, namely interviews, questionnaires and observations. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of data analysis and aspects of trustworthiness and triangulation.

The interpretation of the research data will be presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. From this, the implications the different aspects may have on educators’ empowerment, will be highlighted.

The analysis of qualitative data is complex and requires cautious and accurate analysis and interpretation capabilities. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the objectivity of and the attention to detail in the interpretation remain reliable (Creswell, 2009:7).

The researcher collected data by means of questionnaires, observations and interviews. During the analysis of the available data, the researcher searched for emerging themes. Discussions on the findings around the themes that have been identified, are presented below.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHICAL AND BIOLOGICAL DATA OF PARTICIPANTS AND SCHOOLS

All participants were from primary schools situated in impoverished areas of Nelson Mandela Bay. Participants consisted of educators from both genders teaching in the Intermediate Phase. All participants were in possession of an appropriate teaching qualification for teaching in the Intermediate Phase, ranging from Teaching Diplomas to B.Ed. degrees. Only one participant from all five participating schools possessed a specialisation qualification for teaching learners with special educational needs (SEN).
Table 1 indicates the number of learners at the participating schools, number of educators at the schools involved in the Intermediate Phase. The table include gender, qualifications and age group of educators in the Intermediate Phase. Although the table indicates all the educators from the Intermediate Phase, not all these educators have participated in the study.

**TABLE 1: Overview of Intermediate Phase Educators of Participating Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOLS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF LEARNER IN THE SCHOOL</th>
<th>NUMBER OF EDUCATORS IN THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>EDUCATOR QUALIFICATIONS</th>
<th>AGE GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LOWER THAN MATRIC</td>
<td>FROM 20 YEARS TO 30 YEARS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TEACHER CERTIFICATION MATRIC + 2 YEAR</td>
<td>FROM 31 YEARS TO 40 YEARS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MATRIC + 3 YEAR TEACHER</td>
<td>FROM 41 YEARS TO 50 YEARS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SPECIALISATION IN SNE</td>
<td>FROM 51 YEARS TO 60 YEARS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL ONE</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0 1 6 0 0 0 0 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL TWO</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0 0 6 1 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL THREE</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0 0 5 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL FOUR</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0 2 7 0 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL FIVE</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0 0 6 0 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though learner enrolments at the different schools ranged from fairly high to quite low, the participating educators at these schools all experienced similar challenges in their classes. The fact that the majority of educators had taught for more than ten years, seems to indicate that most of their challenges originated from the teaching and learning environment in which they found themselves. The poor environments in which these schools were located, contributed heavily to the challenges educators experienced.
TABLE 2: Overview of average number of learners per class in Intermediate Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOLS</th>
<th>AVERAGE NUMBER OF LEARNERS PER CLASS IN INTERMEDIATE PHASE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GRADE 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL ONE</td>
<td>+/- 33 learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL TWO</td>
<td>+/- 39 learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL THREE</td>
<td>+/- 41 learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL FOUR</td>
<td>+/- 44 learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL FIVE</td>
<td>+/- 30 learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst numbers in most of the classes were in line with the prescribed number of learners per class approved by the Education Department, a few of the participating educators had unusually high learner numbers in their classes.

While some educators taught all the learning areas to a single class, most of the participants taught at least two or more of the learning areas offered in the Curriculum. Some participants only taught one learning area, for example Social Science, Life Orientation or Natural Science, in this Phase.

For most learners in the Intermediate Phase at the participating schools, English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) was different to their home language. The home language of learners at these schools was predominantly IsiXhosa, with a few learners speaking Afrikaans. The few Afrikaans-speaking learners had to cope with English as LOLT and took the IsiXhosa as a third language. Further complicating the issue of language, was the fact that the home language of most participating educators in this study was IsiXhosa-speaking. Also, in spite of the fact that some educators were not fluent in English, they were required to teach in the medium of English.
5.3 FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The basic question the researcher wanted to address was: *How can educators in the Intermediate Phase be empowered to support learners who experience learning problems in an inclusive classroom situation?*

To answer this question, questionnaires were distributed amongst Intermediate Phase educators at selected schools. Participants were also interviewed to clarify the question the researcher addressed. From all the data collected, specific themes and sub-themes emerged. These are discussed below.

5.3.1 THEME ONE

**Types of learning problems educators are faced with.**

5.3.1.1 **Educational problems**

- **Findings**

The majority of participants at all the participating schools were in agreement that language problems, such as reading and writing, as well as mathematical problems, such as counting and reasoning skills, were the biggest learning problems among learners.

Writing starts as a physical activity. However, the writing skill grows out of spoken language and reading and is supposed to gain learners competency through verbal experiences. The task of writing is a demanding one, and many learners display a grammatical ability that is much poorer than their spoken competency. Writing as a means of communication is problematic, due to the limited vocabulary, lack of comprehension and poor grammatical skills among many learners. Since academic success is based on an understanding of the language of communication, the majority of participants listed reading and writing as problematic for learners. Comments made in this regard were as follows:
'Reading, some spelling': ‘I have discovered that learners in the Intermediate Phase, most of them cannot read or write’.

Although there has been a great improvement in the provision of learning material by the Education Department, it is still not uncommon for educators not to have access to these materials. It is therefore no surprise that many participating educators blamed insufficient learning material as a contributing factor to language problems. This was evident from the following comments:

‘Learners are unable to read, due to insufficient learning material like reading books (readers)’.

To some participants, the poor reading ability of learners extended beyond comprehending, interpreting and the act of reading, influencing the learners’ way of learning. This was clear from comments such as:

‘… not understanding questions that are asked in tests, exams and various questions that they come across when learning’.

As the learners demonstrate poor reading skills, educators are confronted with a lack of knowledge of how to remediate the problem. Therefore, in addition to educators' deprived pre-service educational training and lack of educational in-service programmes, struggling to teach reading skills is not unusual, which leads to further educational problems for learners. This was highlighted in the following comments:

‘The learners have a reading problem, which result to less interest for other learning areas. Reading has also affected their way of perceiving things, the ability of carrying out instructions is affected, the listening skill is affected and their interest in learning is affected, writing and spelling of words, to construct sentences is worse.’

Participants viewed learners’ poor copying and transcribing as a direct result of poor execution of the reading skill. Learners’ lack of reading ability was recognised in the
way in which they copied and responded to class-work from the blackboard. This was noted in comments such as:

‘Some cannot transcribe from the blackboard, because they cannot read’.

‘Some learners cannot read, they cannot write work from the blackboard’.

Following considerate thought by some participants, poor basic reading performance and their accompanying literacy skills, were stated as reasons why reading had not been mastered. Comments in this regard were:

‘...poor pronunciation, language usage and carrying out and following instructions read’;

Linked to the learners’ poor reading ability, was the concern about learners not mastering the skill of writing as part of communication language. This was aptly verbalised by one of the participants: ‘They cannot write, because they cannot read’.

- Interpretation

A variety of complexities contribute to the learning problems experienced by learners in the Intermediate Phase. It is apparent that especially not only skills lacking in language, such as reading and writing, but also in spelling and mathematics such as counting, calculating and reasoning, were seen as the most relevant problems. The lack of these skills negatively influenced how learning took place.

5.3.1.2 Language and Communication

- Findings

Participants were also concerned about the usage of English as a medium of instruction, whilst many learners and some educators in the Phase struggled to express themselves in that language. Even though English was the medium of instruction in the Intermediate Phase, the participating educators were not sure whether learners
understood, as they often could not complete the instructions given to them. The following remarks confirmed their concerns:

‘it is difficult for learners to understand language that they are taught with;

‘Understanding of language that they are taught with English as the medium of instruction’;

‘Understanding instructions done in English’; including ‘… understand new concepts.’

Participants blamed learners' poor writing on ‘confusion of words, bad copying of words from the chalkboard, a lack of vocabulary, cannot construct sentences without assistance’ and ‘they cannot write their own sentences’.

The language of learning and teaching (LOLT), including the medium of instruction which differed from the mother-tongue of the learners, was seen as a major cause of the learning problems. The majority of participants were extremely concerned about this matter. Responses from participants varied and included remarks such as the following:

‘Since we are using English as a medium of instruction, learners don’t understand it’.

‘When they start Grade 4 (Four) the major challenge is English language …’.

‘Language use: English’; ‘Language. Since the medium of instruction is English in all learning areas and it starts in the Intermediate Phase’.

‘Medium of instruction’; ‘It is the language that is used and our learners are not motivated in speaking the language…’:

‘Understanding instructions done in English for the first time in Grade Four’.

‘Language barrier; the learners still struggle to understand new concepts, due to the lack of their English vocabulary’. 
Since the introduction of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and later the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), the participants had observed that learners entering the Intermediate Phase were experiencing problems with reading and/or writing. One participant was convinced that since the use of OBE and the RNCS system, learners’ schooling had been negatively affected, gloomingly stating:

‘I think since the beginning of OBE and RNCS, our kids are becoming less interested in their work, they are lazy to work on their own, we need to go back to the old roots (way of teaching)’.

The participants evaluated these problems in relation to academic underachievement and therefore classified them as learning problems.

Alongside the difficulties with language, were the poor mathematical skills displayed by learners. The participants complained that poor calculating proficiency was common:

‘... recognition of numbers, lack of the knowledge on basic operations, place value, number names and logical thinking.’

These poor mathematical skills were regarded as the reason for the lack of numerical and problem-solving proficiencies learners who experienced academic problems, demonstrated. This was further evident from the following comments:

’They can’t read and also they can’t do basic Math calculation; sometimes they cannot write’.

‘They don’t know how to read, write (and) solve problems’.

- Interpretation

Learners experienced problems with the language of learning and teaching (LOLT), as it differed from the everyday language in which they communicate. The collected data indicates that learners from predominantly IsiXhosa speaking homes struggled to cope
with English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT). Some educators also lacked fluency in the English language and often reverted to their mother tongue to make explanation and communication easier for themselves.

While observing, the researcher noted that some learners were eager to participate in conversations held in their mother tongue (IsiXhosa) but shied away if they had to speak in English. Few learners would confidently converse in casual conversation in English without reverting to their mother tongue. This could be seen as an indication that there are problems directly linked to the language of instruction.

5.3.1.3 Socio-economic barriers

- **Findings**

A few participants cited physical problems and social problems as causes of learning problems. The problems listed were: ‘Hearing disorder, poor eyesight, societal problems, health problems, (problems) originated from birth and alcohol abuse (by parents)’. Although these problems were cited, most do not fall within the scope of the study and will therefore not be discussed.

- **Interpretation**

From the answers, it is clear that most educators had no clear understanding of what exactly socio-economic problems entailed. As such, no action could be planned by the educators as individuals or in collaboration with others, such as the Senior Management Teams (SMTs). Whilst educators made mention of physical problems and social problems, most will not be discussed, as they do not fall within the scope of the study.
5.3.2 THEME TWO

Support and assistance available to educators

The second theme deals with support and assistance to educators. This theme was developed into subcategories, which included support and assistance from inside the school as well as from outside the school. Some of these were identified by educators and are discussed below.

5.3.2.1. Professional in-service programmes

- Findings

According to the data presented in Table 1, all educators were in possession of a valid teaching qualification. Although most were qualified to teach the content of the Curriculum and had many years of teaching experience, very few had specific training to remediate learners experiencing learning problems or intervene where learners faced barriers to learning.

Although educators at schools were encouraged to attend the workshops presented by the Education Department, few participants were aware if and when these were being offered. They stated that workshops on learning problems and barriers were being offered, but these were generally attended by selected colleagues, mostly members of elected school committees, described as the Inclusive Learner Support Team (ILST). Some participants admitted to attending out-of-school ILST workshops, at which they had been given support material on the learning problems and barriers experienced by learners:

‘I have also attended an ILST workshop on these barriers, and the last one we were given material to use.

‘... none, except an ELSEN course which I attended ...’.
‘Education advisors are there, but what is their duty, they don’t come to us.’

Although some participants had attended in-service workshops, the information gained at these workshops had often not been shared, many educators losing out on valuable facts.

‘Others go to workshops, but they do not report back, I don’t get the information.’

‘It is always a struggle to make time for reporting on the ISLT workshops; there are too many other things happening at the school.’

A need that became apparent in respect of the abovementioned shortcoming, was for committees to drive different educational programmes. Although the educators had the content knowledge thanks to their pre-service training, not many had been schooled in the challenges they came across in the classroom. Committees established at the schools were supposed to aid educators in dealing with the challenges listed now.

Some of the participating schools had established committees where educators could share the nature of the educational problems they encountered in their classrooms. A few participants accounted that through these committees, support was being given to those in need of advice:

‘A committee has been established to help educators through giving some advice’.

‘At our school, we have a committee that helps us with the problems that we have in the class, like the learners who cannot read and the learners who cannot write.’

The truth is, however, that although these committees were reported to help educators tremendously, educators generally did not make use thereof. The committees were not sustained, as the educators on the committees were also full-time class-teachers and therefore could not meet on a regular basis.
Most important though is that no educator acknowledged their own strengths or weaknesses but preferred to take on the role of the victim of circumstances.

‘We have an ILST Committee where we help other teachers to identify the problems the learners have. Educators do not bring the learners problems to us, so we can’t always help the educators when there is a problem.’

‘The committees are there, but they cannot do their job, as they are busy in their own classes.’

‘Committees meet, but it is sometimes only once a quarter’.

- Interpretation

Some educators were fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend topic-related workshops and lectures, during which they gained valuable information that they could apply to empower themselves. Unfortunately, not all educators had shared the information they gained at the workshops. Those who had not been afforded the opportunity to attend often struggled on their own to achieve effectiveness in their classrooms.

The participating schools had set up various committees for educators to discuss the challenges they encountered in the classroom, but these committees were mostly non-functional. In schools where the committees were functioned, the time spent on helpful contribution was in most cases too limited. Committees were furthermore not sustained, as the educators belonging to these teams were class teachers in their own right and time did not permit them to commit effectively to these committees.

Most of the participating schools adhered in principle to Departmental directions regarding the establishment of committees for educational programmes. Unfortunately, the way these committees had been established, was problematic, as the ‘buy-in’ of all educators was lacking, resulting in very reluctant involvement that had developed into a
‘no-involvement’, killing any advantages or benefits to educators that could have developed.

5.3.2.2 Specialist educators and education support specialists

- Findings

At most of the participating schools, educators lacked the know-how on specific remedial teaching, even though participants saw remedial skills as a solution to helping learners with problems. A few participants indicated that they needed support from individuals, such as specialist or remedial educators or lecturers from academic institutions offering programmes. This need was expressed, as most schools lacked such specially trained specialists. This apparent desire was voiced as follows:

‘... to be assisted by remedial educators of whom we lack those expertises in our school’.

‘Specialised people or remedial teachers to help with learning problems’.

‘We do not have educators who have LSEN knowledge in our school’.

Participants varied in their views regarding the use of remedial educators, versus trying out different strategies on their own. Participants expected that more support should be given to them in the schools where trained and qualified remedial educators were teaching, and that these ‘experts’ could work closer with them and share their knowledge and assist with the problems experienced. The first challenge regarding school remedial programmes was voiced as taking ownership of the remedial programmes and the implementation thereof:

‘Your remedial work, which is not the solution if you don’t tackle the actual cause or problem’.
‘Individual attention paid (to learners), though too little time available’ and ‘as an educator to identify their problem, do individual assessment’.

In addition, some schools have trained remedial educators available, but they are not primarily and effectively used in the school remedial programmes. At schools where a remedial educator was available (even if not one of the participating schools) participants made use of their expertise by negotiating and requesting their assistance. This was obvious through declarations such as:

‘We have educators who are trained for remedial, so I ask from them, some of the problems (solutions)’.

‘We have remedial educators, but they are busy in their own classrooms. They cannot always help us.’

‘I discuss the writing and learning problems of the learners with the remedial teacher, and then I try to implement what she says I must do’.

Alongside the lack of remedial educators requested, the lack of proper remedial classes was stressed, with the need for a designated remedial specialist for these classes. This was expressed as follows:

‘Our need is full-time remedial classes to help us help the learners’.

‘The Department must come on board and see that schools have a need for full-time special classes’.

‘...Remedial classes ...’; ‘...Create remedial classes...’

‘...special classes or employment of remedial education...’

Educators work within an educational community, and some participating educators were of the opinion that schools should be supported and assisted by knowledgeable
professionals such as education specialist educators and advisors, social workers and psychologists in this community. Some respondents raised the concern that, unfortunately, those individuals in the educational community who could assist educators were not freely available and in many instances seldom visited schools in need:

‘Nothing has been done by Department,’ and ‘Education advisors are there, but what is their duty?- they don’t come to us.’

‘Social workers must visit the schools, as learners have lots of social problems that comes from the home environment’.

‘I think there are lots of them such that these are not coming to our school level, eg. psychologist and social workers.’

There is also a need for support and assistance from outside the school with regard to information from professionals regarding intervention practices. Some participants expressed that professional people such as psychologists should be more involved with intervention assistance to educators:

‘We need to get support from the psychologist, some learners have social problems, and they need the counselling’ and ‘psychologist (sometimes)’.

‘Psychologist to refer learners immediately those who need to be referred’.

‘Educators refer learners to psychologists for professional diagnosis, but parents do not take them for fear of stigma’.

• Interpretation

The respondents displayed an eagerness to learn more about remedial education and were prepared to be guided by remedial specialists or trained remedial educators who
have the necessary expertise. The educators perceived that they themselves lacked remedial skills and therefore requested assistance in this regard.

One qualified educator in the research study was in possession of a Special Educational Needs (SEN) qualification. Some participants stated that the Education Department should establish remedial classes and appoint remedial specialists at all schools.

The respondents reported that education support specialists were not involved at schools, causing a lack of the expertise and assistance that should be provided to educators facing many more serious challenges in the classroom. Furthermore, the scarcity of specialist educators, advisors and professionals such as social workers and psychologists for more serious problems was perpetuating the problem.

In addition, educators found it essential that professionals such as psychologists and social workers should provide assistance with regard to the challenges they faced. They contended that if their requests were promptly dealt with, the struggles they endured when instructing learners experiencing educational problems would be much more tolerable.

Respondents also generally believed that parents should be involved in their children’s schooling and not fear the stigma associated with learning problems. It seems as if the majority of respondents perceive specialists such as psychologist and social workers as a remedy for all without realising that by merely implementing a variety of good teaching practices, most of the problems may be addressed.
5.3.3 THEME THREE

Developing of the Self for Empowerment

The participants recognised that the teaching qualification they had obtained in their pre-service training to become certified educators was not sufficient to successfully address all problems and challenges in the inclusive classroom. To satisfy a clear educational training void, participants were craving the development of the self to empower themselves in instructional shortcomings, and in particular working with learners experiencing learning problems in the classroom.

5.3.3.1 Professional development programmes

- Findings

An overwhelming number of participants considered different categories of workshops such as Curriculum Development, School Development, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Classroom Management workshops, to be of paramount importance in the empowering of the self. Although not expressed in such direct terms, participants armed with a teaching qualification suitable for the Intermediate Phase considered themselves disempowered by the unsuitable learning characteristics demonstrated by learners in their classrooms and their own inability to deal with these. The types of workshops sought by the majority of participants in their quest for personal development are therefore significant. Comments in that regard included:

‘...school development workshops’.

‘...workshops on the assessment of learners’; and ‘...more workshops on learning disabiliities’.

‘...attend seminars and workshops regarding learning problems or assessments’.
‘I need to be educated in learning problems in this field, so that I can understand them better and be able to deal with the problems’.

Whilst school-based development workshops were seen as one components of empowering the self, some participants called for additional in-depth training, as found in educational support qualifications, in order to empower themselves. They stated that training programmes and further studies should complement and fulfil the void that they experiencing with regard to their shortcomings in working with learning problems and barriers. Participants were eager to suggest ways in which the shortcomings in the classroom environment could be rectified.

‘...study, study and proper training, not for the sake of empowering, but (out) of concern to help the learners who have problems’.

‘...enough training on how to do lesson planning and assessment’; ‘to get maybe some training in learner problems’.

‘...to go and study remedial teaching, as I don’t have it!’

‘...not only to study about the learning problems, but also how to implement the knowledge of learning problems the children have’.

Some disillusioned participants express the desire to be remunerated or funded for their attendance of workshops and training sessions and for continued studies. They felt that this would be beneficial to both educators and the learners in the academic community. Although the power of knowledge is supreme in the classroom, many participants felt that the time and effort in gaining this knowledge must be acknowledged. Comments in this regard included:

‘Yes or No. Many educators specialise on certain fields (where) they demand (some sort) of recognition, i.e. need to be remunerated and be regarded as specialist (educators)’ and ‘Yes they do’.
'Teachers must be paid when they study, especially if it is programmes that will benefit both the teacher and the learner'.

'...get proper training and get recognised as a remedial teacher and get remunerated for that.'

'From what we are experiencing with our learners, they will be empowered on how to help the learners out who have different learning problems if we get more training on the problem.'

Although most participating educators viewed studying and attending workshops as an opportunity for professional development, some found studying a challenge, as they perceived it as having limited scope for career advancement. The educators viewed studying for self empowerment as a challenge, due to the high fees charged for these educational programmes at the various institutions. Furthermore, as full-time educators, time for furthering their education was also limited. In addition, most of the participating educators were family people and also had commitments to their personal lives and families.

'I do not have the time to study; I must do sports in the afternoon. When am I going to have time for myself?'

'I want to study, but it cost a lot of money. There are bursaries at the Department, but I struggle to get one'.

'To study, is very expensive, we must be subsidised, because it will help the learners also if I get the knowledge of learning problems'.

Several participants were oblivious to the training opportunities that could develop them. This was obvious from comments like ‘None’ and ‘I do not know of any’. Therefore, it is shocking to note that even though many participants yearned to utilise and attend to
workshops and other uplifting programmes, they are not completely aware when and where these opportunities are available. Comments to this effect include:

‘I must be honest that I have never heard of any …’

‘No, but if it is available, I don’t think there will be a problem (attending the workshops). If any, it will be a victory’.

A few participants, who were aware of training opportunities, declared that these prospects did not reach their schools regularly or timeously. Although there were those participants who were oblivious to training opportunities, others stated that they were aware of training opportunities or study programmes on learning problems and barriers to learning. Comments included:

‘There are facilitators from the Department of Education for the different learning areas' and some ‘universities that can help us with the curriculum’.

‘Not much, I have just reported about the kind of workshop (barriers to learning) I have attended. This is due to the lack of enough time’.

‘There are workshops on learning problems, and specific learning area workshops, but they are not given to us on time’.

‘Universities have programmes on LSEN, but we must pay to go and attend those programmes’.

Many participants remarked on the promises made by the Education Department to schools with regard to bettering educational communities; promises that never materialised. The assurances from the Education Department disillusioned many participants when promises of empowerment and support by way of workshop programmes never came to fruition. Comments in this regard included the following:
‘We were promised about introducing a remedial class, but till now nothing has been done.’

‘Department of Education has risen the point of teacher who have specialized in psychology to assist on the matter.’

‘...only workshops which are held for a few days or in the afternoon, I think it is not enough’.

- Interpretation

There was a feeling of hope amongst the educators that if they acquired knowledge on learner challenges, it would help them advance their ability to manage the educational and other challenges they face in the classroom. Given the shortage of professional help, there was a sense that acquiring knowledge on learner challenges would not be advantageous only to the educators, but also beneficial to the learners they taught. To acquire the information on learner challenges, educators wanted to attend different workshops, training programmes or study curriculum development, educational problems (SEN) or classroom management programmes. It should be noted that not all the educators were eager to participate in the in-service professional development programmes; even if having been given the opportunity to attend and most would not be willing to attend in their own free time for example on Saturdays or during vacations.

In addition, educators stated that topic-related workshops were presented over short periods of time; not giving educators enough time to absorb and comprehend the information needed to empower themselves. Those privileged enough to attend workshops, found them exceptionally informative, but short on contact time, as these information session were often presented over one to two days, or occasionally over one week. Not enough time was allowed with the professionals or specialists at workshops to discuss the individual problems encountered in the classroom or at schools. The workshops presented were not followed up by the presenters or other
specialists in the form of visits to individual schools to make sure that the information given had been disseminated and applied correctly.

5.3.3.2 Purpose of teacher education and training

- Findings

It was generally thought that pre-service training programmes were suitably adorned with teaching and application knowledge. However, most educators were oblivious to the variety of learning problems or possible causes for barriers to learning and therefore struggle when confronted with such problems. The educators clearly believe that pre-service training would equip them to deal with most social, economic and educational problems, but that not many of the institutions were up to the challenge of adequately addressing these problems in their programmes.

Most participants became aware of their own shortcomings towards learners' educational problems and barriers to learning only after they took up their teaching positions. A significant shortage mentioned regarding pre-service programmes was the lack of adequate knowledge of learning problems and barriers in the educational environment and lack of knowledge of how to cope with these difficulties whilst teaching. This was clear from comments such as the following:

‘...to be empowered to teach learners to cope with these barriers to learning, just to have an idea as to how to cope to teach learners who need remedial, as I have no idea how to help this child’.

‘A teacher college, we learn about things we are going to teach, we don’t get the information on how we can manage our classes, it is important’.

‘Learners come from different homes, they have their own problems. I need to be empowered to help these learners. I have the knowledge from my Teacher’s Diploma, but I need to be helped with the poor reading and writing’.
'We must not only learn content knowledge at the College, they must prepare us for problems that we get in the classes'.
‘...security (if I have to stay behind after school), there is a lot of naughty boys living around the school’.

‘I do not feel safe if I want to do extra classes in the afternoon’.

In addition, concerns were raised about the safety of the physical environment. Playing fields at the participating schools were in a poor state and not well developed; placing the added burden on educators to ensure learner safety on the school grounds. Educators felt disempowered, as in addition to the struggles they faced in the classroom, they had also not been trained in First Aid programmes if any harm should come to the learners.

‘The Department needs to develop the playing fields for the learners’.

‘The playgrounds are not safe; there is no grass for the learners to play on’.

‘Our school must plant grass, there is no playing area for the little ones to play away from the bigger learners’.

‘We are not nurses if the learners hurt themselves on the playground’.

Another fear raised, was that of poor fencing and access gates at the schools. Because of the poor fencing and unlocked gates during the school day, all and sundry had access to the schools with or without prior permission. This was expressed in the following comments:

‘It is not safe if parents walk around the school; they must first report to the office before going to the classes’.

‘...for safety, visitors must make an appointment with the office’.

‘Fencing around our school must be upgraded: everyone just walks into the school premises’.

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‘The gates of the school must be locked during tuition time’.

- Interpretation

The educators were perturbed about safety and security at schools. They were especially worried about the playgrounds, as these were not being maintained and were very unsafe. There were no First Aid programmes available during pre-service or in-service training that equipped them to render medical assistance.

Access to schools was a problem, and it was revealed that gates should be locked during school hours. If visitors and parents wanted to visit the school, they should first get permission from the office.

Security must also be extended to after hours for educators to feel safe when they performed extra-mural duties. Although schools were surrounded by fencing, the fencing was in a poor state, and there were still cause for concern, as the immediate environment around the schools was not conductive to feelings of being safe.

5.3.4 THEME FOUR

Classroom Management and Discipline

This theme was divided into various categories, such as curriculum considerations; skilled instruction; and resources and support material in teaching.

As the classroom environment is part of the bigger academic community, it has an influence on how academic accomplishments could be successfully negotiated. Academic accomplishments are realised by an academic community that comprises a school, learners and educators.
5.3.4.1 Curriculum considerations

- Findings

A major cause of distress among participating educators was identified as the emergence of the time-table scheduling and the introduction of numerous new learning areas in the Intermediate Phase. This increase in the academic workload and the fixed timetable scheduling for learners entering the Phase had many participants worried. Although the workload with regard to the increase in learning areas from the Foundation Phase (three learning areas: Numeracy, Literacy and Life Skills) to the Intermediate Phase (eight learning areas) is prescribed in the Curriculum, it is persistently perceived as a contributing factor affecting learners experiencing learning problems.

‘They are from the Foundation Phase, where they were doing only three Learning Areas, now we introduce eight Learning Areas. The workload is more for them’.

‘…a lot of learning areas, as they were used to three learning areas (Numeracy, Literacy and Life Skills). But from Grade 4 they must do ten learning areas, which is very strange to them’.

‘…to many learning areas.’ and ‘They must be used to them..., many teachers teaching different learning areas’.

Furthermore, educators considered learners not to be mature enough to embrace the emergence of the Intermediate Phase effectively, as there was an extensive cooperation gap between the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase. This is evident from the following responses:

‘Learners cannot work on their own; and in some instances are lazy and not interested in their own learning’.

‘Learners want to be spoon-fed. They expect the teacher to tell them the same things over and over again.’
Likewise, participants declared that there should be closer cooperation between the different phases, especially the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase. Ultimately, it was not only the learners who struggled with the crossing of phases, but also the educators who experienced this as challenging, especially regarding to the pursuit of academic excellence. This was evident from the following:

‘...co-operation or joint working committee between schools Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase’.

‘There should be co-operation between the different phases’.

The educators stated that quality administrative structures would ensure that educators gained swift understanding of the physical and cognitive development of learners, including insight into their academic paperwork. If these organised systems were in place, easier and earlier detection of learner problems would occur. Significant to the above detail was the citing: ‘...keeping of records, i.e. profiles and portfolios of learners (from the) Foundation Phase’:

‘Assessment from previous grades will show if learners has problems’.

‘Assessment records and portfolios of learners must be given to the class-teacher, so that learners with learning problems can be identified at the beginning of the year’.

• Interpretation

The educators stated that learners were not coping with the increased workload in the curriculum when crossing over from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase, which placed stress on the educators. The addition of more learning areas in the Intermediate Phase and being taught by different educators caused confusion among learners, as they were used to class-teaching in the Foundation Phase, where one educator taught all the learning areas to one class.
The educators also believed that the learners were not mature to work by themselves. This lack of commitment and initiative among learners was another stress-inducing factor for educators.

Cooperation between the phases was also a huge concern. It was stated that educators from different phases should work more closer together, so that there would be better understanding of curriculum matters.

In addition, it was felt that the filing of administrative work had to be improved. This process should speed up the identification of problems among learners and assist educators anxious about challenges in the inclusive classroom.

5.3.4.2 Skilled Instruction

• Findings

The participants stated that they had tried diverse strategies to provide assistance to learners experiencing educational problems. With the teaching knowledge the participants held, they tried in various ways to make a difference in the lives of learners who were struggling. The following comments were made:

‘I try to simplify the context as much as possible. I divide the class into groups made up of learners with mixed abilities’;

‘As educators, we try by all means by first introduce or translate the context from their mother-tongue, or bring an object’.

‘...to take the learner to sit in front.’ and ‘...cut A-Z letter in order to form the words before he or she writes it. ...to spell the word before she writes it’.

Participants also utilised popular strategies, such as ‘drill’ and ‘repetition’. Although these strategies were being readily implemented in classrooms, participants who had neglected them in their teaching practices suggested that they should be revisited, as
resource for changing and enhancing learning. By utilising well-liked and traditional strategies in the classroom, such as: ‘we drill the learners’ and ‘repetition’; participants hoped to cope more effectively in the inclusive classroom.

Different techniques were proposed as coping mechanisms for educators struggling with the problems learners experience in the classroom. Participants also put forward strategies such as:

‘...divide the tasks into smaller sub-tasks’.

‘...arrangements of group abilities’.

‘...by giving learners less work and doing it with understanding’.

‘Change the way in which learners receive information, e.g. replace long passages of text with diagrams’.

‘Our lessons are to formal, we need to try play and learn kind of lessons (that is)not to focussed’.

A disturbing feature expressed by participants was the reality of educator/learner ratios in classes. Participants held contradictory ideas on how these educator/learner ratios within the classroom had effected learners’ achievements and educator effectiveness. Participants cited the following:

‘More than 45 learners in a class is too much, it makes me not to cope in the class with all the marking’.

‘Drop learner-educator ratio in the classroom to 25 for (better) learner-educator contact during tuition’.

‘I wish to have smaller groups – to deal with from morning till afternoon – where I would be able to implement what I have learnt from the workshops’.
‘In a smaller class remedial work can be done with learners’.

- **Interpretation**

The different participants used many diverse instructional techniques to address the ever-escalating challenges in the inclusive classroom. Even though educators regularly changed instructional techniques to cope with some of the problems they experienced in the classroom, they did not feel comfortable in the inclusive classroom.

The educators appealed for smaller learner/educator ratios in the classroom, believing that this would provide them with more time and quality interactions with learners during teaching. Some also viewed smaller learner/educator ratios as an aid in identifying learning problems much earlier and providing assistance to those with problems. Most felt that intervention programmes and effective instructional techniques could promote educator empowerment, if smaller learner numbers were present in the inclusive classroom.

5.3.4.3 **Resources and Support Material in Teaching**

- **Findings**

A major concern to most participants was the shortage of teaching and learning materials such as teaching aids and textbooks are not available at their schools. The shortage of these crucial materials was placing undue strain on the educators in the inclusive classroom and was adding to educators struggle to prepare learners well and was therefore also a factor in ineffective achievements. Many of the responses indicated that schools should provide educators with additional teaching and learning material to maximise educational achievement. Comments included:

‘...provision of learning material, textbooks, duplicating material’.

‘...supplement of more teaching aids, more learning aids, photocopying of assessments’.
‘...support material such as photocopying for the child, so that they could even be helped at home’.

‘We must get science models to teach with in Natural Science’.

Apart from the concerns about the lack of books for educators and learners, the need for the simplification of learning materials for learners was regarded as a condition for educator empowerment. This is highlighted in the following:

‘...more teacher guide books for me and learner textbook for the learners’.

‘...simplified learning material that would be understood by learners at their level of learning’.

‘Learner textbooks are complicated. It must be simplified.’

Additional assistance required, was the utilisation and creation of teaching material such as flashcards and worksheets as learning aids. Some of the responses indicated that innovative learning materials were lacking in the classroom. Comments to this effect included:

‘...no charts for flash cards, word cards’ and ‘schools must buy flash cards and word cards to be used in lessons’.

‘The school must provide teachers with charts and stationery, so that we can make spelling cards that is relevant in the class’.

Some participants stated that devises such as computers and overhead projectors should be made available to them in the classroom.

‘We have a computer room; if we use it can help learners learn’.

‘If we use computers, we can do research on our lessons on the internet’.
‘The school has an overhead projector, but I have not seen anyone using it’.

The lack of proper furniture was also seen as a hindrance in the inclusive classroom. The poor and dilapidated furniture was regarded an impediment to learning and was contributing to the stress of educators. Observations indicated that classroom practices were being hampered by the physical appearance of classrooms. In many cases, learners and educators had to endure classrooms with dilapidated furniture and broken windows and doors. Participants were required to render effective teaching and learning under conditions that were not particularly conducive to these processes.

‘Tables, chairs and desks are in a poor condition’.

‘I need place to store the learners’ portfolios and my administrative work’.

‘Assessments are not safe; we need to store it in locked cupboards’.

Participants from all the schools mentioned that they had computer laboratories, but none had any school libraries or science laboratories. These schools therefore had to make use of public libraries. In many instances, when learners were given tasks, they did not make use of these public facilities.

‘We have a computer room, but no library or science class.’

‘Reading is poor, as learners do not have the facility of libraries.’

‘Libraries will help us; when we give learners work, we can get them books from the school library if we has one’.

‘I must perform experiments in my class, because we don’t have a science lab’.

- **Interpretation**

Resources and support material in teaching was cited as a huge problem. The scarcity of resources such as science models, charts and stationery and of equipment such as
computers, duplicating machines and overhead projectors, was a major problem. What was worrying, was the fact that some also complained about media such as flashcards - something that educators are supposed to make themselves to fit a lesson.

The educators stated that the poor condition of furniture and the lack of lockable cabinets and shelves contributed to challenges in the educational experience. Good administration also suffered as educators did not have safe storage facilities where learners’ class-work and personal administrative tasks could be stored.

The participating schools had resource rooms such as computer laboratories, but none had their own libraries or science laboratories. Educators and learners were forced to make use of public libraries, which affected speedy execution of tasks. The educators felt disempowered, as they had to perform certain scientific experiments under unsafe conditions. The question though is, what dangerous scientific experiments are done at Intermediate Phase level?

5.3.5 THEME FIVE

Home Environment

It was clear from the responses in this category that the home environment played a big role in children’s social, emotional and cognitive development. Most children’s development was also affected by their economic situation. In addition, parental cooperation could assist educators in discovering more about the needs of the parents and in so doing trust to communicate freely with the parents on children’s academic progress and educational problems that could develop. The educators believed that children experienced in the home and surroundings, ultimately influenced how they experienced learning. The parental influence was regarded as critical in the learning experience.
5.3.5.1 Parental involvement and recognition and capacity building of parents

- Findings

Parental involvement or the lack thereof as part of a structure of support and assistance to educators was another point noted by participants. Most participants concluded that they had not received any support whatsoever from parents regarding their children who were experiencing educational problems. The belief that parents must be more involved in their children’s schooling was bluntly evident from participants’ responses:

‘Parents must be more involved’; lack of assistance from parents’.

‘...parents at home, remember charity begins at home’.

‘... more help from parents and family at home’.

‘...a serious intervention by parents with children having problems and openness from an early stage’.

‘Parents must come to the school when we want to talk to them about their children’s problems. It would help a lot’.

Parental involvement could also play a critical role in the home environment. Participants regarded the role of parents as all-important in educators’ empowerment, as parents could be a decisive factor in the progress of children experiencing problems. It is with frustration that participants had to deal with non-supportive families and parents, who possessed little or no education themselves. This intensified the problem and barriers to learning experienced by the academic community. The participants voiced their frustration in comments like:

‘...support from parents, especially parents with no education at all’.

‘...lack of assistance from parents’.
Another factor of concern was the lack of commitment displayed by some learners who were already struggling in the classroom. This was perpetuated by a lack of attention to homework, which further contributed to their struggles. As a consequence, participants requested that special teaching times and aids be made available to specifically encourage and support uncommitted learners. Responses included:

‘Support must be given to reading programmes as part of daily homework plan’ and ‘after school tuition’.

‘Learners who consistently do not complete homework must be compelled to do their after school hours at school’.

‘Parents must try to help their children with homework, they can see the child has a problem’.

In addition to the lack of commitment by parents, the participants also cited a lack of interaction and discipline when learners did homework. Due to the high illiteracy rate amongst parents, they contributed very little to helping their children with homework. The participants commented as follows:

‘Parents do not supervise homework; I am not even sure if they find out if the child has any’.

‘Because of parents’ poor schooling, they do not know how to help the learners’.

‘I don’t know if parents are interested in what the children do at school, you can see that they don’t help them, because the homework is never done’.

• Interpretation

Some participants argued that non-supportive parenting increased the difficulty of teaching children. Parents were hesitant to communicate with educators or the school with regard to their children’s learning problems. The reality of parental uninvolvment
placed undue strain on educators, as learners from these homes were constantly failing to do their homework and consequently fall behind in their schooling. Educators felt disempowered, as the learners’ academic achievements were deteriorating, and they considered this failure as a reflection on their teaching.

5.3.5.2 Influences of literacy levels of parents

- **Findings**

The educators were of the opinion that parents were often in denial about their children’s learning problems. In this regard, the educators stated their appreciation of parents who were open and recognised that their children had problems so that intervention and remedial programmes could be arranged from an early stage. This was clear from the following responses:

‘Parents are non-committal; they are not much worried about the progress of their children, as many are also illiterate’.

‘…support from parents, especially parents with no education at all’.

The participating educators stated that most learners entered the school from home environments that undoubtedly differed in economical, social and physical conditions. Some learners were indisputably influenced by experiences of being surrounded by unemployment and poverty. Highlighting this, participants responded with remarks such as:

‘Children experience poverty, as their parents and family do not have work’.

‘…societal problems like poor families’.

‘The learners living in a disadvantaged area and background are influenced by extreme poverty’.
In addition to the economic situation the educators stated that most learners were also affected by their social and physical circumstances. Unfavorable conditions held enormous consequences towards learning and, ultimately, learner achievement. Although the educators made mention of social and physical problems, as stated in the findings, these will not be discussed as they do not fall within the scope of this study.

‘..societal problems, health problems, (problems) originated from birth and alcohol abuse (by parents)’.

‘…some learners have social problems’.

**Interpretation**

Parental illiteracy was also identified as a contributing factor to educator disempowerment, as the parents themselves were poorly prepared for education and did not contribute to their children’s learning. Educators communicated with parents on matters regarding their children’s progress, but parents do not reciprocate the interest in their children’s education, partly due to their own poor schooling. As education was not of importance to these parents, they did not assist their children in monitoring their homework and other classwork tasks. The educators stated that parents followed learners’ homework programmes, educators would be able to detect learning problems timeously and prepare an intervention programme to remediate the problems. The educators were struggling, as they did not have the expertise to establish and discuss problems with the parents, leading to a sense of disempowerment among educators.

5.3.5.3. The influences of unemployed parents

**Findings**

The educators stated that, often, unemployment of parents played a role in the strained parent/educator relationships. Parents were not eager to visit schools, fearing that they would be required to contribute financially. Due to the socio-economic environment, parents had little means of income and were often scared that any commitment to the
school would translate into a financial liability, therefore, they tended to be uninvolved in their children’s schooling.

‘Parents are worried that the school will ask for money if they come and therefore stay away’.

‘Unemployment in society is high’.

‘Parents do not have work; unemployment is high’.

The participants regarded the high unemployment as the key factor why the parents did not want to get involved in their children’s schooling; they feared that they would be required to contribute financially and they could not afford to do so. The cycle of unemployment also persuaded parents not to want to take their children for professional help, as they could hardly provide the essentials for their families. Comments made in this regard included:

‘There is barely money for food and essential; parents are scared teachers will ask them to take their children to psychologist when they don’t have the money’.

‘Parents can’t afford to take their children to psychologists as they don’t have the money for it’.

‘Parents are unemployed, they don’t work, how can they take their children to get remedial help?’

• Interpretation

The socio-economic conditions surrounding the majority of schools indicated that parents were not committed due to their social status. Learners’ schooling was influenced by parental circumstances, especially unemployment.

A lack of information regarding learning problems and the possible financial implications were regarded as the reasons for parents' hesitancy to interact with educators.
were scared to seek professional help, as this could further burden them and add to their financial woes. This left educators disillusioned and disempowered, as many learning problems were being overlooked and learners failed to progress academically.

5.4 SUMMARY

In Chapter Five, the researcher focused on the analysis and interpretation of the questionnaires and responses to questions posed to participants during interviews to clear any confusion regarding the responses to the questionnaire while observation notes were used to clear any misunderstandings.

This chapter dealt with the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. Also discussed, were the effects the different aspects may have on educators’ empowerment. In Chapter Six, the implications, recommendations and conclusions of the research will be presented.
CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The research study was initiated to determine how educators in the Intermediate Phase could be empowered to cope with some of the difficulties they encountered in an Inclusive classroom setting. The objective of the research study was to investigate how educators in the Intermediate Phase could be empowered to cope with the demands they faced daily in an inclusive classroom situation. To understand this endeavour, research was initiated to establish how the different kinds of educational problems experienced by learners in the Intermediate Phase affected educators’ empowerment. Once more understanding was gained about educator empowerment, another objective was to provide practical recommendations.

6.2 DEMOGRAPHICAL AND BIOLOGICAL DATA OF PARTICIPANTS AND SCHOOLS

The fact that the schools in the study were situated in township areas and were surrounded by impoverished communities, did influence the performances of educators. According to the data, both parents and learners played a critical role in influencing the performances of educators in the learning environment.

6.3 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implication of the findings and recommendations will be discussed in terms of the different themes that emerged during analysis and interpretation, after which final conclusions will be drawn.
6.3.1 THEME ONE

Types of learning problems educators are faced with.

6.3.1.1 Educational problems

There is a realisation that learning is a challenge to most learners. Noticeable educational problems are experienced by educators in the Intermediate Phase. The problems identified, are language problems, such as in reading, writing and spelling, and mathematical problems, such as counting, calculating and reasoning. These problems were interwoven on the majority of socio-economically disadvantaged schools participating in the research study.

The problems are escalated by the fact that both educator and learner are expected to communicate in the learning environment in a different language (English) other than their vernacular, which is usually IsiXhosa. The lack of good language proficiency impacts negatively on all subject fields, resulting in poor performance over a wide spectrum of the child’s academic endeavours.

- Implications

If the model learners hear and observe is not a good one, it will negatively impact on their learning. Furthermore, if the educators experience problems in using LOLTs, it may most probably lead to negative attitudes and lack of confidence.

Furthermore, it has become clear that the basics of learning (language skills and numeracy skills) are sadly lacking, with the dire implication that as all learning is primarily dependent on language skills, learning in general will suffer.
Recommendations

- There is a need for greater cooperation between schools, departmental support services, local health services and other professionals in the identification of educational problems with reading, writing and mathematics. Schools, and in particular School Management Teams (SMTs), should establish a close working relationship with other schools, departmental support services, local health services and other professionals through regular meetings and also inter-school visit so that expertise can be shared.

- School Management Teams (SMTs) should establish a close working relationship with Educational Support Services from the Education Department, not only for the purpose of referrals, but to get professionals to conduct practical workshops on how to improve reading instruction.

- The individual educator could plan improved group-work activities during which stronger learners could assist weaker learners and the educators could assist weaker learners before moving them to other groups. This will assist educators in spending effective time with weaker learners, whilst working through the curriculum at a reasonable pace.

- The individual educator could plan for a variation in his/her teaching techniques in reading, spelling, and/or mathematics. These skills could be learnt from support groups, workshops or self-study.

- The individual educator should read widely, attend workshops or enroll for specific qualification, such as the Advance Certificate in Education (ACE) in Special Needs Education (SNE). The knowledge and skills thus acquired, would improve the educators’ competence to teach all learners, including those experiencing learning problems.
All educators should establish a ‘reading corner’ in their classrooms. Reading material could be photo copies of interesting text, a block loan from the municipal library, or old magazines or other books donated by church groups or donors.

Educators from each grade should get together and form their own internal support teams that could cooperate and collaborate in developing simple reading tasks that could be swapped between classes. This would save educators time in preparing these reading tasks and provide them with more time to spend on the task of helping learners experiencing problems.

Educators (individuals or a support group) could organise activities that would promote reading, for example, ‘Tell your favourite story’ or organise a reading marathon. In this way, learners’ reading would improve and educators could spend more time on other educational tasks.

Educators should organise workshops and invite specialists and lecturers to their schools for topic specific issues. Having obtained specialist knowledge, educators could apply what was shared with them and use it to improve learning. At such workshops there is often a re-affirmation of what is already known or in practice. By hearing that they are ‘on the right track’ but looking at the skill from a different perspective is enhancing confidence. This would give educators a feeling of empowerment and not allow them to feel so disillusioned in the line of their duty.

Educators as a support group should consider team-teaching activities. Educators who cannot bridge the learning problems of certain learners could be supported by colleagues in identifying possible learning problems, and in so doing find some solutions. Such team teaching activities will support and develop good teaching practices that is empowering to the educators and benefit the learners.

Support teams could encourage SMTs to approach NGOs such as READ, UBUNTU or businesses to donate books. Furthermore, all educators should take
learners to the nearest municipal library and encourage them to join. Instilling a love for reading could help learners improving their language and communication skills. In the process, their learning would improve.

At the same time it would be true that if educators themselves read widely, their subject knowledge, general knowledge and language abilities will improve, empowering LOLT educators directly.

6.3.1.2 Language and Communication

- Implications

Communication is about sharing information, attitudes and beliefs, and also about the passing on of knowledge and information. Increasingly, educational problems are concealed in the use of a second or third language in the teaching and learning environment. The sad reality is that some educators cannot proficiently express themselves in English and therefore further compromise learners’ competency.

The fact is that learners who are not competent in the use of English as a language of instruction will find the academic experience extremely difficult and frustrating. This often results in failed learning.

- Recommendations

- The Education Department must institute compulsory English programmes for educators teaching in English (LOLT), aimed at improving English competency and conceptual understanding. Improving educators’ English language competencies would develop their command of the language, there by improving the way they teach so that they will command better academic achievements in their classrooms. Educators should, after the successful completion of such programmes, be acknowledged for their efforts and awarded with certificates.
Educators should be encouraged to speak only English at school (even in the staffroom). Educators should read more English texts (newspapers, magazines and books) to enhance their own competency. Increasing their own language competencies would improve their own knowledge base and language skills; therefore improving their teaching capabilities. If English is not their First Language, educators themselves should seek opportunities to improve their use of the language by reading English more profusely and speaking it as often as possible.

Schools must initiate English programmes for learners; allowing them to communicate exclusively in English at least one day a week. This will improve their competency and confidence in the use of the language. Successful communication in a school will further also ensure that academic achievement improves.

Educators could establish support teams and share ideas on a variety of interesting teaching techniques that will promote fluency and comprehension in a second language. Having acquired knowledge of different teaching techniques, educators should change their teaching methods and styles if any specific technique is not achieving satisfying academic results among the learners in the inclusive classroom.

Weak learner could be given oral tasks; initially based on a theme previously dealt with in the class providing building blocks such as appropriate vocabulary and phrases. Examples could range from ‘preparing a favourite food’ or a trip to a big shopping mall. Learners who have problems with reading and writing would improve both their listening as well as communication skills. In this way, educators could gauge learners’ progress through verbal interaction and plan for their progress whilst having an opportunity to assess their learning.
Educators could find or write simple dramatisations, using everyday language. Having the correct dialogue to memorise, will enhance self-confidence in using English as a second language.

Every object in the classroom could be labelled, and elaborations could be practised, such as:

- *My teacher sits at the table.*
- *There are books on the table.*
- *The table has four legs.*

In so doing, educators will broaden the vocabulary of the learners and therefore help them with their learning. Improving learning will result in increased academic achievements and this will at the same time also improve the morale and motivation of educators.

6.3.1.3 Socio-Economic Barriers

Learners living in poor socio-economic circumstances face a myriad of problems and often have great difficulty to overcome these problems. Once learners experiencing any of this myriad of socio-economic problems experience a sense of being understood and see that attempts are being made to assist them with day-to-day problems, a sense of ‘safety’ may develop, which may bring about improved motivation and concentration in the classroom; aspects that would have a positive influence on learning.

- **Implications**

It became clear that most educators do not have a clear understanding of what exactly constitutes socio-economic problems; the implication being that they would be absolutely at a loss to address the direct consequences of socio-economic problems in the learning situation.
• Recommendations

❖ Educators should be educated on how the socio-economic problems could impact on the children’s learning, in order to plan appropriate intervention strategies. Educators should therefore make use of expert help and workshops to gain the necessary knowledge and expertise regarding learning problems.

➢ Where food is a problem at home, educators could be instrumental in establishing a school soup-kitchen/feeding scheme. Although some schools are provided with feeding schemes through the Education Department, learners are only provided with one meal at school. This should ideally be extended to a meal after school, and over weekends. Schools, with the help of SMTs, should seek sponsorships to help provide meals for those learners who are in need at home. This would improve health and concentration and therefore improve the learners’ learning.

➢ Where the learner does not have resources or could not complete homework due to overcrowding at home the educator should be sensitive and not insist for example coloured pencils to complete a task. Perhaps a common box of stationary for use by all could be made available. Schools could collaborate with more affluent schools and asked for second-hand stationary from their learners such as pencil crayons, pens and other used stationary which could be handed to learners who do not have the means to buy it themselves.

➢ Where poor health is a problem, the educator could be instrumental in organizing visits by a health worker or visits to a clinic or hospital. If learners are kept in good health, their mental ability and concentration would improve, and in so doing their academic achievements would be better.

➢ Where parents are seriously ill or have died, the educator could arrange with Social Services or a church for support to the family.
Learners must be given as much time for themselves to be children and not have the responsibility of a parent. In this way children can concentrate on improving their learning and educators can achieve better academic results.

- Where abuse by the parent and/or to the child is a real or perceived problem the educator could be instrumental to arrange for the correct intervention by professionals from Child Line or the Police Child Protection Unit or Social Services.

- In other cases such as alcohol abuse and drug abuse by parents, criminals activities, child prostitution and teenage pregnancies the educator needs to have the knowledge, skills and motivation to address the problems without taking the ‘high moral stand’. Educators could improve their knowledge and skills by attending workshops on the topics and therefore put learners at ease when trying to help them fittingly.

- Arranging afterschool care facilities goes a long way towards keeping children safe and off the streets. Homework could be completed under supervision by an adult or ex-learners who could also render help with the homework if needed. Involving capable volunteering parents, ex-learners or matrics or retired people could alleviate any extra pressure on teaching personnel.

6.3.2 THEME TWO

**Support and Assistance available to Educators**

Findings support that effective development programmes influences what happens in a school and need to be established and implemented as such. This is to provide support and assistance to equip educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond to the diverse needs of the teaching and learning environment.
6.3.2.1 Professional in-service programmes

All educators fulfill the criterion of certified educationalists, but to stay abreast of the latest developments every educator in the profession need some form of continuing educational programme, be it personal studying or by means of in-service programmes. The majority of the educators are qualified on paper but seemingly lack the professional skills of identifying and skillfully intervening in the educational problems that learner’s experience. Perceiving not having the skills demotivate them and make them feel like failures in their profession.

- **Implications**

The fact that participants often seems be unaware of when and where workshops are offered, combined with their perception that only a select few always attend and not give any feedback to the rest of the staff impacts negatively on their view on the value of these workshops.

In addition of the above, many educators perceive the established committees at school as ‘extra work’ where those who sit on the committee must do all the work and those not on the committee, have no contribution to make but just be informed in a ‘top-down’ manner (although the feedback did not indicate much feedback). Such a situation will obviously lead to an attitude of hostility and will not foster co-operation and team work. Finally, most educators do not realise and acknowledge their own strengths. Not realizing their own potential, strengths and weaknesses, they could not be focused on what areas to pay more attention to.

- **Recommendations**

  - District offices should run relevant and appropriate workshops equipping educators with specialized training and provide them with the competencies that would allow them to work in the inclusive setting. These workshops should be
followed up regular visits to monitor personal development. Workshops should be compulsory to empower educators.

- The SMTs should be transparent about all workshops that are offered and should have a clear policy stating that whoever attends should be held accountable to render comprehensive feedback. Professional development would therefore improve in the schools and educators would feel more empowered.

- Educators should see training and attending workshops as renewing and affirming their attempts to maintaining themselves as effective educators whilst also being accredited for various forms of pre-service and in-service programmes they complete successfully. Incentives should be offered to educators for attending these workshops as such professional growth programmes not only empower the educator but also improve the teaching and learning and therefore the academic achievements of the school as a whole.

- In-service programmes should be regularly evaluated to see whether it is achieving its objectives and should contribute to improve professional skills and emotional well-being of educators. Effective professional growth programmes not only empower the educator but also improve the teaching and learning and therefore the academic achievements of the school.

- Apart from feedback, where a couple of educators attended workshops, some official follow-up of implementation should be planned for. These should be recognized as maintaining the values of effectively contributing to development of the educators. If schools have monthly meetings those who attended workshops should be allowed to give feedback and be available to answer questions. SMTs should make sure these feedback and official follow-up sessions take place for continuous and ongoing development to all at the school.

- Supporting the professional in-service programmes (workshops) is the establishment of supporting functional committees. As these committees seems to be non-functional in most schools, SMTs and educators should consider a
different approach: Instead of establishing a committee that operates in a ‘top
down’ fashion, rather establish working groups for all educators in a specific
grade (even if it is just two educators). These groups could meet informally as
often as the need arises but at least once a week. In this way educators are in
constant communication of what is happening in the school and in other spheres
of the educational environment.

- Once a month all educators in the phase can meet to share ideas on what
  worked or did not work. In this way colleagues can talk about how the standards
  of teaching and learning could be raised. At these meetings phases could take
  turns to table one new or innovative idea for interesting teaching or intervention.
  In this way professional development is ongoing and educators should feel less
disheartened about the problems in the classroom and more empowered with the
knowledge that is shared.

- Neighbouring schools could ‘twin’ and work together as phase or as grade
  educators. Establish trust amongst colleagues who has to work together to
  sustain healthy practices to build new ways of teaching and relating to one
  another. General learning problems demonstrated at neighbouring schools in the
  area can be discussed by educators, and common intervention programmes
  could be instituted to help those learners experiencing learning problems.
  Discussions could be held to establish whether these programmes worked or not.

- SMTs should provide and make opportunities for innovation and risk-taking.
  They should furthermore keep personal expectations of work and conduct high,
as this could help balance academic achievement and social cohesion. SMTs
  should give educators opportunities to share and discuss educational information
  gathered through personal collaborations, meetings and unions.

- Educators should maintain a balance between everyday administrative tasks and
developmental activities. Be aware of your personal strengths and enjoy the
benefits it brings to your learners and your profession. Knowing that their
personal strengths are positive, could give educators a sense of positivity that could be taken into the classroom and leave them with an optimistic feeling of empowerment.

6.3.2.2. Specialist educators and education support specialists

Although educators with special training render remedial assistance to a few learners, most educators have not yet empowered themselves in identifying and remediating learning problems. Most educators also did not seem to understand that such specialists would be a last resort with themselves being in the position to bring about major changes by merely implementing a variety of good teaching practices.

- Implications

Although educators professed an eagerness to learn about remedial education and declared a willingness to be guided by professionals, there seems to be a slowness to take ownership and lack of commitment to learn and apply remedial strategies, as none of them indicated any intention of furthering their studies, in, for example ACE (SNE), which is available part-time at a local university, or through distance studies at other higher institutions.

Due to the fact that educational support personnel have different professional backgrounds, the Education Department should be able to provide guidance through a range of different people with an array of different specialisations and qualifications. However, unfortunately, there are simply not enough specialists in our country to provide in special educational need needs. This means that educators are often ‘on their own’ when it comes to making important decisions regarding the social problems and academic intervention needs of their learners.

In all fairness, it must be added that, given the large number of learners in classes, the identification and assessment of learning problems could become a daunting task.
**Recommendations**

In addition to the recommendations made in 6.3.2.1, the following are also recommended.

- Remedial Support Teams should be established and sustained at schools in order to assist educators and to help them make contact with other professionals for meaningful and beneficial interaction. These Remedial Support Teams could give advise 'on the spot' and arrange workshops at school to help educators make contact with professionals who could improve their knowledge and skills on the problems the educators are encountering in the classroom. For successful personal developmental programmes, workshops must be monitored and supported by experienced specialists.

- Goodlad and McMannon (2004:205) concur with Oldroyd, Elsner and Poster (1996:43-44) in suggesting that professional development programmes must not only be topic specific but also have prospects for career development and advancements. It is recommended that educators be encouraged to further their academic training in special education at accredited institutions. By doing this, they will obtain a broad theoretical background of the underlying learning problems and barriers to learning experience by learners and will become empowered to identify, assess and intervene with confidence.

- The Education Department can aid educators by employing more well-qualified support staff to assist and support them to deal with the socio-economic problems of learners as well as the curriculum and/or teaching problems experienced. To sustain school programmes, the support staff must continuously support and monitor the workload given and completed.

- With regard to curriculum support, especially relating to subject-related learning and teaching techniques and strategies, The Department of Education should make more advisors available to assist and serve smaller clusters of schools. Having a smaller number of schools to serve, will free up more time to be spent
on each school and earlier involvement in decision-making regarding learners or assistance to educators. Curriculum support programmes should be monitored to make sure that the implementation is done correctly and is sustained.

- Similarly, a remedial specialist could be appointed to monitor the implementation of various strategies on in-class practices demonstrated at workshops. If educators have this support, they would be more inclined to query and question any educational dysfunctions they encounter in the classroom.

- Institutes of higher learning could be approached by government to allow for a period of practical experienced gained in-service at a school or a small cluster of schools. This could include students in SNE qualifications, psychologists, nurses and social study students. During this time, experienced educators could learn practically from these practising students. This collaboration could help educators who do not have the opportunities and time to study.

- Educators should read more widely, and school discussions could be arranged to bring about a better understanding of Inclusive Education practices and the value of good teaching practises.

6.3.3 THEME THREE

**Developing of the Self for Empowerment**

The successes of schools depend on their staff and the positive attitudes that they demonstrate by attending continuous professional development programmes and implementing the knowledge gained in the classroom throughout their teaching careers.

6.3.3.1 *Professional development programmes*

Professional development programmes are pivotal to the empowerment of the self for many who face the demands of the inclusive classroom. These programmes increasingly contribute to the quality of personal well-being through enhancing mental
and intellectual well-being, which would have a positive effect on the teaching and learning situation. Attending professional development programmes provides the opportunity to develop professional knowledge and judgements that complement subject knowledge and enhance self-confidence.

- **Implications**

Many participating educators affirmed the value of attending workshops and fully appreciated the value and potential gain of attending workshops. However, a fairly large number did not acknowledge any personal gain in knowledge and felt that they needed to be paid to attend, or that they lacked the time to study; sentiments that demonstrated low internal motivation and possibly low commitment to their profession as a whole. Others complained about high study fees and the lack of bursaries.

A tendency to blame the learners’ *unsuitable learning* characteristics for their predicament was also evident. Unfortunately to be empowered, educators need to decide what *they* could do to change the prevailing situation. This means that they need to be honest about their own strengths, weaknesses and personal commitment and general attitude regarding personal accountability.

- **Recommendations**

  - Educators should take responsibility for developing of the self for empowerment. They should be committed to change, as they themselves are instrumental in the change process. Educators need to listen to advice from colleagues, mentors and experts and take responsibility to find out about, and attend professional developmental programmes.

  - SMTs should put staff development opportunities in place to provide ongoing support for all programmes, as professional development is most effective when it is embedded in school programmes. These development plans need to be task-specific and geared towards educators’ concerns and skills.
❖ Workshops should be followed up to monitor implementation and sustain the programmes. To encourage educators to take part in workshops, incentives such as attendance certificates and follow-up support should be provided.

❖ SMTs should engage in professional dialogue and development with all staff members. Sharing of information will make the task of improving the school and the academic environment much easier, whilst also contributing to personal growth and empowerment.

❖ Positive relationships with colleagues are important and will positively influence the smooth running of academic and administrative affairs. Improved communication will help to foster a sense of knowing, thereby cultivating a positive spirit in and around the school environment. This is beneficial to educator empowerment and good to the teaching and learning environment.

❖ Communication between the Department of Education and schools should improve so that circulars and notices regarding workshops reached schools in good time. Keeping educators up to date with current developments, keep them motivated committed. Well-informed educators perform much better in the educational environment and also feel much more empowered.

❖ The Department of Education should make more bursaries available for studies in specialised fields or to improve qualifications. Educators who improved their qualifications and knowledge in specialised fields, especially SEN, would feel much more empowered to work with learners experiencing learning problems. The knowledge gained through these studies would be beneficial not only to educators and learners alike, but also to the school and the community at large.

❖ The Department of Education should have incentives in place to motivate educators to further their studies. Qualifications gained through studying would be useful not only for empowerment, but also financially. Better promotion opportunities should be available to those who complete extra academic qualifications.
Through professional developmental programmes, schools and individuals should be able to achieve improved administration. Educators can make use of study programmes at higher institutions or contribute to in-school or out-of-school workshops to improve their knowledge on school and classroom management. A school with a good administrative structure contributes to positive teaching and learning, which ultimately promotes good academic achievements and gives educators a sense of empowerment.

6.3.3.2 Purpose of teacher education and training

- Implications

Pre-service educator training allows educators to teach in educational institutions as qualified educators, where they are faced with the demands of inclusive policies. The perceived lack of knowledge that is hindering educators to effectively deal with the problems they are faced with is a cause of great frustration. Pre-service qualifications do not always render the educators able to understand the diverse needs in the inclusive situation, and many can therefore not cope without specialised skills they think are needed to execute effective teaching and learning opportunities for learners with educational problems.

- Recommendations

- Institutions of Teacher Education and Training should be made aware of the challenges in-service educators face with regard to inclusive education and should present the relevant education to both in-service and pre-service students.

- For effective implementation, practitioners at Higher Learning Institutions should support both in-service and pre-service educators as support staff by paying regular visits to schools to assist where help and clarity is needed. Practitioners at Higher Learning Institutions should share the latest research developments
with educators, especially regarding SEN studies; equipping and empowering them with relevant findings and recommendations.

- Educators should equip themselves with knowledge by attending in-service programmes and furthering their studies regarding the challenges they face in inclusive education. These programmes should not just allow for the acquisition of qualifications and knowledge, but must be effectively used in the school setup. Once qualified, these educators must be used as mentors in the school and be allowed to share their knowledge.

6.3.3.3 Safety and the learning experience

• Implications

Educators are required to ensure the health and safety of learners. Both educators and learners must feel safe in any environment in which they are engaged. It is a fact that the atmosphere created in the school environment reflects in teaching and learning: if the environment is run down, unsafe and/or unhealthy, a negative milieu could result.

Educators are often seen as taking the place of parents during school hours; therefore, educators are not only responsible for their own safety in the classroom, but also for the safety of the learners in their charge. This places a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of all educators, managers and education officials.

• Recommendations

- Clean-up drives could be arranged in and around the school. The community, parents, educators and learners must all be involved in these clean-up programmes. Competitions should be held to encourage participation. SGBs and parents must involve the community at large to promote and provide security in and around the school.

- The Department of Education must be promptly informed of any structures in need of repair, including fences and gates, in and around schools and have
these fixed promptly. The school managers and SMTs must take responsibility for informing the Education Department to ensure prompt services, thereby upholding the well-being of the school.

- Unemployed and skilled parents in the community with the necessary know-how could be asked to fix broken fences and gates to ensure the safety and security of all at the school. Incentives could be given to unemployed parents, for example, exemption from paying school fees, for helping around the school.

- Businesses in the community could be involved by asking them to adopt a school and looking after the safety, security and well-being of all using that school. Schools could encourage parents to support those businesses that help to maintain them.

- Schools should have an official school visiting policy, which must be prominently displayed. Access gates must be locked, and parents, the community and visitors must be taught to adhere to visitors’ rules. Unemployed parents could be placed in charge of the access gates to the school to minimise unwanted entry.

- The Education Department must have regular and compulsory First Aid programmes to empower all educators on health and safety issues around the school environment. Pre-service and in-service programmes should be extended to include First Aid, if not in place yet. Educators must empower themselves in basic First Aid knowledge by attending workshops presented by associations such as St. Johns Ambulance and Red Cross of South Africa.
6.3.4 THEME FOUR

Classroom management and discipline

The school’s ethos has an important bearing on the work of both educators and the learners. Classroom management should reflect an ethos of inclusiveness. Educators should be able to respond to diversity and take responsibility for their own learning needs and skills development as a way of working towards becoming effective inclusive educators.

Schools with overcrowded classes cause great anxiety in educators, as they struggle to cope with order and discipline, including the various learning problems displayed in such classes. Such a situation often leaves educators feeling disheartened and demotivated.

6.3.4.1 Curriculum considerations

- Implications

The education Curriculum allows for flexibility, but not all educators are able to respond to the differences in learner ability and the educational problems some learners encounter in the learning process. The flexibility of the Curriculum allows for flexible teaching approaches, but not many educators feel up to this challenge, due to their perceived inept pre-service teacher training, inferior qualifications and limited knowledge.

The number of learners in a class also has an affect on the Curriculum. Big classes do not influence only the learners’ ability to pay attention and learn, but also ultimately how educators deal with the situation, which often leads to disciplinary problems.
**Recommendations**

- The Education Department must hold regular workshops on Curriculum matters and must monitor implementation consistently. Educators must be informed in good time of any new matters relating to the Curriculum. Educators must take charge of their own shortcomings by attending study programmes or workshops presented by specialists in the field. Educators must be guided and supported after the workshops, and Curriculum matters must be monitored for correct implementation. A good understanding of the Curriculum will ease the stress of the classroom practice and improve the teaching and learning environment.

- Educators should inform themselves by studying the theory of the new Curriculum through Higher Learning Institutions or making use of workshops presented by specialists in the field. Regular development programmes about the curriculum at schools or in school districts would also be invaluable and should be attended.

- Educators must have a good understanding of Curriculum matters and school governance. To achieve expected the objectives, knowledge on how to deal with the learning problems must be improved, and personal insight in and knowledge of the content matters or the skills in teaching the subject matter must be improved through personal development.

- Educators from different schools in the same area could cluster together and share their knowledge and understanding of the Curriculum. For the sake of Curriculum consistency a team approach has to be necessary, in terms of which, educators must work as a group to develop a Curriculum plan. Working together on the Curriculum will give educators more time to spend in their teaching and learning environment, resulting better academic results and in so doing making educators feel more empowered.

- Schools should have a whole school Curriculum policy in which everybody should be involved. Educators should be directly involved in policy-making and
developmental plans. Educators must have regular meetings on Curriculum matters to ensure that they share their knowledge and understanding of the Curriculum.

- SMTs and Learning Area heads must ensure that educators stay up to date in their Curriculum knowledge by attending and sharing all departmental and institutional workshops, meetings and seminars. SMTs and Learning Area heads should provide developmental events to provide ongoing support programmes regarding curriculum matters.

- Curriculum matters must provide opportunities for creativity and innovative goal setting to enhance learning while posing suitable learning challenges. Schools must be careful not to develop a Curriculum that is so demanding that it evokes a fear of failure in learners. The Curriculum must therefore be developmentally appropriate for the learners.

- An inclusive Curriculum can be achieved only if schools have solid school policies and school development plans that are geared towards diversity and achievements for all learners.

- Overcrowding is a very disheartening factor in educators’ empowerment; educators need to be supported by specialists from the Education Department and professionals in how to deal with large classes. As the Curriculum is influenced by large classgroups, educators should experiment with various techniques to keep order in the classroom; this information is available through competent mentors and literature on large-group teaching. Demotivated educators should be constantly monitored and supported by school managements and the Education Department.
6.3.4.2 Skilled instruction

- Implications

Based on the research findings many educators considered that a variety of instructional techniques could enhance their teaching. A drawback in the use of these instructional techniques is that not many educators believed that they were trained to use different instructional techniques. In many instances, the classroom setup hampered how educators could make use of various instructional techniques.

Overcrowded classrooms in schools play a negative role in the demands faced by educators in the inclusive classroom. Class size affects instructional techniques, which in turn affect the learner achievements educators hope to attain in the inclusive classroom.

- Recommendations

- The clustering of groups of educators at a school or in a school community should be encouraged to organise demonstration lessons for educators to experience how different techniques could enhance lesson outcomes. This will bring new ideas but might also remind them to use skills that they have learned!

- Departmental specialists should organise and demonstrate the different techniques to be used in lesson presentation. Specialists should demonstrate practical lessons with learners from an inclusive setting; hence encouraging educators to make use of demonstrated techniques.

- Educators lacking confidence should take time to sit with an experienced and successful fellow educator and plan lessons well in advance. Proper planning leaves educators with more time to spend on remediating and planning intervention programmes for learners experiencing learning problems.

- Educators should be encouraged to view and discuss each other’s lesson techniques. It is important that colleagues view themselves and each other
positively. Positive feedback from learners and colleagues is a source of great joy and encourages personal empowerment.

- Educators should be encouraged to attend workshops or further their studies to improve their knowledge of lesson techniques. Good lesson techniques lead to educators obtaining good academic results, which will in turn boost the morale of educators.

- It is important to always understand that to assist academic competence, educators must build on well-established strategies, such as peer tutoring, self-monitoring and positive reinforcement contingencies, to facilitate learning in an instructional environment that will influence the outcomes of their learning positively. Regular developmental workshops at school will help educators in knowing when and where to use these strategies for effective teaching and learning.

- Educators must be able to facilitate and assess learning in the classroom and, when required, they must be able to initiate intervention programmes. The teaching style must be chosen to assist learners at all times. A learner with learning problems needs explicit, unambiguous instruction to understand and comprehend clearly.

- To be supportive of the learners, flexible and comfortable classroom practices must be employed, such as involving learners actively in discussions; this also enhances teaching and learning in the classroom. A good command of instructional skills will help educators understand and implement these skills correctly and effectively at all times.

- Educators need to be afforded the chance to improve their preparation techniques and discipline by involving themselves in programmes of professional development. These programmes could be in the form of in-school workshops or collaborations with other schools, where knowledge on how to use techniques are discussed.
To support educators in overcoming disciplinary and control issues in the classroom, they should be supported by professionals and/or mentors who demonstrate good disciplinary measures and structures. Educators should also make use of literature and mentors to enhance their command of disciplinary measures and structures.

Educators, who experience disciplinary problems, should be taught how to improve lesson planning by introducing a variety of activities and presenting the correct core of content at an appropriate level. When well-prepared and knowledgeable, educators will gain confidence, which will render them more confident and assertive.

To support educators with learner discipline, focused one-day workshops should be encouraged, which should include literature being made available on the topic. These workshops should be monitored by specialists, to help educators master the problem.

Educators should become involved in the drawing up of all school policies and developmental plans. Clarification must be sought on the educator/learner ratios applicable. Schools should adhere to these policies for the well-being of all in the educational environment.

As overcrowding is very disheartening, educators need to be supported by specialists from the Education Department and professionals in dealing with large classes. Educators should be constantly monitored and supported by school management and the Education Department.

School managements must be supportive of educator/learner ratios to encourage effective teaching techniques. A well-supported educator will gain confidence and will feel more empowered to complete academic tasks effectively.

The educators themselves must adopt a more positive mindset and attitude: ‘If I do nothing, who else will care?’
6.3.4.3 Resources and support material in teaching

- Implication

The claim was made by educators that resources and support material were scarce commodities in schools. The short supply of resources such as textbooks, stationery, teaching material and duplicating machines and the poor condition of furniture, lockable cabinets and other commodities had an enormous negative effect according to educators, reiterating that it also affected their empowerment.

- Recommendations

Emphasis should be placed on educator collaborations and networking.

- The Education Department must make sure that all teaching and learning materials are delivered on time. There should be a textbook available for each learner enrolled at the school, and learners should not share textbooks.

- Educators from neighbouring schools could cluster and share solutions to similar problems in respect of resources and textbooks. Socio-economic disadvantaged schools could ‘twin’ with more affluent schools, as the former still have inequalities in their resources.

- Schools should be encouraged to share teaching and learning materials and human resources, ultimately contributing to an improved teaching and learning environment. This must be encouraged; as learners move from one school to another when their economic status improves.

- Educators do not work in isolation; they function in learning communities and therefore it could be productive to have collaborations on learning material between educators. Educators should be encouraged to create their own teaching and learning materials; this would be beneficial to both educators and learners as it would focus on the level and experiences of the learners themselves. If educators created their own teaching and learning material,
learners could associate with the content and appearance thereof, improving their learning. Media will also exactly fit the specific lesson.

- Teaching and learning materials could be exhibited at school ‘exhibitions’, where schools and communities share and discuss resources and support material. As the resource materials have already been tested, the standard of the support material will be relevant to the schools and communities who are collaborating and therefore relevant to the level of the learners. With this help, educators will spend less time in personally making media or developing support material. Having a variety of such media and material available to choose from, will leave more time for planning and implementing the new ideas gained from colleagues, so that personal competence and success will increase.

- Educators should start their own corner library in the classroom with old books, textbooks, magazines and newspapers. Learners should be encouraged to use it not only when completing classroom tasks, but constantly when they have free time to read; thereby improving their language and reading skills. Educators can start reading stories from the corner library and encourage learners to complete the stories by reading the relevant books or making their own story.

- Educators could exchange library material for reading and research purposes. Readers and library books used in a corner library could be exchanged between class groups to make sure that there is a constant supply of new books and magazines for the learners to read.

- In schools that have computer laboratories, educators should empower themselves with computer literacy. Individual educators could skill themselves in computers literacy through training programmes and help others in its use. If there are skilled educators in computers at the schools, they could teach others computer technology and skills. Furthermore, being computer literate will help in the preparation of neat and attractive learning materials.
- Schools with computer laboratories could invite specialists in computer technology and literacy to teach educators these skills. Once educators have the knowledge, they could also be taught how to use computers as teaching tools. Educators should be allowed to complete administrative tasks using computer technology.

- SMTs, SGB members, parents or the school as a whole could be tasked to raise funds, to supply schools with teaching materials such as photocopier machines and overhead projectors. Schools need their own duplicating facilities for administrative tasks, and educators must have access to printing and copying facilities for creating and developing their own teaching material. The use of overhead projectors in the classroom could improve and make lessons much more interesting for learners.

- Influential community members and businesses in the area could be approached to sponsor schools with photocopiers and overhead projectors, or carry the operating costs of such machines. This would ensure that educators always have duplicating facilities, when needed, for effective classroom practices. With the availability of teaching tools such as overhead projectors, educators could plan interesting lessons, enhancing learners’ enjoyment of the lesson interactions and improve learning.

- Influential community members and businesses in the area could be approached to sponsor schools with cabinets for classroom administration. With administrative tasks secure, educators could concentrate on the teaching and learning in the classroom, therefore improving academic results.

- Science educators should approach School Managers and SMTs for any vacant classroom to create a practical, safe and secure science laboratory. This would go a long way towards improving science education, as it will allow educators to perform scientific experiments in the safety of a laboratory. This would also help to instill a love for science in learners, thereby improving academic results.
• Businesses and community leaders could also be approached for sponsorship and financial help to establish safe, secure, well-equipped and fully functional science laboratories. Functional science laboratories would ease the stresses of science teaching and improve the teaching and learning environment, thereby improving educator morale.

• The Education Department should make sure that municipal accounts are settled, making sure schools always have electricity to use for teaching and learning materials such as computers, photocopiers, overhead projectors and science apparatus.

6.3.5. THEME FIVE

Home Environment

Parents and their socio-economic circumstances affect how educators cope in the inclusive classroom. Smith (2004:27) states that parental involvement in school programmes has a positive influence on learners’ progress and development and recognises how important it is for parents to be involved. Parental cooperation could contribute to the academic success of their children, as learning problems could be detected much earlier and remediated through the correct intervention programmes and support. Educators who are familiar with their learners’ circumstances could experience a sense of empowerment when making the correct decisions, with the input of and in consultation with parents, on their children’s education.

6.3.5.1 Parental involvement and recognition and capacity building of parents

• Implications

The reality is that many parents are apathetic towards their children’s schooling. This is cause for great concern. This lack of parental involvement undoubtedly has a detrimental effect on the learners’ world, as parents form part of the circle of people that expose the learners to opportunities for learning and life experiences.
**Recommendations**

- Partnerships between the school, educators and parents should be developed. Parenting programmes must be instituted so that parents could be made aware of what the implications of their lack of commitment are. It is the parents’ responsibility and duty to see that after-school programmes such as homework and studying are completed. Any omissions in this regard would be reflected in learners’ academic results. Parents must be encouraged to provide learners with support at home in doing their homework, while the learners must be encouraged to involve their parents in their after-school and homework activities.

- Relationships must be developed between the home and the school as parents could offer valuable knowledge and understanding of their children, enabling educators to create the best possible learning opportunities for them. Parents have first-hand knowledge of their children’s health and hobbies, which educators could use to create and develop an appropriate learning environment. Taking learners’ interests and health status into account, educators could create lessons that would improve learner’s concentration and, in so doing, also their learning.

- Schools should develop relationships with the parents of their learners, in order to alert parents to any lack of discipline among learners and how they could support their children’s learning at home. Schools should not only introduce workshops for educators on discipline and control, but extend these workshops to include parents. Such collaboration between home and school would go a long way in helping both parents and educators remediate discipline and control together.

- SGBs and SMTs, with members of the school staff, should plan workshops that will attract the parents. For example, capacity building workshops could be planned in accordance with the level of persons who will attend. Parents should know how the school operates, and how it is trying to advance their children and learning and development. Schools should introduce incentives for parents to
attend the workshops. Sporting or cultural events that involve parents as coaches and managers of different sporting codes or cultural events.

- Communication between home and school should be improved. Communication channels must be established that are fitting and relevant for parents and communities, be it sending letters home, contacting parents by phone or SMS, or asking learners to carry messages. Meaningful dialogue should be encouraged. Parents should be made to feel comfortable and welcome when they visit the school or attend development workshops. All school policy documents that are relevant for parents to read must be made available at all times.

- Parents should be praised for their commitment towards the school and its academic environment. Schools should hold ‘open days’ where parents can observe what a normal working day is like at the school. Parents could visit classrooms and look at their children’s academic and other performances. Pre-arranged open evenings could be held where parents and educators could discuss learners’ progress.

- Parents and educators should also interact socially. During such interactions, any discussions of learners’ academic progress or lack of it should be avoided. Schools could invite influential persons as keynote speakers for social gatherings and select topics that would interest the parents. Greater parental involvement would enhance opportunities for the school to become more involved in community life.

6.3.5.2 Influences of literacy levels

- Implication

Most parents have low or no schooling, which affects how they viewed their children’s education. Educators have difficulty in encouraging parents to visit the school and be actively involved in their children’s schooling. Educators become despondent because
of parents’ lack of commitment to educational institutions and their children and feel powerless to help the struggling learners.

- **Recommendations**

  - Partnerships between the school, educators and parents should be developed through constant communication and interaction with parents. Effective communication between home and school is important, as strong partnerships will benefit both learners and educators. Educators could discuss learner problems with the parents, and parents could provide information about their children to the school that is important for educators to know, such as bad experiences or a death at home that could potentially affect the children’s learning.

  - Schools should provide wider support for parents by offering advice or simply by providing a listening ear. Through this support, schools could ensure that parents have access to required information and advice when they need it. For example, parents could, through the help of the school, be put in touch with support services, such as psychologists and social services.

  - Schools should encourage parents to educate themselves in workable skills, for example by participating in school gardening programmes or school nutrition programmes, and acknowledge these parents for their services and contributions. Workshops should be organised at which parents are given information on activities such as gardening or cooking, which they could then use at the school or to find employment.

  - The Education Department should be invited to establish Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) programmes and encourage parents and family members to enroll for these programmes to improve not only their literacy and schooling, but also their self-esteem and confidence. This would also place parents in a better position to later help their children with school assignments and duties.
Schools, together with the help of SMTs and SGBs, could create reading and writing programmes and encourage illiterate parents and family members to join to improve their literacy. Experts could be approached for assistance or ordinary educators could volunteer to help in this initiative. Empowered parents could help with the smooth running of the school educational environment.

Schools should encourage parents to be part of school activities, such as school plays and sports, cultural and social events such as dances, quizzes and bingo nights. Participation in these activities would allow parents not only to interact with educators but to spend time with their children in and around the school environment. Furthermore, parents should be asked to act as coordinators on school excursions and outings to help ensure the safety and smooth running of these outings.

Parents should be involved in school activities, even if they do not speak English (official LOLT) by involving them in non-verbal projects. Educators can also be requested to communicate to parents in a language comfortable to them. Meetings with parents should be held in a language that is comfortable to the parents, so that they will feel free to share their views and make could make a meaningful input. Parental involvement in learners’ schooling would give educators an opportunity to communicate learner’s progress at pre-arranged meetings.

The recommendation made in 6.3.5.1 is also relevant to this section.

6.3.5.3 Influence of unemployed parents

- Implications

An implication stemming from the socio-economic environment, in which the participating schools in this study operated, is that many parents in poor communities are challenged to keep their families going. Parents’ reluctance to commit to the
activities of the school and their children could be from fear that the school will place undue pressure on them for financial assistance which they cannot give

- **Recommendations**

  - Schools should make an effort to understand the circumstances of the surrounding communities and understand the socio-economic conditions. If unemployment is high, parents should not be burdened with a financial load they cannot carry. SMTs and SGBs should be attentive to the financial needs of the school and lessen parents’ economic dependence by obtaining sponsorships to help with unpaid school fees. Businesses and community leaders could invest in a specific school, for example by ‘adopting’ it and financially supporting it.

  - SMTs and SGBs should involve unemployed parents in the community to participate in school-based projects such as repairing broken windows and classrooms, fences, gates, toilets. Parents should be encouraged to become actively involved in school gardening programmes or school nutrition programmes and, where possible, acknowledge them financially for their services. Parents are often willing to help if they feel that they are useful and could contribute in a purposeful way. This should also improve their self-worth and make them eager to become more involved in other school activities.

  - Parents should be given incentives for utilising their skills and expertise at schools, for example by allowing their children to attend school for free or go on school excursions for free. Parents could also be asked to accompany learners on school excursions and outings to help educators exercise discipline and ensure the safety of the learners.

  - Parents must be encouraged to visit the school and partake in school activities without any discussions about their financial or economic circumstances. Thus, continuity between home and school would be guaranteed, enhancing the learner’s opportunity to stay safe. This would also give educators an opportunity to interact with the parent’s on a social level.
6.5 SHORTCOMINGS OF STUDY

If time permitted, schools from different socio-economic backgrounds and cultural settings could have formed part of this study. However only schools in the same area and similar in background were involved, as they were easily accessible. Other schools outside the research area were not considered for this research, as it would have been too costly and time consuming for the researcher to include them. Distance also played a role as there were schools with similar backgrounds that could have been considered, but they were too far to access. It would also have been too costly to visit these schools. As the researcher is also a full-time educator, time would not have allowed her to include these schools, as it would have impacted on her own tuition time.

For a comparative study, it would have been interesting to see what the findings would have shown if schools from different socio-economic backgrounds and cultural settings were part of the study.

6.6 CONCLUSION

Many educators in the Intermediate Phase experience many challenges in the Inclusive classroom setting, to the extent that they believe that they cannot cope in the educational environment. This study set out to investigate how educators could take control to empower themselves to cope with the demands and challenges they face. By means of a set of structure, in five themes, answers to the research questions were sought and each objective has been met.

As the researcher, an educator in the Intermediate Phase herself, was intimately involved in the research, and the information and knowledge gained made her more confident in the understanding of the educational environment and left her much more empowered to face the demands of educational problems in the Inclusive Intermediate Phase classroom.
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ADDENDUM A
Research (2009)

Empowering Intermediate Phase educators in an inclusive classroom situation to support learners experiencing learning problems

Questionnaire (Educators)

Name (optional): ……………………………………………………………………………………..

School (optional): ……………………………………………………………………………………..

Gender: Male □ Female □

1. What Learning Areas do you teach? ………………………………………………………………

2. What grade/s do you teach?

Grade 4 □ Grade 5 □ Grade 6 □ other (specify): ………………………………………

3. How long have you been teaching in this phase?

Less than 5 years □ 5 to 10 years □ 10 to 15 years □ other (specify) ………….

4. How many years have you been teaching? …………………………………………………

5. What are your academic and professional qualifications?

Two year diploma □ Three year diploma □ Four year diploma □

Degree plus teaching diploma □ Specialise Diploma in SNE □ Remedial Education
(Specify) □ ………………………………………………… Other □ …………………………………

6. Please list the training, if any, you have regarding the Special needs Education
(SNE)/Inclusive Teaching.

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7. How many learners are presently enrolled at your school?

Less than 250 □  250 to 500 □  500 to 750 □  more than 750 □  other (specify) ………

8. How many learners are in your class?

Less than 25 □  25 to 35 □  more than 35 □  other (specify) ………….

9. Specify the gender: Number of Boys……….. Number of Girls…………………

10. What is the home language of the learners and specify the number in each language group?

English□……… IsiXhosa□ ……Afrikaans□….. Isizulu□ …… other (specify) ……
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11. What is the language of learning and teaching at your school?

English□  IsiXhosa□  Afrikaans□  other (specify) …………………

12. What do you consider to be the biggest learning problems learners experience during the Intermediate phase?

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13. What kind of support/help is available to you as an educator regarding assistance to learners with learning problems, at your school?

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14. Please list the type of learning problems learners experience in your class?

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15. What kind of support would you need in order to support learners with learning problems better?

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16. What special/extra training opportunities are available to empower educators to assist learners with learning problems?

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17. If you listed training opportunities in question 16, who is developing and offering these?

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18. Have you made use of any of these opportunities on offer to educators?

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9. Do you feel that the opportunities on offer address the educators concerns? Explain your answer.

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20. What can you do to empower/improve yourself to support learners with learning problems?

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21. What would you need to be empowered?

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22. What official support structures are available for learners with earning problems at your school?

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23. What kind of support will help educators cope with learners with learning problems in their class?

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24. Any other information you deem important regarding your own abilities and/or support to yourself and/or support to learners experiencing learning problems?

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Thank you for your valued input.

Ysanne Bosman
ADDENDUM B
Interview Material

(Date: .....................................)

How can educators in the Intermediate Phase be empowered to cope with the demands they face in an inclusive classroom situation?

Name of interviewee (Optional) : ..........................................................................................

Interview environment: ...........................................................................................................

Interview Questions around:

1. Demographical background:
   - Class teacher ..............................................
   - Gender ......................................................
   - Age (optional) ...........................................
   - Teaching experience .................................
   - Home language ........................................
   - LOLT at school ........................................

2. What phase(s)/ grade(s) you teaching in
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3. What qualifications do you have?
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4. If any, do you have any other qualifications?
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5. If any, are there training/ development opportunities that can help you? Elaborate?

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6. How is the teaching in the classroom influenced? Coping? Problems?

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Teaching and learning material in the classroom?
7. Resources in the school?

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8. How are you coping in the classroom?

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9. Any educational problems experienced by learners?

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10. Factors in the teaching-learning environment needed to be looked at to empower the educator?

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11. How could these factors be addressed?

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12. Any other information for use in research study?

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13. Researcher response, if any?

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ADDENDUM C
How can educators in the Intermediate Phase be empowered to cope with the demands they face in an inclusive classroom situation?

Surroundings:  
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Fencing/ Gates:  
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Buildings:  
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Gardens:  
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School starting time:  
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Learner's time of arrival:  
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Educator’s time of arrival:  

Promptness/readiness at lines/ discipline:

Educators:  

Learners:  

Language of communication

Educators with parents:  

Educators with Learners:  

Amongst colleagues:  

Learners with learners:  

Classroom presence:  


ADDENDUM D
14 April 2009

Dear Sir

RE: Permission to do research in the Intermediate Phase at Ebongweni Public Primary School

I am currently reading towards a Masters Degree at the NMMU. The title of my study is: Empowering intermediate phase educators to support learners coping with barriers to learning facing them.

I am hereby asking permission to conduct research in the Intermediate phase of the above mentioned school in order to gather information by means of questionnaires, interviews and observations. All information gathered will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes. All information on the participants in the study will be kept confidential.

Before commencing with any data collection procedures, participants will be informed about reasons and objectives of the study, the data collection procedures and that all information will be dealt with in strict confidence.

I believe that this study will be of benefit to the learners at this and other schools, as the research will endeavor to and find possible solutions to the stated problem.

Yours faithfully

Ysanne Bosman

(Researcher)
Dear Sir

RE: Permission to do research in the Intermediate Phase at Ebongweni Public Primary School

I am currently reading towards a Masters Degree at the NMMU. The title of my study is: Empowering intermediate phase educators to support learners coping with barriers to learning facing them.

I am hereby asking permission to conduct research in the Intermediate phase of the above mentioned school in order to gather information by means of questionnaires, interviews and observations. All information gathered will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes. All information on the participants in the study will be kept confidential.

Before commencing with any data collection procedures, participants will be informed about reasons and objectives of the study, the data collection procedures and that all information will be dealt with in strict confidence.

I believe that this study will be of benefit to the learners at this and other schools, as the research will endeavor to and find possible solutions to the stated problem.

Yours faithfully

Ysanne Bosman
(Researcher)
Ms Y. Bosman  
P.O. Box 27882  
Greenacres  
Port Elizabeth  
6057

Dear Ms Bosman

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN DEPARTMENTAL SCHOOLS: PORT ELIZABETH

I refer to your letter dated 20 April 2009.

Permission is hereby granted for you to conduct your research on the following conditions:

1. your research must be conducted on a voluntary basis;
2. all ethical issues relating to research must be honoured;
3. your research is subject to the internal rules of the school, including its curricular programme and its code of conduct and must not interfere in the day-to-day routine of the school.

Kindly present a copy of this letter to the principal as proof of permission.

I wish you good luck in your research.

N. NTSIKO

ACTING DISTRICT DIRECTOR: PORT ELIZABETH

20 April 2009
ADDENDUM F
21 April 2009

To: Ms. Ysanne Bosman

RE: Permission for conducting research in above-mentioned school

Permission is hereby granted to conduct research at our school. I trust that your research will make a meaningful contribution to the empowerment of educators in our school.

On behalf of our school, I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you well in your studies and the successful completion of your master's degree.

Yours in education.

Principal

( T.C.Kbya)
Topic

How can educators in the Intermediate Phase be empowered to cope with the demands they face in an inclusive classroom situation?

Faculty of Education

September 2009

(M.Ed)

Student: Ysanne Bosman

Student #: 1953 55 480

Contact: 083 653 8741

Supervisor: Dr. Greyling