PERCEPTIONS ON FUTURE FULFILMENT OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED ADOLESCENT LEARNERS AT THE KHANYISA SPECIAL SCHOOL

By

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PORT ELIZABETH
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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby certify that I have language edited the M A thesis (Education) entitled ‘Perceptions on Future Fulfilment of Visually Impaired Adolescent Learners at the Khanyisa Special School’ by Ms N M Ciyana at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

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LETTER OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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DECLARATION

I, Nontobeko Monica CiyanA, certify that the totality of this research, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own work and that it has not been submitted for any degree at any other tertiary institution.

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SUMMARY

This research focuses on the perceptions of future fulfilment of visually impaired adolescent learners at the Khanyisa Special School. The qualitative research was undertaken at the selected special school, which is situated in Nelson Mandela Bay in the western region of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, with ten learners, ten parents and five teachers as participants.

The concluding chapter suggests ways and recommendations to assist the visually impaired adolescent learners at the Khanyisa Special School financially and academically.

KEY TERMS:

- Blindness
- Disability
- Handicap
- Light perception
- Low vision or partial sight
- Self-concept
- Visual functioning
- Visual impairment
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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL ORIENTATION OF STUDY, PROBLEM STATEMENT, PURPOSE OF STUDY AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that well over 42 million people in the world suffer from some kind of visual handicap or reduced sight (Sanders and Myers, 1996:118). These people harbour the same dreams and aspirations for a bright and fulfilling future as the non-visually impaired. Yet, no literature could be found on any research concerning their aspirations or expectations, how they perceive themselves, and how they may obtain help to support and build the confidence skills needed for independence in adulthood.

Learners with disabilities should have equal access to education opportunities by being exposed to the same education as learners without disabilities. Governmental policy development in South Africa has been guided by the universal principles of the right to basic education, equality, and the recognition of the democratic rights of all learners, including those with disabilities (Department of National Education, 1997:72). According to the Department of National Education (1996:29), the South African Schools Act stipulates the ages of compulsory attendance at school, also for learners with special educational needs. However, compulsory attendance for learners with disabilities often varies, depending on how severe the disability is. Some disabled learners start school as late as the age of 10 years, continuing up to the age of 18 years or more.

A major paradigm shift in South African education policy entails a move from dual, special and general education systems toward the transformation of mainstream education to recognise and address the diverse learning needs of all learners. This includes the introduction of a national curriculum. According to Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001:303), the education policy recommends a shift in
thinking about ‘special needs and support services’ in South Africa towards a commitment to the development of an inclusive education and training system. The real challenge that faces this country lies in the implementation of such an inclusive education system at all schools. However, some of the recommendations will have to be adapted to specific situations; for example, a totally blind learner will struggle in a mainstream school and may need assistive devices, such as a Braille reader. The reality is that a learner who was born blind will need specialised support and assistance from specially trained people to learn to cope in a visual world so that he/she may become an independent adult member of a society that caters predominantly for those who can see.

Total blindness or reduced sight can have a devastating effect on the lives and personalities of those affected, as well as their families and friends, not only monetarily, but especially emotionally. This applies particularly during the formative school years. Education support for learners with visual disabilities in the Eastern Cape is available only at a few specialised schools and institutions, such as the Khanyisa Special School in Nelson Mandela Bay. This often means that learners with visual disabilities must leave home at a very young age for schooling that includes training in mobility, personal independence and communication skills. These are some of the important skills that should be taught to and acquired by visually impaired learners to prepare them to cope in a world that caters mainly for the sighted.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Visually impaired learners are faced with a broad spectrum of challenges and frustration that can easily cause stress and emotional volatility. Such learners may have tantrums, scream, cry, be sad, and withdraw themselves from others. Nailbiting is quite common and these learners tend to be forgetful. They also sometimes lag behind in learning, which later contributes to more serious learning difficulties. Mastropieri and Scruggs (2000:104), confirms that such a lack of vision causes learning related problems in most learners. For example, they cannot read the words on a page; they hold the book too close to their eyes.
while they are reading, they repeat the same line, or jump lines while reading; or they frown while reading. These learners often suffer from excessive optic fluids while reading, in addition to a host of other problems. This study proposes to establish what the attitudes and perceptions of learners with visual impairments are regarding their future. Ways and strategies for educators to assist and equip them towards a productive and meaningful adult existence will also become part of the equation.

Based on the above, the following research questions are posed:

1.2.1 Primary research question

- What kind of vision for the future is experienced by the visually impaired adolescent learners at the Khanyisa Special School?

From the primary research question, the following secondary questions have developed:

1.2.2 Secondary research questions

- How do visually impaired learners from the Khanyisa Special School perceive their “selves”?
- What can be done to equip visually impaired adolescent learners with more occupational and social skills to broaden their career and other life opportunities?

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order to answer the research questions, this study will endeavour to meet the following objectives:
1.3.1 Primary research objective

- To determine the vision regarding the future experienced by the visually impaired adolescent learners from the Khanyisa Special School.

1.3.2 Secondary research objectives

- To explore how the visually impaired learners from the Khanyisa Special School perceive their “selves”.
- To find ways to equip visually impaired learners with more occupational and social skills to broaden their career and other life opportunities.

1.4 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

In order to have an in-depth understanding of the field of enquiry, the following key concepts will now be clarified:

1.4.1 Visual impairment

Visual impairment is a partial or total loss of vision resulting from a medical condition, such as congenital conditions, birth trauma, diseases or injury, causing an inability to function normally. Visual impairments include a wide range of visual problems, such as deficits in acuity, visual field, eye movement, or colour perception (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:170).

1.4.2 Visual functioning

How a person uses the vision he/she possesses, is known as visual functioning, which is a learnt behaviour. The visually impaired should be taught to use and develop their other senses, such as hearing and touch (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:36). A learner with poor visual acuity may have either good or poor visual functioning (Heller, Alberto, Forney and Schwartzman, 1996:173), for example, a learner may not be able to see near objects clearly (far-sightedness) or may not be able to see clearly at a distance. He or she may learn to use glasses, contact
lenses or eye drops to maintain vision; or may have to resort to medication or surgery (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:36).

1.4.3 Blindness
Blindness means that a learner has no vision at all, or only a very limited perception of light, colour or objects. Such learners require major accommodations in order for them to be successful in educational settings. They have to depend heavily on their other senses, such as hearing, touch and smell, in order to learn. Such learners may, for example, use Braille, where they feel letters with their fingers, as they do not have the vision to read normal printed text (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:173).

1.4.4 Light perception
The concept of light perception means that learners can only perceive the presence or absence of light and have no other vision. Such learners also use Braille; because their limited vision does not allow them to read normal text (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:173).

1.4.5 Low vision or partial sight
Low vision or partial sight implies significant loss of vision. The visual functioning may increase with the use of optical devices such as glasses or training, or a combination of both. Learners with low or partial sight are capable of coping with the demands of most classroom settings and apply their sense of vision in order to receive information to learn (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:173).

1.4.6 Disability
Disability resulting from impairment limits the normal functioning of the individual. A disability such as visual impairment involves the loss of ability to perform daily activities and exercise social roles effectively. The term disability can be used when an impairment is objectively defined as causing an obstacle to mobility, domestic routines or occupational and communication skills (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:170). The term visual disability covers the spectrum from low vision or partial sightedness on the one end up to a total loss of vision, as in blindness,
on the opposite end (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2000:104). In the case of a visual disability such as partial sightedness, a learner’s academic performance may be affected seriously. Problems could include poor handwriting, a low attention span and losing one’s place during reading. Because of eye discomfort and light sensitivity, a general dislike of visual tasks can easily develop.

1.4.7 Handicap
According to Kochhar, West and Taymans (2000:110) and Gulliford and Upton (1994:149), handicaps result from social discrimination, a lack of physical accommodation, insufficient education and service responses, which jointly could impede progress at school or elsewhere.

For example it will be difficult for a visually impaired learner to read print without using Braille or to climb a staircase without using a railing or the Hoover cane. A visual impairment may become a handicap, which will in all likelihood have a negative influence on factors like self-esteem and confidence. As the handicapped learner is not able to perform daily routines independently, he/she may be forced to become dependent on others.

1.4.8 Self-concept
Self-concept is an umbrella term that covers the concepts of self-image, ideal self and self-esteem, as is shown in the schematic diagram below.

FIGURE 1: Self-concept

```
Self-concept

Self-image..................................................ideal self

Self-esteem

(Lawrence 2000:3)
```
The diagram shows how a person’s self-esteem relies on the relationship between the self-image and the ideal self. Self-concept is the sum of an individual’s mental and physical characteristics and the evaluation of what the individual thinks about him-/herself. Self-concept consists of three aspects: thinking; feeling (emotions); and behaving. It is that part of our personality of which we are conscious (Hamachek, 1995:28).

When a visually impaired learner reflects on his/her problems, he/she may feel unhappy, ashamed or angry. Perceptions of the self are usually based on both verbal and non-verbal feedback cues from especially parents, siblings and teachers, who may accept and praise or dismiss, criticise or ignore progress made by the young individual. In this way, he/she learns that ideal characteristics and standards of behaviour and particular skills of the existence of and value placed upon (Lawrence, 2000:3 and McNamara and Moreton, 1993:4). Like other learners, visually impaired learners also feel tremendously encouraged by positive remarks and words of praise such as “Well done!”; “Thank you”; “Keep up your good behaviour” and so forth, and also grow depressed and demotivated when he/she does not succeed or is not valued.

Self-esteem is a vital conceptual tool, from both a psychological and sociological perspective, to test the behaviour of a learner (Baron and Byrne, 1994:119). Self-esteem as part of self-concept is the way one feels about oneself, including the fact that one has self-respect and self-acceptance. It is their perception and evaluation of the difference between the self-image and ideal self that becomes problematic for learners with a disability (Baron and Byrne, 1994:119). Learners with high self-esteem are likely to be confident in social situations and will usually tackle school work with enthusiasm. Such learners will retain a natural curiosity for learning and will be eager and enthusiastic when faced with a new challenge, irrespective of handicaps. On the other hand, a learner with low self-esteem will lack confidence in their ability to succeed and will often try to avoid situations they consider as potentially humiliating or embarrassing (McNamara and Moreton, 1993:4-5).
1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research will focus on how visually impaired learners perceive themselves and their future. In order to support and build the confidence skills needed for their independence in adulthood, the visually impaired learners at the Khanyisa Special School should be equipped with more occupational and social skills to broaden their career opportunities, thereby stimulating hope and optimism regarding the future.

Building skills and confidence in visually impaired learners will be viewed in the context of the whole school setting, based on the placement of visually impaired learners in a special school and the type of problems visually impaired learners face in adjusting to their environment.

Learners with a disability tend not to develop to their full potential, as they experience frustration and failure in normal learning activities. To overcome such frustrations, it is important that learner's emotional and academic needs are met, especially in the school environment. For example, they should feel important and secure; be able to follow the learning aims, understand the learning processes, have the opportunity to apply newly gained knowledge, and receive positive feedback from their teachers on the knowledge gained (Reilly, 2001:34).

Learners with disabilities are likely to display a low attention span and high levels of frustration. Often, this arises from a sense of low self-esteem and feelings of low self-worth (Kok, 2002:3). The learners may have no self-confidence and may perceive themselves as worthless members of society and the community at large. Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002:227) contend that said problem can be corrected by constant encouragement and motivation as these learners develop. At the same time, Donald, et al. (2002:227) state that a sense of self-worth can be progressively undermined by the circle of disadvantages stemming from the learner's ecosystem. For example, learners are surrounded by parents, school, peers, church, the immediate community and broader society all that play an important part in their lives. If members of this ecosystem do not support
learners who are not performing adequately, these learners will most probably lack the courage and skills to improve their self-esteem. Intervention should happen at all levels of the ecosystem, that is, all people in the immediate environment of these learners should contribute to developing their skills and confidence.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

A research design is viewed as a plan that includes every aspect of a proposed research study, from the conceptualisation of the problem through to the dissemination of the findings (De Vos, 2002:124). The first stage of the plan will be to select a research design.

1.6.1 Research design

It may be claimed that the research content of this study will be highly contextualised, which means that a qualitative research approach must be adopted as the most suitable research method. De Vos (2002:15) agrees with Strauss and Corbin (1990:17) that qualitative research produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. This kind of research entails research on people's life stories, behaviour, organisational functioning, social movements, or interactive relationships. Therefore, researchers such as Bogdan and Biklen (2003:4) describe qualitative research as descriptive in nature, as the data are captured in words, not numbers.

Wiersma (1995:1) states that collected data should be captured as an accurate measure of reality, while McMillan and Schumacher (2001:372) state that qualitative research is a naturalistic enquiry. Therefore, qualitative research enquires about natural and real issues concerning people, and also about why certain problems, diseases, disasters and issues occur in people's lives.

A qualitative research design will answer questions such as ‘what and how’ and report things the way they are, as explained by McMillan and Schumacher
(2001:266). As the research objective of this study is to investigate the vision for the future of visually impaired learners from the Khanyisa Special School and to find ways to support and build the confidence skills needed for the independence in adulthood of such visually impaired learners, a qualitative design will be the appropriate choice.

Strauss and Corbin (1990:19) contend that the use of a qualitative research model will give the researcher access to a participant’s frame of reference, personal beliefs, values and personal motivations. De Vos (2002:199) supports this view, describing qualitative research as holistic, open-ended and process-oriented research that enables the researcher to gain insight into the subjective human reality of the participants in terms of their understanding of the issue under investigation.

1.7 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Permission to conduct the research was requested from the school authorities and relevant officials from the Department of Education. After the authorities gave permission to conduct the research, the researcher personally visited the participants at the Khanyisa Special School, in order to establish a relationship of trust.

Participants were heterogeneously chosen from the Senior Phase classes, using their level of sight as criterion. The site chosen should have characteristics that, according to Wiersma (1995:2) are important for conducting this type of research, in order to gain a better understanding of the research question. The site selected as appropriate for this study is the Khanyisa Special School in KwaDwesi, Nelson Mandela Bay. This school was chosen because it is the only school for visually impaired learners in Nelson Mandela Bay and as such complies with the requirements set by Hawkins (2001:387) concerning the site characteristics, because it contains the data needed by the researcher.
1.7.1 Sample
A purposive sampling method, as described by De Vos (2002:198), was used. This type of sampling is based predominantly on the judgement of the researcher, in that the sample must contain the properties required by the researcher. In this study, learners with visual impairments were used as the main sample. The teachers and parents of the learners were also used for the purpose of triangulation and to ensure that the data are information rich. All participants are connected to the Khanyisa Special School in the Port Elizabeth area of Nelson Mandela Bay.

The selection and choice of the sample is of great importance, as the correct use of sampling will help the researcher to discover facts and clarify assumptions that will contribute to greater insight into the topic under enquiry. Struwig and Stead (2001:124) support this view, stating that sampling is used to discover, understand and gain insight into the assumptions held by the researcher.

1.7.2 Data collection
The data collected must be rich in description and information (Patton, 1990:169). For this purpose, data were collected from visually impaired learners, their teachers and their parents by means of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews at the Khanyisa Special School. All interviews were recorded, and notes were kept for analysis at a later stage. Data were also gathered from a literature study. From research done by others, the researcher was able to expand her own base of understanding on aspects of the issue under investigation.

1.7.3 Data analysis and interpretation
For this study, a systematic approach, called content analysis, was used to identify and summarise content. The Morse and Field’s approach to data analysis (De Vos, 2002:340) comprises the following: comprehending, synthesising, theorising, and re-contextualising. These methods formed part of the integral processes followed by the researcher. A system for storage and retrieval was designed prior to the start of the actual data collection process. The researcher
made notes from recorded interviews. The files were kept in a safe place for referencing or for information that may be needed later.

De Vos (2002:352) states that the results of an analysis should be verified to ensure trustworthiness. In this study, verification were achieved by the information provided on the decisions made regarding sampling, data collection, instruments and analytic strategies as discussed in Chapter Three.

**1.7.4 Ethical measures**

According to Neuman (2000:452), privacy, anonymity and confidentiality should always be maintained. Following the American Psychological Association’s Code of Research Ethics (APA), the researcher applied the following principles to ensure that the study met the requirements of an ethical undertaking:

- **Principle 4** – all promises and commitments made to participants, such as privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, must be honoured.

- **Principle 6** – participants who wish to remove themselves from the study at any time must be allowed to do so, without penalty or coercion.

- **Principle 8** – after the data have been collected, participants should be provided with further information about the study; including the removal of any misconceptions they may have (De Vos, 1998:34).

**1.8 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH**

Based on the fact that there is only one special school for visually impaired learners, namely the Khanyisa Special School, in Nelson Mandela Bay, the research was limited to this school. Due to financial constraints, travelling to other parts of the Eastern Cape where similar schools are situated was not possible.
1.9 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One presents the introduction, followed by a general orientation to the study. The study aims are stated, followed by a brief discussion of the chosen research design.

The theoretical framework of the research is presented in Chapter Two. This chapter focuses mainly on the theoretical aspects relating to visually impaired earners, as found in the literature.

Chapter Three focuses on the research methodology and design. A detailed discussion on the nature of the research design, how the sample was determined, and how the data was collected, concludes this chapter.

The research findings, data analysis and the interpretation of data collected, are the focus of Chapter Four. All recorded data and collected data have been compared, analysed and interpreted.

The final chapter (Chapter Five) presents a synthesis of the findings, followed by the recommendations, aimed at supporting and building the confidence skills needed for independence in adulthood by visually impaired learners. Recommendations are provided to equip them with more occupational and social skills to broaden their career optimism regarding their future. This is followed by the overall research conclusions. The limitations of the research are also outlined.
CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON LEARNERS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF THEMSELVES AND THEIR FUTURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents theoretical perspectives on visual impairment and related aspects. Problems related to social interaction, communication, (including reading and writing), mobility and achieving independence have all been identified as having a direct bearing on the quality of life and the aspirations for the future of visually impaired learners in general. These problems may constitute barriers to their future career and life opportunities, by impeding or jeopardising opportunities for studying further, getting employment, or other important life goals. For these reasons, the researcher wants to investigate the vision for the future as experienced by visually impaired learners at the Khanyisa Special School.

According to Engelbrecht and Green (2001:171-178) levels of vision and level of disability differ from learner to learner, and depends on the level of disability the learner has. For example:

- Learners with normal to near normal vision, who perform tasks without problems or without the need of special aids.
- Learners with moderate vision, who perform activities almost normally with special aids.
- Learners with severe vision dysfunction, who can be divided into two categories: the Braille users and the non-Braille users. Both groups perform visual activities at a limited level of speed, endurance and precision, even with the help of special aids.
- Learners who experience difficulties with all visual activities and cannot perform most detailed visual activities.
- Learners who are nearly blind, who use Braille and depend primarily on
other senses.

- Blind and totally without sight learners, who depend exclusively on other senses.

Fewer than one in ten people officially listed as 'blind' live in a state of complete darkness (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2000:104; Dobree and Boulter, 1982:113). Most cases of complete blindness result from congenital blindness, which means blindness was already present at birth. This type of blindness may be caused by diseases such as syphilis, German measles, diabetes, and injuries at birth. Nine out of ten people who are visually impaired became thus through drugs, accidents or a genetic problem (it ‘runs in the family’).

Visual impairment is a major obstacle in a person's aspirations and vision for the future. The nature and degree of the problems will depend largely on the age at which blindness set in (Kapp, 1991:360). According to Kapp (1991:362), a visually impaired learner who previously experienced the world through sight will, to a certain extent, depending on the length of time he/she has been able to see, have established a mind picture of the world. When blindness afflicts a child before the first distinct experience of sight has dawned, its effects may be similar to congenital blindness. The later in life that blindness sets in, the less severe the developmental disturbance will be (Kapp, 1991:362). For example an aged person will understand that the aging or genes he/she has are the cause of the blindness, unlikely with the adolescent who will want to ask question like “why me?”

2.2 SOCIAL STATUS OF BLIND PEOPLE IN GENERAL

In order to understand the world of visually impaired learners, one has to examine the world of visually impaired individuals and how they have been historically accommodated by society at large.
2.2.1 Separation from society

Blindness is one of the oldest afflictions known to man. In primitive societies, individuals who could not provide for themselves were generally considered a liability to the tribe. People who were blind were considered such a liability, as they represented a responsibility and burden to the tribe. Visually handicapped children were often removed from their families and killed. Subsequently, handicapped people were kept in segregated institutions. Even in centres of early civilisation, such as Sparta, Athens and Rome, children with visual or other handicaps were put to death. This practice was generally accepted from both moral and legal perspectives and advocated by philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Seneca (Lowenfeld, 1974:2). Ancient societies took decisions based on their limited understanding of handicaps and superstition.

However, some visually handicapped people in ancient times were treated with respect by their colleagues and friends. Homer and the prophets Tiresias and Phineus are well-known examples. This veneration was a helpful form of separation, though it, too, removed the blind individuals from a normal place in society to a life of loneliness (Lowenfeld, 1974:2).

2.2.2 Ward status in society

When someone is placed under special protection because of a handicap, he or she becomes a ward of the person or institution that cares for him/her. The Old Testament has many such protective precepts. The early Christian communities considered children (particularly orphans), the aged and the blind as special wards of the church. Under the auspices of the church, many asylums and hospitals were founded, such as the one by St. Basil in Caesarea-in-Cappadocia, to which the blind were admitted. During the Middle Ages, a number of hospices were founded exclusively for the blind. However, most of the blind were left to a beggar’s lot and depended on charity from the church (Lowenfeld, 1974:2). As a fundamental part of the church’s services, men and women were kept in separate institutions (McNamara and Moreton, 1993:2).
2.2.3 Emancipation in society
Some visually impaired individuals achieved independency, becoming well-known poets, singers and musicians, especially in the Middle Ages (Allen, 2001:1133). Among blind self-emancipators were such illustrious persons as the mathematician Nicholas Saunderson, who became a Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge; John Metcalf, an English road engineer and bridge builder; and Thomas Blacklock, a Scottish poet and minister (Lowenfeld, 1974:3). In modern times, singers such as S. Kekana, J. Butler and B. Mlangeni have achieved fame for their musical ability. With the necessary training and support, it is possible for any person with a visual impairment to emancipate him/herself and become a valuable member of society, as modern society generally places less restriction on people.

2.2.4 Integration in society
In the past, it was generally assumed that visually impaired individuals could perform only certain types of work, for which they were prepared in schools and workshops for the blind. This led to occupational segregation and job restrictions. This outdated occupational segregation has been replaced by the present-day approach, which endeavors to determine where the individual’s potential, talents and interests lie, in order to provide training and placement in the kind of work for which he/she is best suited (McNamara and Moreton, 1993:2). This approach has brought about an influx of visually impaired individuals into industry, private enterprise and different professions, resulting in increased occupational integration. Blind people have found their niche as radio and TV presenters, switchboard operators, and many more professions.

The National Disability Strategy condemns the segregation of disabled individuals from society (Department of Education, 2001:10). At school level they try to maximize the participation of all individuals, including individuals that have special education needs due to various disabilities and impairments (Department of Education, 2001:67). Integration into society is the only way to combat the segregation of learners on the basis of disability (Donald, et al, 2002:292). The achievement of Inclusive Education is therefore seen as a priority in long-term
planning strategies. Unfortunately, due to various problems that cannot be discussed in detail in this study, the process in South Africa is extremely slow, and special schools are doing their utmost to advance the integration process by co-operating with mainstream schools and integrating specific activities, such as debating or class competitions.

Independence of movement was not initially held as an option for visually impaired learners. The visually impaired were restricted to moving around in schools, workshops and homes exclusively designated for visually impaired individuals (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:181). In the modern era, visually impaired individuals are expected to have sufficient confidence and skills to interact and become fully participating members of society. Training in techniques such as making use of the long Hoover cane were introduced to achieve greater mobility and freedom for visually impaired individuals (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:181). Today, one often sees visually impaired persons confidently walking around our towns and cities, carefully navigating traffic. Special robot sounds to tell the visually impaired when to cross the road and when to stop, are also most helpful to them.

2.3 CAUSES OF BLINDNESS IN PEOPLE

Visual impairment has many causes. Diseases of the eyeball, cornea, lens, retina, optic nerve and uveal tract account for a substantial percentage. The impairment may start at any phase of human development (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:174; Kapp, 1991:360). This literature study will focus on the spectrum of visual problems that can occur from the prenatal phase up to and including early adulthood.

Knowledge of when and how visual impairments occur, is of cardinal importance to this study, as the researcher endeavors to investigate what kind of vision for their future is held by visually impaired adolescents at the Khanyisa Special School and to find ways to equip visually impaired adolescent learners with more occupational and social skills, in order to broaden their career optimism for the
future.

2.3.1 Problems developing during prenatal phase and birth
Visual impairment originating during the pre-natal phase could result from genetic and embryonic developmental problems. Albinism is an example of such a genetic cause. Chromosomes carry genes that determine development in the body. When chromosomes are abnormal in some way, they do not function correctly and can cause visual problems, such as those associated with albinism. Albinism is a condition which leads to a shortage of pigment in the skin and eyes. Albinism causes the eyes to be very sensitive to light, as a result of which the eyes need constant protection (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:175; Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:35; Van der Kolk, 1981:7-12).

Visual impairment can also result from damage to the central nervous system of the fetus caused by disease contracted by the mother during pregnancy. Infections from diseases such as German measles, syphilis and diabetes put the fetus at risk of developing a spectrum of medical problems, including visual impairment (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:56; Dunlea, 1989:2). Complications at birth, caused by, inter alia, the incorrect use of instruments (forceps) by the doctor or midwife to assist the birth, could injure the brain of the baby (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:56), which could cause problems with vision. Eye complications at a young age could also contribute to the incidence of visual impairments.

2.3.2 Problems developing during infancy and later
Infections such as meningitis or encephalitis are known causes of visual impairment. Accidents such as falling on a sharp object or being involved in a car accident often contribute to visual impairments of different degrees of severity (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:56).

2.3.3 Children with visual and learning impairments
In order to understand how visual impairments may influence learning, some commonly encountered problems will now be briefly explained.
2.3.3.1 Perceptual problems
Unlike children with normal sight, children with visual impairments will not automatically see an object and know how to interpret it and make sense of the given information. This restricts their involvement in many activities and as such, it is impossible for visually impaired individuals to avail themselves of the same opportunities available to the sighted. When visual impairment sets in at an early age, the following problems arise:

- **Visual-perceptual problems**
  According to Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:135), visual perception is a precondition for reading and writing. Visually impaired children, who suffer from visual-perception problems, like a problem with visual closure (the ability to identify or recognize an object despite the fact that the entire object may not be visible), or visual foreground-background problems (the lack of the ability to fix one’s attention on details among many other perceptions that one notes simultaneously, at a given time), will find it more difficult to learn to read Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:80). Visual closure or visual foreground-background problems occur due to abnormalities in the eye or lens structures; meaning that defective vision may occur because objects are not focused correctly on the retina. If the rays of light are brought to a focus in front of the retina, the condition is referred to as myopia (nearsightedness); while if the rays are focused behind the retina, the condition is called hyperopia or hypermetropia (farsightedness) Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:135). The interpretation of what the visually impaired see may therefore not always be correct.

- **Auditory perception problems**
  Auditory perception is the ability to hear similarities and differences between sounds Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:78). The ear is divided into three parts: the outer, the middle and the inner ear. The pathway along which sound travels is called the auditory pathway. Damage resulting in hearing loss can occur anywhere along the auditory pathway. There are two kinds of hearing loss. They are:
- Conductive hearing loss – this happens when there is damage in the auditory canal and the middle ear, such as too much wax or an inflammation.
- Nerve hearing loss – this is damage in the inner ear or along the pathway to the brain and it may be caused by having a parent who is deaf, sustaining a head injury, exposure to loud noise over lengthy periods of time, or drugs (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:31).

Auditory perception plays an important role in blind and partially-sighted children’s exploration of their surroundings, because they depend on the different sounds objects make to assist such exploration. Brain dysfunction could disrupt auditory perception Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:135). While a visually impaired child will experience problems with orientation and mobility and may take a long time to master a new route, problems with auditory perception are likely to lead to language problems, because the language and speech of other people or sounds in the surrounding area may be misinterpreted. Auditory perception problems will cause children to forget commands and fail to memorize important information, like street numbers and names Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:135), information that is of vital importance to a visually impaired person.

- **Tactile perception problems**

  Tactile perception is the ability to distinguish between various objects merely by handling them. In other words, it is concerned with perception by means of the sense of touch (Allen, 2001:1241). Tactile perception is very important to children with visual impairments, because they rely on their sense of touch to differentiate between objects. A child who has tactile perception problems will, for instance, also have great difficulty in distinguishing between Braille characters. His/her brain will be unable to interpret successfully the information that comes from the tactile organs and his/her exploration of the surroundings will therefore be inadequate Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:135). A problem similar to this is astereognosis; the inability to be aware of an object placed in the hand. If any problem with tactile perception is diagnosed early enough, dedicated therapists and teachers may be able to help the child to circumvent his/her tactile
perception problems.

2.3.3.2 Behavioural problems

Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:136), defines behaviour as an individual’s response to his/her surroundings. Should these responses be inadequate or unacceptable to others, they are termed behavioural problems. Two behavioural problems often found in learners with visual problems will now be briefly discussed.

❖ Attention deficit disorder (ADD)

A child who suffers from attention deficit disorder is constantly distracted by external stimuli. A noise outside the classroom would cause such a child to jump up to look what has happened. Any noise, such as a clock clicking, a pencil falling or desks banging, will distract the child’s attention, because he/she is unable to organize the structure of his/her perception properly Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:136). In a visually impaired child, such stimuli may cause even greater distraction, as the child will have to guess at the reason for, or the location of the noise.

In this regard Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:136) state that attention deficit disorder is definitely likely to also affect children with visual impairments, but since these children do not receive visual stimuli, their attention may be distracted by their thoughts, by sounds or by the objects that they are handling. Because of the short attention span of ADD children, visually impaired children with ADD may find it even more difficult to focus on the task at hand.

❖ Perseverance

Perseverance entails the steadfast pursuit of an objective. Visually impaired learners often display great determination to persist, in spite of difficulties Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:136). They tend to repeat a response after the original stimulus has ceased, meaning that they may “practise” until they have mastered an action. A good example is when they will practise walking around in a set environment until they can do so without bumping into fixed objects. They
may also keep on touching an object until they are satisfied that they understand the dimensions thereof.

2.3.4 Deficit in cognitive development of children with visual impairments
The cognitive development of children with visual impairments takes place in the same way as it does in the case of normally-sighted children, although it happens at a slower pace, because such children do not have the ability to become as actively involved in their social and physical environment as sighted learners. They initially need extra assistance from the people who play an important role in their lives, such as parents, teachers, siblings and peers. Because their vision is lacking or restricted, their perception, which is necessary for cognitive development, is limited Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:96). This may impede the development of the child, in that he/she may learn at a slower pace and may therefore be promoted to higher grades at an older age than learners without any barriers to their learning.

2.3.5 Social and emotional development of children with visual impairments
Visually impaired children have limited or no visual contact with their parents. They inhabit a dark world in which they are mostly ignorant of what is happening around them. Visually impaired children are unable to visually identify the sources of sounds; they are also unable to observe facial expressions or body language, and may therefore find it very difficult to interpret others’ emotions and intentions. Consequently, parents and their children with visual impairments may find it difficult to initiate spontaneous contact with one another. Such children may also experience difficulty in establishing social relationships with others, because they lack the ability to differentiate visually between themselves and other people and are therefore often unable to initiate play with friends Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:103).

Educators need to be alert to signs that may indicate possible problems with vision among learners, so that support can be given early. The following section describes briefly the signs and symbols educators should be watching out for.
2.4 HOW TO IDENTIFY LEARNERS WITH VISUAL PROBLEMS

Authors like Gous and Mfazwe (1998:36) have listed the following features as possible indicators of visual impairment:

- The learner rubs his/her eyes or often blinks.
- The learner has problems with reading, e.g. holds book too close or too far away from eyes, or shuts one eye to read.
- The learner has uncertain movements, such as feeling the ground with feet, or missing stairs.
- The learner’s handwriting is poorly spaced.
- The learner may have a squint, eyes that are red and swollen, different-size, or eyes that seem to move a lot without clear focus.
- The learner complains of sore eyes and headaches.
- The learner may rub his/her eyes with fists or wave fingers in front of his/her eyes. These unusual habits are called ‘blindism’ (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:36; Kapp, 1991:363).

Apart from being able to detect visual problems, educators also need to understand the psycho-social development of visually impaired individuals.

2.5 PSYCHO-SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN VISUALLY IMPAIRED INDIVIDUALS

The different visual impairments could negatively influence some or all of the domains of psycho-social development. A discussion on normal development within each domain of human development is presented below. In each domain, the problems associated with visual impairment will be highlighted.

- **Social development**
In order to live in and be integrated into society, one needs to communicate with that society by means of membership of a group through various social structures. According to Van der Poel (1997:11), a visual impairment is not an
isolated developmental dysfunction. A visual impairment can never be separated from the learner, the family, the community and the living world. Visual impairment can be seen as a developmental dysfunction implying a degree of environmental deprivation, of which the main effects are manifested in relationships with people and objects inside and outside the family.

The difficulties facing both the visually impaired learner and the sighted learner in interaction with one another could result in such interaction being perceived as stressful and uncomfortable by both parties (Van der Poel, 1997:11). Although the visually impaired may not be completely separated from sighted society, they seem to be isolated in the sense that society constantly undervalues their potential, abilities and achievements. Scott (1982:164) states that although societal changes have taken place, visually impaired learners have traditionally been considered by society to be dependent and less worthy, inferior and incapable. Unfortunately, these sentiments are still found in modern society.

The researcher believes that it is more difficult for a learner with little vision, or no vision at all, to make friends or become part of a group, because such a visually impaired learner may be afraid or at risk of being teased, rejected or marginalised. It is for this reason that those learners who perceive themselves as ‘different’, tend to isolate themselves from others by keeping in the background and refusing to play with others.

Another major concern to visually impaired learners is the possibility that a second line of conversation, via facial expression, may be going on in which he/she can inevitably participate. The visually impaired learner may sense that such a second line of conversation is going on and this may make him/her feel insecure and isolated in social settings (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:180). Communication carried by gestures obviously creates problems for visually impaired learners. Among the sighted, gestures are frequently used to supplement the verbal content. However, some communication difficulties can be overcome if verbal communication skills have been strengthened and developed during every phase of development, from infancy onwards. Learners with visual
problems should be encouraged to mix with sighted learners in order to enhance their communication skills. Good communication skills are a key to enhance the visually impaired learner’s attainment of independence. Because of their poor sight, visually impaired learners are often not good at communicating with other people or peers. They are not sure if they are going to be hurt or ridiculed and strangers or their peers, and consequently it is difficult for visually impaired learners to make friends easily. Often, because of their visual impairment, they do not feel confident to express themselves in front of other people. This self-consciousness may make it difficult for them to become totally independent. Interaction with their peers will help them to communicate with the outside world.

It is further vital that visually impaired learners are able to interpret sounds from the environment, such as moving traffic. This will enable them to cross the road safely and move around with more confidence. In some countries, traffic lights have a fast-ticking sound when the lights turn green or tick slower when they turn red (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:180).

Listening is a skill that must be acquired; while it is vitally important to all learners, it is of key importance to learners with visual disabilities. In venturing into the world, they must, for instance, use their sense of hearing to know or understand what to do next. The less a learner is able to rely on vision for information from the environment, the more crucial it is that he/she becomes a good listener. However, overdependence on the sense of listening may cause learners not to use any remaining vision they may still possess (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:180). Learners should therefore be motivated to rely on all senses for information.

The restrictions visual impairment imposes on the ability to move around in different ways are bound to cause frustration. Visually impaired learners need to ask for an assistant to move from one point to another. Mobility is the ability to move safely and effectively from one place to another, but moving around is not always safe for a visually impaired learner; for example, a step up or down, constructed in the same paving as the sidewalk, could be hazardous even to
sighted learners, because the change in level may not be visually obvious (Smith, Polloway, Patton and Dowdy, 2001:181). However, it is true that mobility, aided by the Hoover cane, enhances the coping skills of learners with a visual impairment. Independence will bring about confidence, and vice versa. Visually impaired learners need to be able to go shopping, visit friends, cross roads in short, all the activities that form a integral part of everyday life.

Support such as a human guide, a guide dog, and the Hoover cane facilitate mobility and independence (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:181). The child who can move around freely and independently will grow in confidence. Such confidence will in turn support his/her affective development, which could improve his/her social development and so forth.

Engelbrecht and Green (2001:181) contend that although visually impaired learners share the same desires as sighted learners, independence is not always easy for them to achieve, because it takes them longer to master independence. Visually impaired learners usually need some level of assistance from other people. This means that they are to a certain extent forced to be dependent on family or friends.

Parents of visual impaired children may find it difficult to grant their children the freedom they need to become more independent. This may result from a habit formed over years of anxiously watching over their visually impaired child and the notion that the child will never be able to function without their help, or the fear that he/she may be physically or emotionally hurt.

- Cognitive development

An impediment in a learner is a reality that cannot be ignored or erased, but his/her education should lead him/her towards participation in his/her peer group and in class work (Kapp, 1991:364). In this study, this means that although a learner has the impediment of being visually impaired, education should take its course by giving the learner equal educational opportunities; ensuring that the learner is participating co-operatively; and motivating the learner to have a
positive attitude. Visually impaired learners depend on educational opportunities to fulfill their future goals. They should be given relevant information that will assist them in making suitable choices regarding their future career opportunities. With little or no vision, it is obvious that reading or writing will pose a problem. Unfortunately, inability to read or write is usually equated with ignorance and stupidity. Braille is the most popular method for writing and reading used by visually impaired learners (Hallahan and Kauffmann, 1991:318). Many excellent works in literature have been made available in Braille, while modern libraries cater for the visually impaired by stocking books in large print or books captured on audio tape.

- **Physical and motor development**

Any visual impairment will impede a child’s learning to a greater or lesser extent. Children with visual impairments are not subject to spontaneous visual stimulation to become mobile (Landsberg, Kruger and Nel, 2005:86). Visually impaired children have to depend on their sense of hearing for motor stimulation. Auditive discrimination (the ability to distinguish between various sounds) develops slower than visual discrimination (the ability to distinguish between things). The result of this is that visually impaired babies lag behind sighted babies in their motor development; as motor development does not take place spontaneously Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:95).

Fatigue often develops from the long hours spent in reading or writing, and may also have a negative impact on the learner’s physical functioning. The long hours in reading or writing when the teacher is giving lengthy activities which must be completed by learners without giving them a break, could be very tiring. Learners with limited vision furthermore may find it extremely difficult to keep up with the rest of the class when work is written on the board or long sections must be read from text in small print (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:182). Sitting in a position where eyes and even neck muscles are strained, could be very tiring. Unfortunately most visually impaired learners lack the opportunity to take part in physical activities that could contribute to physical development and stress relief.
Visually impaired learners furthermore need a safe classroom environment. Dangerous equipment like a guillotine should be kept out of the class, electric cables should be kept tidy and out of the way, while furniture should be kept in the same place at all times. In a safe environment, it is however important to plan for suitable opportunities where these learners could develop not only their small and large motor skills, but also exercise and develop their bodies physically.

- **Affective development**

Affective development includes dealing with personal emotions, feelings, passions and moods (Gouws and Kruger, 1996:94). All humans, but especially the visually impaired, need a conducive, favourable, loving environment that will support their affective development in many ways. For example, one has to consider their needs and switch the lights on bright; allow them to occupy the front seats in the class; and the teacher’s voice should always be gentle and patient.

The visually impaired learner is a stranger in a world designed for seeing people, organized for seeing people, and controlled by seeing people (Kapp, 1991:363). The learner is emotionally affected by his/her visual impairment and by situations in an environment that does not cater for visually impaired learners. For example, in Nelson Mandela Bay, there is no special library for visually impaired learners; this affects them in that they do not have sufficient access to complimentary and relevant information needed for their learning. Ordering from the audio tape library is not always satisfactory, as this library has limited stock only. This situation leads to frustration and they may even become de-motivated and feel let down by society.

The environment places visually impaired learners under greater stress than children who possess normal vision, because visually impaired learners must try to adapt or integrate themselves into the seeing world by learning how to cope and live life to the fullest. For example, visually impaired learners will find it much more difficult to learn how to do things on their own, even simple, everyday activities such as shopping or using a stove. In conquering these “every-day”
tasks, they will gain confidence and be prepared to be bolder in their exploration of the world.

South Africans are exposed to a cruel and dangerous world in which crime has reached alarming levels. Individuals with visual impairments are much more vulnerable than those who have all their senses intact. This realization of vulnerability brings about tension and a sense of fear for the unknown. Such tension and fear will inhibit exploration and achieving independence.

Learners who are visually impaired often feel neglected, isolated, rejected and unwanted. They may wrestle with many unanswered questions concerning the lacking love and support from their parents, family members and surrounding community members and will often withdraw from activities given to them (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:36). These negative emotions usually result from a lack of love, acceptance and support from their immediate families, teachers, peers and community members. Because of this, visually impaired learners are often moody and tend to harbour feelings of anger and even hatred; although these may be exacerbated by normal hormonal imbalances during adolescence.

The visually impaired learner will have great difficulty in accepting his/her handicap if his/her parents are not supportive and accepting of him/her in spite of the impairment. If parents provide a safe and secure emotional environment at home and show unconditional love and acceptance especially to children with impairments, this might eliminate their tension and fears. Sadly, some parents neglect their visually impaired child (Kapp, 1991:363). They are often embarrassed at having had a “less than perfect” child. Some turn to alcohol for comfort. Verbal and physical abuse often develops into a pattern that is not conducive to the development of a healthy self-image in the child.

Another reason why visually impaired children often withdraw from others is that some may feel extremely guilty about being the cause of sadness and disappointment in their parents. Their perception is that everybody hates or resents them and, fearfully, they withdraw. Visually impaired learners also isolate
themselves rather than be with people who could hurt them physically or verbally. They tend to protect themselves from being hurt by becoming unapproachable and are often consumed by negative emotions such as anger, frustration and resentment (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:178 and Kapp, 1991:363).

Other manifestations of impaired affective development in visually impaired learners include strange behaviors such as crying sadly, seemingly without reason while nail-biting is also common. Negative affective experiences may result in losing trust in others, and losing confidence in him-/herself.

2.6 CONCEPT SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-ESTEEM IN VISUALLY IMPAIRED LEARNERS

The major agendas in adolescent development are physical and sexual maturation, social development, establishing life goals and developing a personal identity in relationships while moving towards independence. All these changes could create conflict and stress (Garry, Waltz, Jeanne and Bleuer, 1992:113). Adolescents in general tend to withdraw themselves from others, needing more private space. Their social development becomes distorted by the way they think and act, especially when they do not want to share how they feel. If stress levels become high and have a negative impact on self-esteem in visually impaired adolescents, it becomes an important concern for parents and for the teachers who work with such adolescents.

- Self-esteem in adolescents
Self-esteem is a person’s evaluation of the difference between his/her self-image and his/her ideal self (Lawrence, 2000:4). For example, most people have a good idea of what kind of people they are and what kind of people they would like to become. Self-esteem empowers, energizes and motivates. It inspires us to achieve and allows us taking pleasure and pride in our achievements (Garry, et al, 1992:16). It is therefore important for the visually impaired learner to get opportunities to achieve success in some way.
Self-esteem is a personal judgment of worth, depending on the continuous improvement of one’s self-image, which has positive results at the one end and negative results at the other end. For example, the self-image of a visually impaired learner may be negative, because he/she may think that nothing good will come from him/her and that he/she is unable to perform or achieve. This poor self-image will create low self-esteem, which will lead to poor performance in school activities. Self-esteem is further based on the degree of correspondence between the ideal self and the perceived self (Lawrence, 2000:5; McNamara and Moreton, 1993:4). In practice, self-esteem can be defined as confidence in personality and confidence in abilities. Visually impaired learners who have low self-esteem, lack confidence and are reluctant to take risks, either personally or in a learning situation.

Visually impaired learners become aware of their inadequacies as learners and their inadequate skills at an early stage. They tend to avoid situations that they perceive as likely to cause them further unpleasant feelings (Lawrence, 2000:4). Such learners desperately strive to maintain their self-esteem, whether in relationships with their parents or in relationships with their teachers; not to let their immediate family down (Lawrence, 2000:5). Lawrence (2000:220), Gurney (1988:86) and White (1990:74) suggest that visually impaired learners who feel good about themselves tend to learn more easily and retain information longer; in fact, they do better in every way. This is in line with human development in general.

Positive self-esteem is a key factor in developing good mental health, social relations and a productive lifestyle (Garry, et al. 1992:115). Positive self-esteem should be present if the adolescent is to adequately cope with major stressful situations, such as leaving home and staying in a school hostel, such as the Khanyisa Special School hostel. Visually impaired learners should be supported in order to develop a positive self-esteem that will help them to cope with stress and challenges as they move through adolescence towards independent adulthood.
Many adolescents, especially those from previously disadvantaged townships in South Africa, observe and experience stress in the family caused by economic problems. Often there is no money to buy even basic necessities. Visually impaired learners are likely to be particularly sensitive to an unhealthy economic situation, because of the increased financial demands resulting from their impairment (Garry, et al. 1992:115). For example, they need money for hospitalization, medication, glasses, walking cane, audio tapes, and equipment used for writing, e.g. a Braille typewriter. Sometimes both parents are unemployed, and it is difficult for them to provide their visually impaired adolescent with the expensive visual aids needed to assist his/her remaining sight. Because of these financial problems conflict escalates, which disturbs domestic peace and harmony. Sadly, parents sometimes take out their anger and frustration on their visually impaired adolescent.

**Confidence and competency**

Self-esteem is the confidence in one’s ability to think, belief in one’s right to be happy, and desire to enjoy the fruits of one’s efforts. Confidence in one’s ability and in one’s values can both only be achieved through motivation stemming from success. Self-confidence will develop with experiencing success in skills development and learning. It is therefore of the utmost importance that ample opportunities are made available, especially for learners with barriers to learning, such as a visual impairment.

The most solid foundation for confidence in one’s ability is demonstrated competence. Visually impaired learners should experience that they are competent and able to respond to the demands of living, that is, that they are capable of coping with the challenges they meet every day (Garry, et al. 1992:43).

Visually impaired learners must acquire a spectrum of competencies, such as being independent and responsible for their learning situations, which will enable them to succeed in their future career choices. Visually impaired learners, who feel successful in school, feel good about themselves. Experiencing that their
world is under their control, will foster their self-confidence and will help them perceive themselves as capable and responsible for their own lives (Garry, et al. 1992:51). Motivational talks and sound advice will contribute to building confidence in visually impaired learners so that they will choose their future careers without fear and based on realistic norms and criteria.

- **Academic self-esteem**

With all learners, but especially visually impaired learners, negative factors in their home environment may affect their academic achievement. Such factors could include neglect, abuse and insecurity. A poor, unsupportive home background is one of the most common reasons cited for poor learning achievement. Factors such as poverty, illiteracy, and drug and alcohol abuse could very well lead to the neglect of a visually impaired child.

Parents who are often inebriated cannot give the specific support needed by visually impaired learners. The visually impaired learner will develop greater confidence if parents and teachers support and believe in him/her, help him/her with homework and plan learning experiences. A counseling programme could provide the required boost to the learner’s self-esteem, particularly academic self-esteem.

Visually impaired learners need counseling to cope with academic challenges. Obviously, their impairment poses major additional challenges to learning and academic achievement, but need not predetermine it. Counseling could serve to banish some of these negative feelings and help instill a belief in their own potential to achieve (McNamara and Moreton, 1993:5).

The researcher strongly supports the notion that higher levels of participation from visually impaired learners in a variety of activities lead to higher levels of self-esteem. Such increased participation will lead the visually impaired learner to feel a sense of achievement as well as feeling more comfortable, not only with others, but also with him-/herself. Clearly, the challenge is for teachers to find ways to encourage all visually impaired learners to participate more widely in
school and academic activities, if for no other reason than that it will enhance their self-esteem (Garry, et al. 1992:115).

- **How confidence influences learners’ personal and social behavior and strong affective development**

Even if learners respond positively to learning, their confidence may suffer from negative events, such as academic probation, which comprises the process of testing learners’ behaviour and abilities; financial problems concerning school; serious illness or injury of a close family member; or divorce in the family. These events affect the visually impaired learner personally and socially and may erode his/her enthusiasm for learning. Some learners may have refused to allow these events to affect them, but the frequency of exposure on the long term, will have a negative impact on visually impaired learners’ self-esteem (Garry, et al. 1992:119).

The visually impaired learner tends to withdraw him/her from others socially, because of the psychological effects of these negative events. The choices the learner makes in future will also be negatively influenced. On the other hand, if a learner experiences success, is accepted by those who matter to him/her, thus learner will be more motivated to establish strong social relationships and develop a strong affective disposition.

**2.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter dealt mainly with the main causes of blindness in people, and the problems and challenges facing visually impaired individuals. Concepts of social, emotional and cognitive development in visually impaired learners were discussed. Conditions were described and it was made clear that the conditions could be separated in terms of description and classification.

Visually impaired learners experience problems in terms of communication, independence and mobility. Problems experienced here will influence their confidence and academic self-esteem, which in turn will negatively affect their
affective and social development that is so important for personality development and growing towards independent adulthood.

Factors contributing to limited independence have been identified as poor mobility due to physical limitations, and the low expectations placed on them by their families and sighted society. Mobility training is important to increase mobility skills and independence. Braille, typewriters, ‘talking’ books and magnifiers could assist the visually impaired learner in undertaking the tasks expected of him/her. However, most important is the development of a healthy self-esteem in order to develop positively in all domains during the journey to independent adulthood.

The next chapter will deal with aspects of the research design and research methodology.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

De Vos (2002:77) describes the research design as a detailed plan of how a research study is conducted. Careful consideration needs to be given to the research method, selection of a sample and data collection methods in order to reach the intended outcomes of a study.

The main objective of this chapter is to provide a detailed exposition of the research design and methodology and state the research problems and objectives. Details regarding data gathering and analysis, as well as information on the trustworthiness of the study and the ethical measures applied are included.

3.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In order to formulate appropriate research questions and objectives, the research problem had to be analyzed, and the following aspects emerged as important from both the literature and personal observations.

According to the Department of Education White Paper 6 (2001:7), learners with learning disabilities have the right to learn and to be educated in the same way as those who do not have trouble with learning. Some learners may experience great difficulties in their learning, leading to very low expectations from teachers and parents. A lack of confidence and low self-esteem may make it difficult for a learner to believe he/she can be successful, and problems surrounding learning may ultimately seem insurmountable. All such negative conditions may affect learners’ aspirations for the future, especially in the case of visually impaired learners.
Another aggravating factor is that teachers often do not have the specific knowledge and skills required to support learning in learners with problems; in the case of this study, learners who are visually impaired. Teachers feel that they lack the knowledge and skills regarding strategies that will support and build the self-esteem of visually impaired learners, in order for such learners to develop a positive attitude towards life and their aspirations for the future. Due to a lack of motivation from teachers, parents and peers, visually impaired learners may perceive themselves as not being able to become independent adults who can make a valuable contribution to society. With this in mind, the following research questions have been formulated.

3.2.1 Primary research question

- What kind of vision for the future is experienced by visually impaired adolescent learners at the Khanyisa Special School?

3.2.2 Secondary research questions

- How do visually impaired learners from the Khanyisa Special School perceive their ‘selves’?
- What can be done to equip visually impaired learners with more occupational and social skills to broaden their career optimism regarding their future?

3.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following primary and secondary objectives have been formulated, based on the above research questions.

3.3.1 Primary research objective

- To investigate the vision for the future as experienced by visually impaired adolescent learners at the Khanyisa Special School.
3.3.2 Secondary research objectives

- To explore how the visually impaired learners from the Khanyisa Special School perceive their “selves”.
- To find ways to equip visually impaired learners with more occupational and social skills to broaden their career optimism for their future.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The specific plan that is put together on how one intends to investigate the research problem is referred to as the research design. (Mouton, 1998:55-57, McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:383).

A qualitative, descriptive, interpretative research design is followed for this problem under investigation as suggestion by Creswell (2003:45,182.194), Mouton (1998:53) and McMillan and Schumacher (2001:373).

3.4.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is the type of research that produces findings not arrived at through statistical procedures or other means of quantification (De Vos, 2002:348). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:372), qualitative research is a naturalistic inquiry in which non-interfering data collection strategies are used to discover the natural flow of events and processes, in order to record how participants interpret them. Qualitative research is therefore used when the researcher intends to study subjects in their natural setting (Merriam, 1998:3). According to Cresswell (2003:182), qualitative research is an investigative process in which the researcher gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon by comparing and classifying data collected for the study. Because the researcher was studying visually impaired learners in their natural setting at the Khanyisa Special School, a qualitative research method was regarded as suitable for this study.
After choosing a research design, the research methodology needs to be planned in accordance. This will include information on the literature review and aspects of sampling, data collection and data analysis.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.5.1 Literature review
A literature review is a good point of departure for any research. In many cases, it is of great value to the researcher’s academic development, and assists him/her to become more knowledgeable in the field under investigation. Hart (1998:1) states that a review of relevant and recent literature is important for the researcher to acquire an understanding of the topic and to gain insight into what research has already been undertaken in the field, how the field has been researched, and what the key issues are. Such a literature review offers a point of reference for discussing and comparing events and aspects that surface during the research. The literature review undertaken for the purpose of this research provided the researcher with a wide knowledge base and increased understanding of related aspects, as suggested by Bell (2005:100).

Merriam (1998:51) states that research as found in a literature review is often cited to support current studies and to inform researchers about concerns that need extra scrutiny. A literature review will also indicate major criticisms of previous research undertaken into the topic (Bell, 2005:99). The literature review provided the research with information on how views of society changed (or remained the same) over centuries and what problems visually impaired people perceive as most important.

The literature review of this study was based on various local and international publications, as well as information obtained from the internet.

3.5.2 Sample
A sample is a section of the population considered for inclusion in a study and is therefore a small portion of the total set of objects, events or persons that
together comprise the subject of the study (Drew, Hardman and Hart, 1996:254). Struwig and Stead (2001:121) emphasise that maximizing the advantages of in-depth, purposeful sampling will do much to eliminate concerns about a small sample size. It is crucial to describe, justify and explain a small sample selection, so that others can judge its strengths and weaknesses (Ulin, Robinson and Tolley, 2005:55; De Vos, 2002:334).

In purposive sampling, according to Cohen and Manion (1994:89), researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample, based on their judgement of their typicality. In this study, the researcher made use of both purposive sampling and convenience sampling by choosing participants in terms of their experience regarding the topic and the location of the school in terms of distance to be travelled. The emphasises on the availability of participants until the required sample size has been obtained was considered as a very important aspect.

The sample for this research consists of twenty Senior Phase visually impaired adolescent learners enrolled at the Khanyisa Special School. The reason why the sample has been restricted to one school only, is that there is only one school for visually impaired learners in Nelson Mandela Bay. The sample from which data was collected, also includes teachers, learners and parents.

3.5.3 Research procedures
Permission for conducting the research enquiry was requested in writing from the Department of Education, the relevant school principal, teachers and parents and ethics clearance was obtained from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. After telephonic communication with the school principal of the Khanyisa Special School for Visually Impaired Learners a meeting was arranged with the teachers. The researcher visited the school in person to explain the purpose and procedures of the research to the teachers from the different grades who were invited to participate in the research.
The confidentiality and anonymity of the research were guaranteed to learners, teachers and parents, as suggested by Mouton and Marais (1998:157). All the information obtained from the participants will be kept confidential.

3.5.4 Data collection

The researcher used various ways, such as questionnaires and interviews, to elicit information from teachers, parents and learners.

- **Questionnaire**

  Questionnaires are printed lists of questions to be answered by a number of participants for the collection of data or as part of a survey (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 1995:1026). A structured questionnaire was designed in order to obtain the needed facts and opinions as suggested by De Vos (2002:153).

In constructing the questionnaire, the following guidelines as proposed by Struwig and Stead (2001:818-819), were followed:

- The questionnaire should reflect a quality design.
- It should contain precise and clear instructions on how to answer the questions.
- The wording of the questions should not influence the responses in any way.
- Enough time must be allowed to provide for completing the questionnaire (postal delays and other factors, needed to be considered as many parents resided out of town).

Questionnaires were chosen as a data collection method, because the nature and availability of the sample was complicated, many parents stayed outside the borders of Nelson Mandela Bay. They needed time to answer the questionnaires and post them back to the researcher. It is a sensitive matter, talking about the physical disability of one’s children. The questionnaire allowed the participants to answer in privacy and express their views in writing. Lastly, the questionnaire
ensured anonymity with the result that greater honesty and openness could be displayed.

Questionnaires best matched the purpose and flow of this research. This data collection method allowed teachers and parents, learners and children sufficient time and privacy to reflect on their answers in a positive environment, as suggested by Hawkins (2001:357) and Ulin, et al. (2005:60).

The researcher used the closed question technique, with “yes” or “no” answers only, but participants had to elaborate on the answer provided by them. The open-ended questions in this study proved to reveal valuable insights into the participants’ perceptions of the problem, allowing them to answer freely on how they understood the question.

The first part of the questionnaire covers demographic information to elicit objective information from the participants, as suggested by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996:251). The questions included information on gender and status of the participants, whether learner, teacher or parent.

The researcher included open-ended questions in order to obtain facts and opinions as information rich data from the visually impaired learners, their teachers and parents. Some questionnaires were personally hand delivered to local parents and teachers, while some questionnaires were mailed to parents residing at distant locations. Procedures and instructions regarding the completion of the questionnaire were explained clearly by telephone or in person. Participants were told to ask questions if they did not understand any questions as suggested by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996:254) and Struwig, and Stead (2001:92).

The completion of the questionnaires was based on a voluntary participation agreement from the participants’ side. The researcher informed the participants that the data would be used for research purposes only and that their identities would be kept confidential and anonymous. Participants’ names are not to be
revealed; instead, the researcher will use L1 to indicate a learner, P1 to indicate the parents of the learners and T1 to indicate what the teachers say about such a learner.

**Interviews**

Interviews were conducted based on an interview guide, which contained leading questions. Cozby (1997:96) recommends interviews, to allow the researcher to explain ambiguities and at the same time seek clarification from participants. This proved to be very advantageous where responses were incomplete. Another advantage was that interviews proved to be flexible; as a result, the researcher could obtain elaboration on the aspects under discussion.

All interview sessions were recorded. After the data analysis and interpretations, the researcher kept fully transcribed recordings of the interviews conducted for the purpose of this study, for possible verification at a later stage.

Interview sessions took place at the school. The participants preferred to remain anonymous; therefore, letters and numbers were given to all participants as explained before.

Interviews were conducted with learners to supplement the information obtained from the teachers and parents. The size of the sample group was small enough to conduct individual interviews. The researcher made use of informal interviews for learners who are using Braille. Individual interviews greatly enhanced the quality of the data and during interviews, the researcher gained valuable information from the non-verbal behaviour of the participants.

### 3.5.5 Data analysis and interpretation

Bell (2005:128) states that data analysis is a research technique for compiling a comprehensive report after interpretation. The process of examining, negotiating and incorporating multiple perspectives of data could serve to strengthen the final interpretation (Ulin, *et al.* 2005:62; De Vos, 2002:203). Data examining analysis and interpretation was based on how the researcher understood the participants’
responses in various contexts. During the analysis, specific themes seemed to emerge and all data were sorted and discussed under these themes.

For this study, the model for trustworthiness is that of Guba, which includes truth-value, applicability, considence and neutrality, as explained by Brynard and Hanekom (1997:29), as well as De Vos (2002:348).

3.5.6 Measures for trustworthiness

Guba’s model addresses ways to eliminate bias in qualitative analysis (De Vos, 2002:351). The aim is therefore to demonstrate that the research was conducted in a manner that ensures that the phenomena were accurately identified and met the criteria for trustworthiness.

- **Truth-value**

Truth-value is a criterion that assists the researcher in taking actions that produce the desired results (Kvale, 1996:50). Terreblanche and Durrheim (1999:433) add that truth-value presents an account of the problem as accurately as possible, corresponding to the underlying qualities in a real situation (Neuman, 2000:164). Mouton (1998:109) holds similar views about the truthfulness of research and argues that reports characterised by the avoidance of false or distorted accounts that could jeopardise the credibility of the research, contribute to truth-value.

Truth-value focuses on human experiences as they are lived and perceived by informants (De Vos, 2002:349). The researchers need to test their findings against the various participants from which the data was drawn or persons who are familiar with the phenomenon being studied. In the case of this study, the data collected from teachers, learners and parents were compared and analyzed against the background of a literature study.

- **Applicability**

According to De Vos (2002: 349), applicability refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings. However, applicability in
qualitative research suggests that the ability to generalise is not relevant in many qualitative research projects. The purpose of applicability is to describe a particular phenomenon or experience, and not to generalise it to others (De Vos, 2002:349; Schurink, 1998:331). In this regard, Struwig and Stead (2001:145) mention that in qualitative research, the sample sizes are often small, making external generalisation difficult.

Guba (De Vos, 2002:349) has suggested a second perspective, namely transferability. This means that the research will meet the criteria of applicability when the findings are placed in contexts outside the research. In other words, the extent to which the discoveries can be applied to a context similar to the one in which the research was conducted (De Vos, 2002:349). The researcher should therefore be able to transfer knowledge gained from the analysis and interpretation of collected data in one setting to another, similar setting. The researcher is of the opinion that most of the findings would also be true in most schools for the visually handicapped that are situated in disadvantaged areas such as townships.

**Consistency**

The third criterion of trustworthiness considers the consistency of the data. This means that the findings should be consistent if the enquiry were replicated with the same subjects, or in a similar context (De Vos, 2002:350). A research finding should also be consistent when a different researcher comes up with results at a different time, but under the same conditions (Mouton and Marais, 1998:144; Miles and Huberman, 1996:276). Consistency is also reflected when one part of the account does not contradict another part.

The researcher is of the opinion that the outcome of this research would be consistent if a similar sample of visually impaired adolescents in a different special school was used.
Neutrality

Neutrality refers to freedom from bias in research procedures and results. It is the degree to which the findings are based on information from the informants or situation, without any contamination by any bias, motivation and perspective the researcher may have, as explained by De Vos (2002:350) and Poggenpoel (1998:350). In qualitative research, the emphasis on neutrality shifts from the researcher to the data.

In this study, the neutrality of the data was considered, and the researcher did not choose participants known to her. The researcher met the participants for the first time when she visited the relevant school to request permission to conduct the research. Furthermore, the information obtained from participants was collected in a neutral environment, without the researcher influencing answers in any way, as suggested by De Vos (2002:351).

3.5.7 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to independent measures that confirm or contradict the findings (Struwig and Stead, 2001:145). In order to ward off any bias and verify data, triangulation should take place. One of many methodological means of triangulation is the use of three or more data collection methods within a single study. The use of multiple methods of data collection increases the reliability of a study (De Vos, 2002:359).

Babbie (2001:113), Struwig and Stead (2001:18) and De Vos (2002:359) also describe methodological triangulation as the employment of three or more methods to test the same phenomenon, to provide valid evidence. 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 the study (De Vos, 2002:351). In this study, the researcher performed methodological triangulation by using different methods of data collection, such as interviews, and questionnaires and made use of three groups of participants, namely teachers, parents, and learners in order to compare and verify data.
3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2001:158) have summarized the principles of research ethics. Applied to this study, these principles are:

- The researcher is clear about the nature of the agreement she has entered into with her research participants.
- The researcher has received permission from the Department of Education, the relevant school principal and participants to conduct the research at the Khanyisa Special School. Ethical clearance was obtained from NMMU.
- The researcher has reached agreement with the supervisor on the preservation and safekeeping the data obtained from the participants and the uses of the data.

These ethical research principles were in place and understood before the questionnaires were distributed. The researcher visited the Khanyisa Special School for visually impaired learners, where the purpose and procedures of the research were explained and teachers from different grades were invited to participate in the research. The participants were assured that participation would be on a voluntary basis.

3.7 SUMMARY

Chapter Three consists of a detailed discussion of the methodology and research design, based on a qualitative research model. This includes the rationale for using such a design and for choosing specific aspects within this methodology, such as selecting participants and substantiating reasons for using specific data collection instruments. Finally, measures for trustworthiness are explained and the sensitivity exercised pertaining to ethical considerations was clearly portrayed.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a discussion on the findings, based on the data obtained from the questionnaires completed by and the interviews held with the various respondents. From the information gained, a qualitative account was constructed, keeping in mind that no bias or preconceived notions should be allowed to findings to influence the findings. The account takes the format of a narrative approach, which at times is supported by direct and appropriate quotations from the transcribed interviews.

The sequence of reporting is based on the main themes that emerged from the data received from learners. This is followed by a discussion of the data received from parents and, lastly, a discussion of the data obtained from teachers. Where possible, the findings have been compared and contrasted with the relevant literature.

In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, reference is made to the participants by using letters and numbers, for example Learners: L1; Parents: P1; Teachers: T1; as explained in Chapter Three.

4.1.1 Demographical data on participants

At the school that formed the subject of the study, there were eighteen teachers, including the principal. The learner enrolment for 2007 was 250 learners, representing learners from Foundation Phase up to Senior Phase (Grade 12). As the researcher’s focus is on adolescent learners, only twenty totally blind adolescent learners in the Senior Phase were invited to take part in the study.

Although twenty interviews were envisaged, only ten interviews were executed. The reason for not achieving 100% participation in the interviews initially agreed
upon was that some learners were ill at the time; in addition, participation was affected by a boycott; a number of learners resided some distance from the school and did not come to school during a boycott. As the researcher could not visit them at their homes, some interviews did not materialise.

Twenty questionnaires were distributed to the parents, of which ten were returned. Ten questionnaires were distributed to the five participating teachers who each answered on two learners. Taking into consideration the time constraints due to the boycott, the researcher felt that she had a reasonable return of questionnaires and, combined with the data gathered during interviews, that the data is rich and fairly saturated. The following table gives a breakdown regarding participants’ home situations and/or roles:

**TABLE 1: Statistics on participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners who participated</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners living with grandparents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners living with both parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners living with single parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents who participated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers who participated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that more boys participated in the research project, can be attributed to the higher percentages of boys than girls staying in the school hostel. Another reason is that there were more totally blind boys than totally blind girls at the Khanyisa Special School during the study period.

Six of the participants stayed with a single female parent; only one is cared for by a single male parent. It is interesting to note that while three male parents had passed away, the other three had abandoned their families, shifting their parental duties onto their wives. In two cases, the mothers had passed away, and the learners stayed with their grandparents. In two cases, the fathers were totally...
absent from their children’s lives. Only one learner resided with both parents in a conventional family set-up.

It is very interesting to learn from the feedback gained from both the learners as well as from the teachers that the majority of single, female parents were very supportive and caring towards their children. The respondents expressed their dependence on their mothers, who appeared to be giving more emotional support to the respondents than any other person in the family. The researcher also perceived that these mothers took great pains to care for their families, in spite of financial difficulties, and in some cases with little or no support from other adult family members.

A perception that appeared to be deeply entrenched among the learners interviewed is that the non-involvement of their fathers (when they were still alive) flowed from their fathers’ embarrassment at their children’s disability. In one case, the father blamed the mother for the child’s disability. Another child who is cared for by a single male parent, expressed frustration at the fact that his father is not as supportive as the late mother used to be. This father provided basic necessities, such as food and clothes, but is otherwise very aloof and showed little interest in the child as a person. However, in all fairness, it could be argued that it may be more difficult for a man who has a full-time job, to also care for a family; especially if one of the children needs much extra support and help. In the Xhosa culture it is also not acceptable for men to show their emotions openly, so such fathers, many of them not well educated, would find it extremely difficult to support their children emotionally; especially a child with a severe handicap, such as blindness, who will most likely require a lot of extra emotional support.

At the Khanyisa Special School, the staff complement comprised of sixteen female teachers and only two male teachers. This could be ascribed to the fact that education generally does not attract as many males as females, but also because; fewer men may be inclined to apply for employment at a special school. From the full complement of eighteen teachers, only four female teachers and one male teacher volunteered to become part of the research. Each of these
teachers submitted the names of two learners whose parents had agreed that they may participate in this research. It is generally accepted that learners with special needs were in need of intensive and extensive physical and emotional support and empathy. The researcher noted that the learners perceived their female teachers to, in general, show more warmth and empathy than their male teachers. The learners also reported that they felt more confident to discuss their problems with the female teachers.

4.2 FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The results and interpretation of the findings are discussed below according to the main themes that emerged from the data.

4.2.1 THEME ONE: AFFECTIVE AND PERSONALITY TRAITS

Learners:

Question 2: Your hobbies. Question 3(a): Things you like.

Four learners played soccer for the blind, while four played cricket for the blind. The learners reported that their participation in sport motivated them and made them feel proud of themselves. These learners also reported that participating in sport is interesting and not only entertained them, but also made them feel fulfilled. Two female learners stated that they enjoyed listening to the radio and music, and four learners stated that they preferred tranquillity over anything else. All stated that they often listened to sport commentary on the radio, especially to cricket and soccer commentary. Learners provided answers such as (L1): “Sport, music, cricket for blind, soccer for the blind and go-ball were my favourite hobbies”. L3 stated: “Radio, music and cricket for the blind were what I like most”. One learner, L4, stated that apart from playing sport and listening to the radio, “friends and family” were what he appreciated most, while another learner (L6) enjoyed wrestling for the blind. Four of the learners stated that they liked music very much, and all ten sang in the school choir. The learners reported that music could make one laugh, cry and feel unhappy at the same time. All stated that singing made them happy most of the time and that singing is an easy
They expressed their love for singing as follows: “I am using my voice, and while I am singing, my body will be moving also”; “My feelings about the lyrics and the sound can be expressed by the way my body react, e.g. by swinging, clapping hands or dancing or swaying in beat with the rhythm”.

Learners tended to identify sport and music as items that brought them joy and happiness. Participating in sport not only provided them with entertainment, but also gave them hope and confidence in their own capabilities.

**Interpretation:**
Seven learners stated that they wanted to be musicians, but none had mastered any musical instruments as yet. The closest they had come to playing an instrument is that some of them would drum the rhythm or beat of the music they listened to on a flat surface like a table. The school had no musical instruments, and no form of music, apart of the choir, is being taught at the school.

Not only for the visually impaired learners from Khanyisa Special School, but for most visually impaired people in general, music is a paramount source of entertainment, and a means of escaping reality; as it is also for many sighted people. Some learners indicated that they trained their voices to become members of the school choir, because financial problems made it difficult for them to afford expensive musical instruments.

One learner took part in wrestling for the blind, but none other gave any indication of participation in sport. No sporting codes are offered at the school.

**Learners:**
**Question 5: What do you like most about yourself?**
In spite of deeply entrenched fears and dislikes, as reported in Question 3(b), eight learners reported positively about accepting their blindness as something God brought to them. They reported that they loved themselves and tended to ignore negative remarks from other people. Of the eight learners, four reported that they were good at explaining something to the class and felt confident in standing up in front of their peers to present work.
Almost all of them emphasised that they were not ashamed of who and what they were and stated that they felt confident that they could do anything they were asked to do by the teacher.

**Interpretation:**
It seems as if most of the visually impaired learners had made peace with and accepted their disability as something they had to live with for the rest of their lives. They took their visual impairment as something given to them by God; as something they could not run away from.

Very significant though is the fact that none of the learners singled out any specific attribute about themselves that they liked most.

**Learners:**

**Question 6: What do you like least about yourself / your situation?**

Although all the learners mentioned that some community members still used insulting names when calling them, such as “Mfamandini (meaning: you blind), come here!” Such language deeply affected and eroded their confidence. They were trying to live life to the fullest, and then someone would rudely remind them that they were blind. Feelings of resentment and anger would inevitably surface. Three learners stated that they usually became short tempered when someone degraded or humiliated them. L2: “I am short tempered when I am hurt or when you hurt me”. As a result of feeling hurt or depressed, they would in turn act rudely towards others, and afterwards feel guilty about their conduct. L1: “To take my anger to someone else while that person has done nothing to me”. Three of them also confessed that although they were trying to control their temper, it would often flare up.

The majority of learners did not name any aspect about themselves or their situation as something they did not like. L5: “Nothing, I like everything about myself, because I is born like this. Even that I have mild stroke, one side is not working, but I like myself”. L7: “Nothing that I do not like about myself, though I am blind, but I can socialize with other people”.

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Two learners stated that they hated to be dependent on others and preferred to be on their own. They regretted not being able to do simple things, like cooking for themselves. L3: “To depend to other people for everything, I do not like that”. L6 complained that “I do not like my tiredness; I always feel tired, especially after school and to be dependent to someone else”. Learner L8 felt embarrassed to go town using the white cane, as he felt it advertised his disability: “I want to be able to walk without a walking stick”.

One learner (L9) stated that he could not refrain from mercilessly teasing others, although he knew that he is hurting their feelings. He always laughed and made fun of his blindness and that of others. He admitted that he realised it is wrong to tease others, but felt that as they could not change their situation, they should therefore adopt a humanistic approach and try to make light of it. This is his way of dealing with his blindness.

**Interpretation:**
According to Kapp (1991:364), a child’s disability is a reality that cannot be eliminated. He/she should become a co-inhabitant of a sighted world. The visually impaired learner will generally experience difficulties to accept his/her disability if his/her parents are negative towards his/her impairment (Kapp, 1991:364). Some participating learners had accepted their disability and were trying to move on, while others were taking their stress out on their peers by teasing them and by being short-tempered with them. Two learners (L2 and L6) find it difficult or impossible to join their peer group to work and play, and to talk about similar experiences, sharing strong signs of withdrawal and even denial.

**Learners:**
**Question 16: How do you react when you cannot get something right?**
Nine out of the ten learners reported that they experienced negative emotions when they could not get something right. This ranged from anger to frustration. L4: “I get angry and hurt, although I am usually patient”. L6: “I throw it away, leave it and get frustrated”. L7: “I become frustrated and stressful; I get too hurt and worry”. L5: “I feel hurt”. L8: “I feel so worried; I pray to my Lord”.

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Only one learner (L3) reported that he “just asks someone to help him”. This learner did not report getting upset or angry when he could not get something right.

**Interpretation:**
Subconsciously, these learners tried to hide their impairment by thinking up excuses for their inexplicable behaviour (Landsberg, Kruger and Nel, 2005:336). The inability to perform daily activities made them feel life failures and they vented their frustration and anger in negative ways, such as swearing and screaming.

**Learners:**
**Question 17: What do you find fun to do?**
**Question 21: What makes you happy?**
Five learners find listening to music, radio and TV news fun. L10: “Cricket, soccer for blind people and school work; it’s when my team wins the match”. L9: “Singing and listening to music keeps me at peace”. Five learners mentioned that they liked to socialise with their friends after school hours or during weekends, chatting or listening to music.

Five learners also enjoyed learning new things, like computer skills. Their computers had Braille-like keyboards and voice monitors that guided them in the correct use of computers. These learners could not use normal computers at all, because they were totally blind. Two learners (L2 and L6) preferred to be alone, finding peace and tranquillity in cleaning their hostel rooms while listening to music on the radio.

**Interpretation:**
It is clear that the visually impaired learners enjoyed socializing and listening to music in the same way as any other adolescents. Their opportunities for recreation at the Khanyisa Special School were very limited though. Using the computers during school hours seemed to be very popular, but these are not available after school, so they are very much left to amuse themselves.
Interesting those learners L2 and L6 affirmed their tendency to withdraw from their peers.

**Learners:**

**Question 18: How do you handle criticism?**

**Question 19: What do you do when you feel irritable or bad tempered?**

Five learners stated that they ignored the person criticising them. L2: “Sometimes I do not take it serious or I tell him/her that I do not like that”. L4: “I explain why I am like this or ignore that people”. L5: “I ignore that person as if he/she is not talking to me”. L6: “I ignore him/her and let that person to talk alone”. L1 and L7 agreed that they felt hurt. One learner (L8) stated that he would remonstrate with the person to stop it, while L9 and L10 stated that they always reported such incidents to an adult. One learner (L3) stated that if it is constructive criticism, he always tried to correct what needed to be corrected. Many learners reported that they “ignore” the person. On a question what they would do if a parent or teacher is the one criticising; they all seemed to stick to “ignoring” it, avoiding answering the question directly.

All ten learners stated that when they felt irritable, they would walk away from the person who is upsetting them and retire to bed or to their rooms to ease the pain they were feeling at that moment. If they could not go to their rooms, they could become emotionally upset and lose their tempers, saying things they might regret later. None of them used any physical activity, like exercising, to rid themselves of their frustrations.

**Interpretation:**

From the evidence obtained from respondents, all learners reported that they handled irritability and criticism in a mature and civilised manner, in that conflicts were avoided by leaving the scene and retiring to bed to cool down. This is, however, not a true reflection of the situation, because in responding to other questions, L9 stated that he liked to irritate others; L2 stated that she reacted poorly; while L3 stated that he became stressful or violent. Some participants swore and screamed back.
Learners:

Question 3(b): Things you dislike.

Question 20: What makes you cry?

One learner (L9) commented that he did not like to be touched, while two stated that they disliked remarks such as “Do not forget that you are blind”. (L9) mentioned that he became frustrated and angry when one of his partially blind peers hit him and then run away, knowing full well that he would not know who the culprit is, taunting: “You will hit the air, not me, and I will hit you and stand behind you”. This is happening in the school premises and done by other partially blind learners. Another learner (L6) reported that he is often verbally provoked by a family member’s comment: “Mfamandini!” (meaning: You, blind one!) and would then become the laughing stock of all present. This upset him tremendously and he would vent his anger by swearing back.

Ten learners mentioned that they usually cried if someone provoked or insulted them, because they felt hurt and helpless, with nowhere to go. L7: “When my father passed away, I cried a lot”. Four learners disliked people who were violent, stating emphatically that they wished nothing to do with people who practised physical abuse. One complained about alcoholism in the family, where drunkenness usually developed into verbal and physical abuse that caused a lot of conflict. For some, alcoholism and abuse at home were so bad that they preferred to remain in the hostel even during vacations or weekends, because of the fact that there is very little peace and calm at their homes.

Three learners reported that there is nothing that they did not like about themselves and that they had not asked to be afflicted by a disability. Feeling pity for them would not change their condition. All stated that they did not want to be treated differently and did not want others to pity them.

Reporting that there is nothing they did not like about themselves, three learners stated that “feeling pity for them” would not change their condition, indicating a false sense of acceptance and relating to the interpretation of Question Five.
Interpretation:
The possibility is that they were too embarrassed to acknowledge any negative aspect about themselves or their situation. One could therefore accept that these learners were in denial and had not come to terms with their impairment and still needed to learn to recognise their own weaknesses.

It became clear to the researcher that some of the learners were emotionally traumatised, to the point that they even feared going home. Four learners had been physically and verbally abused, due to the excessive use of alcohol in their families. The same four learners also indicated that they were not willing to be bullied by their peers or family. One reported that in order to hide his anger, he would leave the scene and retire to bed.

It is clear that these learners were highly sensitive to the jokes and pranks played on them. They experienced these as an insult and it hurt their feelings. Because of these jokes and pranks, they tended to withdraw from others. Unfortunately, their inability to stand up for themselves in such situations will ultimately lead to loss in confidence and low self-esteem. All of the learners cried when things became difficult for them, for example when a family member passed away or when their frustrations got the upper hand.

Learners:
Question 28: Do you feel foolish when you have to say things in front of other learners? Question 29: Why?
Seven learners stated that they had no problem to stand in front of the class and explain some activities. L3 and L4 stated that they were confident, as they knew their peers and they were there to learn. Three learners (L2, L6 and L9) reported that they were afraid, shy or had no confidence. L2: “I am scared, shy, and afraid of other people or many people”; L6: “Because they laugh at me and they made me feel scared to talk in front of the class”; L9: “I have no confidence in me at all”.

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Interpretation:
The seven learners who implicated that they felt confident in the class most probably felt that way because of their perception that their environment is safe and familiar. None of these seven learners indicated that they had any lack of confidence in front of relative strangers. The three learners that reported that they were afraid displayed a seriously low level of self-esteem and a serious lack of confidence. One learner is very shy and introverted and hardly ever spoke. This corresponds with information obtained in respect of Questions 2 (parents and teachers' responses) and Question 16.

Parents and teachers:
Question 2: Describe the child or learner's personality.
All parents as well as five teachers agreed that the learners were generally kind-hearted and gentle and shunned violence. All said that the learners generally showed respect to other people and placed a high premium on peace and harmony. Parent1 and P2 mentioned that their children were determined to work hard to get a good academic mark. P1 also mentioned: “He has a low self-esteem and he respects other people”. P1: “He tends to withdraw and never talks about his future”. P2: “She is very shy; quiet and always down”. T2 also made a similar comment about L2 that she tended to withdraw herself from others and seemed lost in her thoughts. This is in line with what the learner stated about herself.

Interpretation:
From what is reported by parents and teachers, it became clear that there is a perception that none of these children is ever violent or purposely rude. Most were determined to work hard in order to fulfil their goals and not disappoint their parents. Unfortunately this is not always true as determined by answers from learners themselves and from the evidence of poor academic results.
Parents:

**Question 13: Does the child believe in him-/herself? Why?**

All ten parents stated that their children believed in themselves. Their responses included information about acceptance, such as (P2): “I can see she already accepted her status and she is coping”. P3: “He accepted himself as he is. He does not blame God for his blindness”; and P9: “Although he is blind he is not shamed of himself and he can do things that other children do”.

Other answers focused on coping. (P4): “Being blind did not stand in his way”; and P8: “Because he never gives up when he did something”. Two parents felt confident that their children would achieve their goals. P5: “Because he thinks he can reach his goals” and P10: “What he wants to do, he will achieve”.

**Interpretation:**

Some parents’ responses concerning their perceptions of their children’s capabilities and self-confidence did not correspond with the information gathered from the learners. For example, the information given by L2 and P2; L6 and P6; and L9 and P9, did not correspond at all. This may be due to parents giving the answers they think to be correct.

Teachers:

**Question 16: Does the learner believe in him-/herself? (Is he/she confident, with high self-esteem?) Why?**

The teachers seemed to know their learners well, because to a large degree their answers corresponded to that of the learners. Four teachers (each teacher answered for two learners) agreed that seven learners were confident and had high self-esteem.

**Interpretation:**

Teachers (L2, L6 and L9) agreed with learners and their parents that these learners were very shy and that they were always quiet, wanted to be by themselves and had low self-esteem. They also agreed that the learners did not
mind to share their views with the class. The information given by participants generally corresponded with this.

**Learners:**

**Question 30: Do you wish you were somebody else? Question 31: Why?**

Eight learners stated that they liked themselves the way they were, adding that God had created them that way and they cannot change their blindness. L1: “Yes, sometimes, because things would be not as difficult as the way they were now”; L1: “It would be easy for me to do things for myself”; L2 said: “I would like to be you (the researcher). You were educated and maybe your things are very easy”.

**Interpretation:**

Most learners evaded or avoided the real question whether they wanted to be somebody else or be like somebody else (which is quite a normal sentiment during the adolescent phase when personality and a search for identity comes to the fore). Most reverted to the fatalistic outlook of “God created me like this” and “No one will change the way I look”.

**Learners and parents:**

**Question 20: Do you blame someone for the blindness of your child? Why? Question 32: How do you feel about being visually impaired?**

Two parents (P7 and P8) blamed physicians and nurses from the Groote Schuur Hospital for the blindness of their children. P7: “Because I find out on the second day of his birth that he has a problem in his eyes, and I did report to the nurses and the doctor. Glaucoma can be stopped if you treated it at an early stage and I thought nurses and doctors were professionals”. P8: Doctors “X” and “Y” of Groote Schuur Hospital”. One parent (P4) blamed the Gelvandale rugby team as the cause of her child’s blindness. “He was injured in a rugby match at Gelvandale School in 2001, when he was doing Grade 9”.

All learners initially felt hurt and could not understand why they suffered from a disability, but had come to accept their blindness. They were proud of
themselves; life is proceeding as if nothing is wrong. They stated that it is no use to hold on to their sorrows, as it would not change their blindness. L1: “Most of the time, I have no problem, but I cannot write because I cannot see lines or what I write”. L2: “I have mixed feelings”; “I feel bad and good at the very same time, my bad feeling is from not finding opportunities as a sighted learner and it is difficult for a blind person to be a nurse”. L8: “Before I was so worried, but now I am ok”. L9: “I feel bad, I was born visually impaired” L3: “This does not disturb me, I was born partially sighted”. L5: “I have no problem; it is Lord who loves me to be like this”. L7: “I am proud of myself; there are things about myself which a sighted person could not do”. L10: “Now there is no problem, but at first, it was difficult to accept it and it was like I was different”. L4: “It is hurting when I cannot do something right, but on the other hand; I am safe from many things in the location, such as liquor and drugs”.

Interpretation:

Three parents were bitter and resentful about their children’s disability. The issue whether their children’s blindness had been caused by the aforementioned persons or institutions were not closed yet and the wounds were still raw. The other responses were neutral; although the parents were saddened by their childrens’ blindness, they did not allocate blame to anybody.

To the researcher, it seems as if all learners had reached the stage of putting the world of sight behind them. They had made peace with their world of darkness. However, how sincere and genuine this state of mind could be in the adolescent phase, could be questioned.

4.2.2 THEME TWO: SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Learners:

Five learners were happy when they were with friends listening to a sport match on the radio, especially when the team they favoured, won the match. Answers included (L2): “To be with other people, singing” and L7: “Sport, class work and friends makes me happy”. Three learners were most happy when they were with their family during holidays. L3: “To receive a call from my mother and hear that my family is alright, that makes me happy”; L5: “To be with my family during holidays”; and L9: “Peace in my family”. Two learners (L1 and L8) mentioned things like “I am happy, because I am at school doing everything in my learning, and “When I pass the tests or exams that I wrote, that makes me happy a lot”.

Three of the learners stated that they shared their secrets with their mothers, because their mothers would guide them in the right direction. L2: “I trust her, because she keeps my secrets”; L4: “She gives me supportive advice and she is everything to me”; and L8: “Because she always motivates me”.

**Interpretation:**

The researcher noticed that most blind learners, like other adolescents, like to socialise with friends talking about things of interest in their lives. They told their secrets to other visually impaired friends, because they trusted them. The visually impaired learners would also often form lasting friendships with sighted adolescents, who socialised with them and assisted them by holding their hand or shoulder while walking about.

Three learners showed a very strong sense of trust in their mothers, with whom they shared their secrets. This could also be an indication of still being very dependent on the mothers.

**Parents and teachers:**

**Question 3:** Describe the relationship with this child and his/her brothers and sisters; **Question 4:** How is the relationship between this child and other family members?; **Question 5:** Is the child well liked by community members?; **Question 6:** Why? / Why not?; **Question 3:** Is the learner well liked by his/her peers?; **Question 4:** Why is the learner popular or not liked
by his/her peers?; Question 5: Is the learner well liked by teachers?; Question 6: Why?

All ten parents stated that that their children were accepted, loved and given a chance to express themselves at home and in the community. P1: “They love each other”; ‘Siblings share everything”; “They also include him in everything that brothers and sisters were doing”. P2 stated: “We are very close with her, but it’s not because she is blind, even before she is blind, she has been sick for the half of her age”; L2 continued: “Relationship is very strong than ever”; P3: “He likes to be with his family as he does to his sisters”; and P5: “He has a good relationship with his brothers and sisters”.

Responses included the following: “It is perfect, the community treat him like others”; “Yes, he is always out with others and he does not keep himself indoors”; “Yes’ because we do not keep her inside the house, her life is not changed”; “Yes, because he is a disciplined child, a friendly and a talkative child”; “Yes, because he respects other people”.

The teachers reported regarding L1: “He gets along very well with his peers; because he is trustworthy” regarding L2: “He respects other people, always tame”. T7: “Always doing his work willingly”. T1: “like to assist other peers and other people”. All five teachers stated: “Yes, we like them, because they are trustworthy”; “honest and some learners are talkative”; while others, such as (L2, L6 and L9): “Are very shy, withdrawn and quiet at all times”.

Interpretation:

All parents and teachers stated that the learners did not have a problem to form relationships with other peers, more especially with other visually impaired learners. Teachers also reported to get on well with their learners and that they find them trustworthy. The teachers tried to combine the more shy learners with the more talkative ones, to build their self-esteem.

The researcher viewed the reported high level of acceptance of these learners by everybody surrounding them, as perhaps partly based on feelings of guilt and
pity for the learners’ blindness. How good the relationships are at home and in the family did not always sound true either. The level of acceptance by people outside the family could unfortunately not be determined. Learners’ answers also did not all correspond with responses given under Theme 1, Question 1, about not wanting to go home or being teased and called names.

Apart from, L9, who preferred to stay at the hostel during weekends due to the difficult conditions at home, three learners, mentioned that they preferred to be with their families, because they felt secured, loved and protected when with them. All parents stated that their children liked to socialise with other family members, peers and community members.

All teachers agreed with the parents that the learners did not have a problem to form friendships. It is not difficult for them to socialise with other learners in the school and they were willing to assist one another. For example, if one learner is partially blind, she would be willing to help those who were totally blind by reading to them or by recording notes.

4.2.3 THEME THREE: FUTURE ASPIRATIONS AND CAREER OPTIONS

Learners:

Question 4: What you want to become one day?
The answers of learners regarding what they wanted to become after completing their schooling varied widely. Two learners felt strongly that they wanted to be of service to other less fortunate people. For instance, L1 dreamt of becoming a minister of religion: “Share good news to the nation and to help Gods’ children spiritually”. L2: “I want to become either a Social Worker or Lawyer”. L3: “I want to join the communication media by becoming a Broadcaster”. L6: “I want to be on television”. Three learners (L2, L4 and L5) indicated that they would like to become lawyers, while another three (L7, L8 and L10) reported that they wanted to embark on some business venture. Only one learner gave no indication of what his vision for his future is.
Interpretation:
This group of learners had the same dreams and ambitions as sighted adolescents. Their ambitions made them feel important and as capable as their sighted peers.

Parents:
Question 7: What future plans does he/she talk about?
Four parents stated that their children wanted to be lawyers and help people fight for their rights. P4: “To be a successful lawyer and be helpful to community”. P5: “He wants to be a lawyer”. P6: “He plans to be a lawyer”. P7: “Working, married and has his own family as a lawyer”. However, the parent is not citing the same preferred career as her child. Two parents stated that their children wanted to be social workers so that they could help other people with their social problems. P2: “She wants to be a Social Worker”. Another two parents indicated that their children wanted to be entrepreneurs: “He wants to have a business and employ the community”; while one stated that her son wanted to have good job and have his own family. Another parent (P1) left the space blank, giving no response. P3: “He sees his self as a broadcaster”. P8 agreed with her child about what the child wanted to become one day and insisted that this must be achieved. P9: “He wants to be a social worker”; and P10 “He wants to be a business man”.

Interpretation:
Feedback from most parents corresponded with what their children said, although there were some discrepancies. Two parents reported specific career choices, while their children were not clear on what they wanted to become. This indicates a lack of communication between these parents and their children. Most parents seemed to be confident that their children would ultimately reach their goals.

Teachers:
Question 9: What future plans does he/she talk about?
Eight responses from the five teachers corresponded with the learners’ responses. Two teachers were very concerned about learners L5 and L10, who
were not coping with their work. These teachers (T5 and T10) felt that the specific learners may cope in “Business, but learners need to put more effort in their work to fulfil their goals”.

**Interpretation:**
The responses from the five teachers regarding the ten learners’ future careers seemed to correspond. However the teachers also seem to lack clarity regarding a proposed career in business: some learners chose subjects that do not correspond with their proposed careers. This section will be discussed in more detail alongside the section on their subject choices and results in Theme Six.

**Learners:**
**Question 12: What do you want to do after leaving school?**
Eight of the learners would prefer to carry on with their studies, if they could be supported financially. One wanted to open her own retail shop, while one wanted to work as a broadcaster: Other responses included (L1): “I want to carry on with my studies doing reverend-ship or Theology from the University”; and L4:”I will be studying law”.

Some considered alternate choices if they would not be able to follow their first choice. L5: “If I did not do well in my studies of being a lawyer, I will do business, which will help me for living”.

**Interpretation:**
Learners were generally aiming high, which is good, but they also needed to be realistic. Although most had a positive attitude about carrying on with their studies, their academic records were not always supporting their career choices. Challenges facing the learners will be discussed in Theme Four.

**Parents:**
**Question 1: What do you think this child will be doing in ten years’ time?**
Six parents stated that their children would be working as entrepreneurs in ten years’ time. Four parents stated that their children would be working as
successful lawyers, while one parent stated that her daughter would be working as a social worker. P1: “He will be working”; P2: “She will be a social worker”; P8: “He will be working as successful lawyers”; while P10 stated that her son would be engaged in a business venture in ten years’ time.

**Interpretation:**
Some parents tried to be realistic; and understood that their children were struggling to master their learning; therefore, they were aware of their children’s learning difficulties and acknowledged that there may be problems. On the other hand, the parents had very high expectations from their children, irrespective of the child’s ability to perform.

**Teachers:**
**Question 1: Where do you see this learner in ten years’ time?**
The teachers mentioned that all the learners could be working as businessmen/-women. Teachers were of the opinion that learners L1, L2 L3, L4, L6 and L7 could fulfil their dreams, with some help from stakeholders at home, school, the community and government. They not only needed help to perform academically, but also needed financial and emotional help. One teacher commented that some learners “need one-on-one special needs drilling or teaching, and with big class numbers, that is difficult to happen”.

**Interpretation:**
The teachers seemed to be optimistic and confident in the ability of their learners. They clearly wanted the best for their learners. The teachers endeavoured to motivate and give hope to their learners.

**4.2.4 THEME FOUR: CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES FACING THESE LEARNERS**

**Learners:**
**Question 15: What are the most difficult things for you to do?**
All ten learners complained about never being taught mobility independence through using the walking stick. Therefore they could not go to town to do their shopping by themselves. L9: “To go to town and to read messages from my cellphone”. They lamented that they had to depend on someone else at all times. Other common complaints were that they could not do ATM withdrawals, could not read cellphones messages, and could not cook for themselves, having to wait for someone to prepare a meal for them. Some stated that it is difficult for them to read Braille or to use a computer. Two learners stated that they were trying to do things on their own, although they sometimes hurt themselves. L7 is very optimistic: “Nothing is difficult for me; I can come to school by myself and I can cook for me”; “I do not tell myself that I am blind”; and “I try to do it myself”. L6: “To go alone out of school; to ask someone to do something for me and sometimes the person asked, refused to help me”.

L2: “It is difficult to do computer or music, because there is no music instruments; no conductor and no teacher to teach computer”. L3: “To do withdrawals from the bank”; L4: “to choose and buy clothes in terms of colour”. L8: “To read Braille written note or prints”.

Interpretation:
Learners gave various reasons why it is difficult for them to perform daily activities. However, L7 seemed to be used to the situation in which he find himself and is trying to adapt himself to the conditions at hand.

Parents:

Question 16: What are the three most difficult things in having and bringing up a blind child?
All parents and guardians (the grandparents) cited the dependency of their blind children as the most difficult aspect of bringing them up. Financial aspects also caused difficulty. P6: “Child grant has been possessed by Government and it is very hard now”. L7: “At all times, there must be somebody next to him; to take him out and I must have money”. L3: “He is unable to go alone; he is not able to do things on his own and he depends on someone else and it is not easy to be at
places where there are many people, e.g. church and shopping malls”. L1: “always keep an eye on him each and every minute; protect him for not get hurt; remove all hazard objects near the child”. L5: “Helping him dressing himself; accompanying him to go to the hospital for his check-up”.

Other difficulties had to do with the child gaining independence. L4: “He has no friends around him; you cannot leave him alone and blind children cannot go to town without the supervision of the parent”. L9: “He cannot do shopping; he can’t prepare food for himself and can’t go alone”. L6: “When she started to walk, I struggled a lot; when she eats, she touches the food with hands”. L10: “I became worried when my child is starting his blindness while other children can see” and “it is difficult to leave him alone and poorly developed social relationships”. L2: “The time when the social workers and doctors told me she is partially blind, the process of changing life and dealing with acceptance of the blindness of my child is a difficult thing to do”.

**Interpretation:**
All parents experienced similar problems in bringing up their visually impaired children. The most serious aspect seemed to be the life-long responsibility to care and protect their blind child, which clearly and obviously rested heavily on their shoulders. They were afraid for their child’s physical and emotional wellbeing and were reluctant to expose their child to the world and did not easily trust others to take good care of their child.

The parents were also worried about the child’s social relationships, which is in contrast to what is stated earlier about the child being accepted by siblings, family and the community at large, and abuse. They wanted the child to become independent, but seemed to lack the skills and knowledge to teach him or her to achieve that.

The financial aspects did not feature prominently in these answers. This is in contrast with their previously stated dependence on and desire for State funding in the form of grants or the subsidising of schooling and health services.
Learners:

Question 22: Do you often lie awake at night worrying about things? If yes, mention some of your worries.

Five learners experienced no worries or problems with their sleeping routine. The other five learners answered in the affirmative. Some of the reasons given, were that they were thinking about the financial problems of the family, due to their single mother’s unemployment. L1: “Thinking about financial problems from my home”; L8: “Because my mother is unemployed”; “My sister is doing Grade 12, and how will we cope with our financial problems?”.

Some would like to, but could not go home during school holidays, because there would be no money to return to school after the holidays. One learner reported that he is compelled to ask someone he knew whether he could stay over during holidays. This person is not a relative, but the learner had no choice, as no one is working at home and no grant from Government is available.

Interpretation:

Half of the learners were not much concerned about their position or their family’s problems. The other half, unfortunately, took life very seriously and carried a heavy burden of concern about financial problems, a parent serving a prison sentence, no one working in the family, and alcoholism and violence in the family. In one case, a sister is doing Grade 12 and the mother is not working. The fact that the family is facing financial problems and he could not help out, was of great concern to the learner. Interestingly, learners did not mention concerns about their own future.

4.2.5 THEME FIVE: EMOTIONAL, ACADEMIC AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM HOME, SCHOOL AND GOVERNMENT

Learners:

Question 1: Tell me more about your family.

Most reported fairly positively about their immediate families. Seven learners stated that they lived with their mothers, were encouraged in their studies and
guided towards a specific career by their parents. They were motivated, encouraged and acknowledged the importance of education in their lives and for their future. L5: “My mother loves me; and urges me in my studies”.

Two of the learners who lived with their grandparents were not satisfied with life in the extended family home. They complained that instead of getting the needed support from the family, there is always a family conflict, especially during weekends. L9: “In my home, there is no peace at all, there is always conflict in my family; and “My aunt is drinking alcohol, and after that, she always says hurting words towards the members of the family or to me”. One learner even mentioned that every month, his grandparents were receiving a Child Grant from government, but not one month had they sent him pocket money. During most school holidays, he did not go home, because there would not be money to pay the travelling expenses return to school after the holidays.

Interpretation:
Although circumstances were difficult and most of the parents were unemployed or pensioners, they gave what they had, and with enormous and unconditional love. Not all parents were causing violence in their homes; only one learner (L9) cited alcohol problems in the family. According to Gous and Mfazwe (1998:57), some families have close, caring and loving environments, while other families are falling apart and not functioning well. The authors further state that disagreements between parents or guardians about how to raise a child may cause tension in the family.

Although parents usually try their best when bringing up children, some make serious mistakes, such as pressuring their children to perform higher than their ability, while some overprotect them from the outside world. According to Gous and Mfazwe (1998:57), because of their children’s visual impairments, some parents show little interest; because of feelings of guilt and/or helplessness or become too strict and overprotective. In the case of most of the learners taking part in this study, they are from poor, disadvantaged and mostly illiterate families.
Learners:

Question 13: What skills will you need to achieve your goals?

Question 14: What are you doing to make sure that you will be able to do this?

Four learners (L1, L3, L4 and L9) stated that they would need computer skills to achieve their goals. One (L8) mentioned the need to acquire different skills: “Walking stick skills” so that they could become independent and not need to rely on somebody else to go to town. Two learners stated that they were studying very hard, but because of the conditions in which they were studying, their hard work would not be evident, because there were no supportive materials like Braille production machines or large-print photocopy machines at their school. Their tape recorders were very old and were not producing a good quality sound, so it is at times hard to hear what had been taped. There were also not enough recorders for each of them, so they had to share with each other. One learner (L4) mentioned that he is not adept at using Braille and still needed more practise to master it. Another learner misinterpreted the question and said that he would like to use Braille.

Learner L1 wanted to: “practise computer and read Bible every day”; while L2 would prefer “Busy at school doing music”. Learner L3 complained: “At the moment, no one is helping us during computer periods, so we left alone to fiddle for ourselves and try to type; and we are using earphones which support us to understand what we are doing”. L4 realized that he needed “to study hard from now onwards”.

Interpretation:
Some learners seemed to know exactly what skills were needed to achieve their goals, but most were very vague as to the actual skills they needed and what they could do themselves to accomplish their goals. Some mentioned other skills such as knitting, but there seemed to be little relation between the skills they needed to achieve their goals and what they were actually studying and practising. It is clear that all learners were blaming the school for not meeting their needs, while the school is blaming Government for not supporting it with the
necessary materials. No one wanted to take any blame; everybody is shifting the blame onto someone else.

Parents:
Question 11: What can the school do to help the child to fulfil his/her dream?
The parents wanted their children to be helped, guided and counselled by “the relevant professional stakeholder at the school”, because they knew what the study ability of the child was, based on the child’s record. Parents also felt that not enough is being done to make learners computer literate and that more skills should be taught to help learners work independently in the future, so that they could earn money for a living. One parent also stated: “These subjects are difficult to be mastered by them”; and felt that the Khanyisa Special School must develop technical courses which should be compulsory and suitable for blind children. Another change parents wanted, is increased practise in the use of Braille and the introduction of teaching, as these skills would help the children become independent citizens. All parents wanted the Government to assist and provide learners with the services of relevant professionals, such as social workers, nurses, psychologists and Special Needs teachers.

Interpretation:
The parents obviously wanted the best opportunities for their children and it is fair to insist on more skills training at school. However, they showed very limited insight in curriculum development and all the criteria that must be met for any child to further his/her studies after Grade 12.

Parents:
Question 12: What can you as parents do to help the child to fulfil that dream?
Nine parents responded positively: “Encouraging, supporting and helping their children in their studies”. They were “motivating their children to stay positive at all times”; and “encouraging their children to believe in God, because everything is possible to Him”.

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Interpretation:
Parents displayed a positive attitude towards their children and learning. Parents were further professing that they wished to see their children’s needs being met, particularly their need for quality education.

Rearing children is difficult under any circumstances, but bringing up a child with a serious problem such as blindness, complicates and compounds matters even more. The emotional burden on a parent, who is alone in this situation due to the partner rejecting both parent and child, is not mentioned, but obviously impacts on the quality of the emotional support the parent can provide.

Teachers:
Question 14: What can parents do to help the learner to achieve that dream?
Five teachers stated: “Parents must try to motivate their children to explore other avenues such as computer skills; weaving; carpentry and music”; and “They must always show unconditional and eternal love to their children”.

Interpretation:
Teachers suggested that parents must consider other avenues to find help for their children. Where parents were unemployed, they needed to try earning some kind of income. However, no concrete suggestions were made in this regard.

Teachers:
Question 13: What can the school do to help the learner to fulfil that dream?
All five teachers stated that the school should commit itself to offer improved computer skills to learners, while specific technical and craft skills should also be taught to all learners. The need for skills in handwork, like weaving and knitting, and technical skills, like operating a switchboard, was also mentioned.
Parents:
Question 17: Is there someone like a doctor, nurse or counsellor who you can talk to about your child's future? If yes, who?
All parents reported negatively, citing affordability as the biggest stumbling block. All parents were totally dependent on the State Hospital for the health and welfare of their children, because it is more affordable than private hospitals.

Interpretation:
Most parents had no permanent employment and depended on government grants. The little money they had went towards basic foodstuffs and daily needs. Only one parent (P6) mentioned that the “grant is possessed by the government” and that she is no longer getting a grant. Parents simply could not afford to pay private hospitals and special needs professionals.

Teachers:
Question 3: Do you have professional help, such as counsellors who are trained to assist visually impaired learners in building skills and capabilities? Explain.
Question 5: What provisions are made by the Department of Education to assist teachers to cope with teaching visually impaired learners?
Question 6: What are the types of problems visually impaired learners experience most often?
One teacher responded: “Government must see to it that all necessary equipment for visually impaired learners is available to make work more supportive and easy for teachers as well as for learners, too”. Teachers agreed with parents about the need for government subsidising learners to get walking canes, so that they could become more independent. Teachers also felt that “Government must employ teachers with technical and craft skills, such as knitting, computer skills, Braille and music”.

Interpretation:
Teachers were also blaming Government, who is taking its time to fulfil the promises contained in the White Paper on Special Needs Education.
Unfortunately, none of the teachers at the school had taken the trouble to learn an appropriate craft, such as weaving, at any of the other special schools in order to cascade their knowledge to the other teachers at the Khanyisa Special School for Visually Impaired Learners. For example, in weaving, a simple frame could be used and learners could learn to weave by using strips of plastic from bags or different materials. Items such as placemats, hats or bags could thus be woven and sold to buy more material and earn an income.

4.2.6 THEME SIX: PROBABILITY THAT LEARNERS WILL REACH THEIR GOALS

Learners:
Question 7: What are your favourite subjects?
Seven learners (L1; L2; L3; L6; L7; L8 and L9) chose LLC-English, for reasons such as “It is used as a medium of instruction language and it is imperative to know it for work purposes and for communication”. Four learners (L1; L8; L9 and L10) preferred Mathematics (“it will help me to calculate my profit”). Eight learners (L1; L2; L3; L4; L5; L7; L8 and L9) chose Business Economics; three learners (L2; L6 and L9) liked Life Orientation; five learners (L4; L5; L7; L8 and L10) preferred History; four learners (L1; L2; L6 and L9) liked LLC-Xhosa, and three learners (L1; L2 and L4) preferred LLC-Afrikaans.

Interpretation:
Most learners chose Business Economics, which they considered relevant to their future career choice, although only four chose Mathematics, while they were required to combine Business Economics with Mathematics. Other subject choices were not related to what they wanted to do in future, for example, L1 wanted to become a minister of religion, but did not have Biblical Studies as one of his subjects.
Learners:

Question 8: Why do you like these subjects so much?

TABLE 2: Subject choices and reasons why learners chose them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Choices</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LLC-XHOSA: L1, L2, L6, L9</td>
<td>Four learners said Xhosa taught them about their heritage and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLC-ENGLISH: L1, L2, L3, L6, L7, L8, L9</td>
<td>Seven learners stated that to get a job, they must know how to speak English well and to express themselves in business meetings with their colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES: L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L7, L8, L9</td>
<td>Eight learners stated that they were learning about South African economics, business and income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHEMATICS: L1, L8, L9, L10</td>
<td>Four learners stated that they wanted to calculate their profit themselves and wanted to understand how to count the product or stock they received from the factory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HISTORY: L4, L5, L7, L8, L10</td>
<td>Five contended that History is teaching them about the history of the country and how their parents fought for their freedom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIFE ORIENTATION: L2, L6, L9</td>
<td>Three stated that they were learning about themselves as human beings and the things surrounding them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interpretation:

The researcher noticed that all learners were aware which subjects they needed for specific careers, but this knowledge did not always correlate with their career choices. Learners lamented that Mathematics is very difficult, a problem also experienced by many sighted learners.
Learners:

Question 9: What percentage do you score in these subjects?

TABLE 3: Subject percentages as provided by learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING AREAS</th>
<th>XHOSA %</th>
<th>ENGLISH %</th>
<th>MATHS %</th>
<th>EMS %</th>
<th>HISTORY %</th>
<th>LO %</th>
<th>BIBLICAL STUDIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3</td>
<td></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L6</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L7</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L9</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interpretation:

The percentages above were provided by the learners themselves, but the teachers did not agree with the scores. Based on the above, one learner’s (L5) performance is below 50%, while nine learners were doing well. Unfortunately, these percentages are fictitious: the real scores were much lower. The reason for inflating the scores could be that the learners were embarrassed by their real scores and wanted to “save face”.

Parents:

Question 8: Do you think it is possible that he/she can achieve that dream?

Question 9: Why are you thinking this?

All ten parents responded in the affirmative, that their children could achieve their dreams, citing various reasons, such as (P9): “He is got a potential, but he need to work hard and a good support from all stakeholders”; P8: “He learns about
business at school”; P7: “He is doing well at school and he is a very caring person”; P6: “If he can get financial assistance”; P5: “He likes his books and he is confident”; P4: “I am behind him each of every step”; P2: “She got ability to learn”; P1: “Everything is possible”; and P10: “This is what he wants and he is learning hard”.

Interpretation:
The parents agreed with the teachers that their children were struggling with their studies, not because they were blind, but because of the scarcity of equipment like tape recorders to support these learners. Therefore, all ten participating parents stated that their children had the ability to achieve their goals. The parents believed that in the end, their children would make it.

At the same time most parents admitted to their children have learning difficulties. They felt that learners were adding to their problems by choosing Mathematics and Physical Science as subjects. One parent stated: “Our children are not coping well in their studies and as they are learning to their slow pace, their ages are not waiting for them to finish Grade 12”. Parents were obviously aware of what could be achieved by their children. They were willing to accept whatever achievement their children reached, as long as they would become independent and earn a living.

Teachers:
Question 7: In what subjects does he/she do well? Give percentages.
Question 9: What future plans does he/she talk about?
Question 10: Do you think it is possible that he/she can achieve that dream? Question 11: Why are you thinking this?
Teachers stated that it is unlikely that all learners would achieve their dreams, as they experienced learning barriers and learning difficulties that were negatively impacting on their learning conditions. All teachers stated that the learners seemed to enjoy their school work, but three teachers complained about behavioural problems, while two teachers said that learners often lost focus on what they were doing in class. With such a low attention span, it is difficult to
achieve successful learning. Three teachers mentioned that learners were not coping with their work at all, with six learners recording an average of below 50% and four barely reaching 60%.

**Interpretation:**
Learners provided false information, hoping for a beneficial outcome from the research, such as that they would get bursaries to further their education. They obviously believed that the researcher would not verify the marks they quoted.

**Learners:**

**Question 10: What subjects do you dislike? Question 11: Why?**
Some learners indicated that they disliked History, because (L1): “The teacher is not confident about the subject”; L3: “It concentrates with things that affect other people and it is about other things that do not concern me”; “It is difficult”; and (L6): “I do not want to be a social worker or lawyer”. Learner L2 disliked Mathematics “because it is difficult for me to understand”, and “as a totally blind learner, there are very complicated things for me to understand in Maths, such as mathematical signs, formulas, geometry drawings and other maths operations; those difficulties made me to hate maths very much and on top, I take time to calculate”. Learner L4 stated: “Economic and Management Sciences is too much a lot and difficult for me”. Three learners (L6, L9 and L10) stated that Afrikaans is difficult and that they did not understand it, while three learners did not report any specific subject they disliked.

**Interpretation:**
Learners mentioned that they disliked Mathematics, EMS, History and Afrikaans; they stated that they find all these subjects were very difficult. It is clear that these learners did not realize the importance of these Learning Areas for specific careers and perhaps also did not have the capacity to study these subjects (this could not be verified, as their IQ score were not available to the researcher).
Teachers:

Question 8: In what subjects does he/she do very poorly? Give percentages.

Teachers stated that all six learners obtained a mark of less than 50%, revealing that either the learners did not understand the schoolwork, disliked the subjects, or their ability to learn is below average. Interventions to help these learners cope with learning and the classroom situation are obviously needed.

Interpretation:

The teachers stated that they did not wonder at the fact that learners disliked certain subjects and that because learners do not understand the subject do not want to accept it instead look for someone else to blame. These answers also did not correlate with question 1 from theme 3.

4.3 SUMMARY

This chapter is devoted to the findings of the research. These findings included biographical information. The responses from learners, parents and teachers were grouped according to the main themes and, after analysis, interpretations were presented. The interpretations were solely based on the data received from the respondents and were presented against a background of the literature reviews.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the search for answers to the research questions regarding perceptions on future fulfilment of visually impaired adolescent learners at the Khanyisa Special School, data was analyzed and a qualitative design study was undertaken. After a careful analysis of the captured data, some conclusions were drawn. On the basis of these conclusions, recommendations have been made. These will be presented in this final chapter.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions regarding findings are discussed according to the main themes:

5.2.1 THEME ONE: AFFECTIVE AND PERSONALITY TRAITS

Conclusions:

(Question 2: (L) Your hobbies; Question 3a: (L) Things you like)
Many visually impaired learners cited music as an option for a career, because it brought them joy and happiness and helped them to express their emotions. Most of the learners had beautiful voices and sang as solo performers in the school or church choir.

Due to a lack of formal training in music, musical instruments and trained teachers a career in music may remain a dream only. The sad truth is that due to the financial situation of all the participants, the likelihood that any of them would be able to afford a musical instrument or music lessons at any stage, was fairly unrealistic. It seems that becoming a choir member was the only option open to them.
Conclusions:
(Question 5: (L) What do you like most about yourself?)
The fact that the core of the question, namely what you like most about yourself, was avoided by most participants, combined with the fatalistic acceptance of their blindness being God’s will points to a large measure of denial. The learners avoided the real issue in their answers. No amounts of coercion or prompts could change this. The fact that not one participant could name a specific strength or attribute, points towards low self-worth and lack of confidence in own strengths. The researcher perceived that they were in fact experiencing insecurity and generally had a low self-esteem. This perception was confirmed after analysis and comparison with data received from parents and teachers.

Conclusions:
(Question 6: (L) What do you like least about yourself / your situation?)
Feelings of not being capable or worthy are negative, and individuals who harbour such emotions, will find it very hard to become assertive or gain any measure of independence. Being embarrassed by one’s disability gnaws away one’s confidence and makes it very difficult to come to terms with one’s condition. Visual impairment brings the frustrating realization of constantly relying on and needing other’s support. This dependence on others destroys the development of a positive self-image (Kapp, 1991:363).

This cocktail of negative emotions obviously had a negative influence on the learners’ self-esteem and confidence. This resulted in withdrawal from peers, the community and sometimes even from members of their family.

Regarding the learner who always teased others, displayed a sense of humour, which is good. Yet, the learner realised that what he said or did, hurt others. One could say his sense of humour had a sharp edge that in some way ameliorated his peers but at the same time also hurt himself. This was his way of overcoming and hiding how he felt about himself.
With most learners not reporting any negative aspect of themselves or their situation, it is clear that they were all still very much in denial regarding their situation. It is sad that no counselling is available to help them work through their problems and establish more objective views of their strengths and capabilities.

Conclusions:
(Question 16: (L) How do you react when you cannot get something right?)
The fact that most learners stated that they would not ask for help, may be an indication of their frustrations, suppressed anger and deep-set resentment that their blindness had made them dependent on others. One also has to consider that these were adolescents going through the normal adolescent phase of emotional upheaval, due to hormonal changes and imbalances. This emotional “storm-and-stress” (Louw Van Ede and Louw, 2005:386) was being further compounded by their disability. The fact that they did not rid of their frustration by some form of physical exercises, contributed to them venting it in negative ways, like swearing and flashing out at others.

Conclusions:
(Question 17: (L) What do you find fun to do?; Question 21: (L) What makes you happy?)
The participating learners were not being taught any handcraft skills at the Khanyisa Special School, which could have an effect on the learners’ development of skills and contribute to boredom. From continued probing, the researcher came to the conclusion that those learners (and others) who preferred to be on their own (in this case, cleaning their hostel rooms and listening to music), were in actual fact keeping to themselves to avoid arguments and conflict.

Conclusions:
(Question 18: (L) How do you handle criticism? Question 19: (L) What do you do when you feel irritable or bad tempered?)
The learners were clearly all very sensitive to criticism and felt hurt very quickly. This could impede their social relationship with friends and increase withdrawal from others. The learners not only experienced but also anticipated criticism. This led to low confidence to perform well in future. The negative criticism motivated the learners and eroded their confidence in areas such as social relationships and all learning spheres in their lives.

Due to restricted mobility and no facilities for physical workouts, the visually impaired learners could not engage in physical activity to ease and rid frustrations and anger. This caused them to bottle up emotions that were later emptied for very little apparent reason. Usually, after venting their anger, they felt embarrassed about their conduct, and such feelings of guilt further compounded their tension.

Conclusions:
(Question 3b: (L) Things you dislike; Question 20: (L) What makes you cry?)
The researcher perceived these learners as individuals who liked peace and socialising with their friends. It is understandable that visually impaired learners would not like to associate themselves with or engage in violence, because it would be impossible for them to physically defend themselves. Even if a blind learner is aggressive by nature, physical aggression will not be supported by their disability. This could be especially difficult for men, who may perceive that their masculinity is in question if they cannot stand and fight with those provoking them. This could be one reason why the male learners chose to resolve violence by leaving the scene and retiring to bed until they regain their calm.

The researcher views most of the visually impaired learners as learners who are experiencing family trauma, which leads to high frustration levels, and little motivation or support to succeed in becoming independent adults.
It was important to include this question, as crying is often considered as a sign of weakness; especially in men/boys. The researcher wanted to determine what pushes the learners to this point. It seems as if all the learners cried as a way to vent pent-up emotions. The boys would try to hold back their tears until they were in private, because ‘men' were not supposed to cry.

Conclusions:

(Question 28: (L) Do you feel foolish when you have to say things in front of other learners?; Question 29: Why?)
The information from all three groups correlated well. The confidence displayed by seven of the learners was most probably restricted to the classroom situation only, because they were familiar with their peers and environment they were in. These seven learners did not all portray such confidence during the interviews. Regarding the other three learners, their parents and teachers were concerned about their low self-esteem and the way they isolated themselves from others.

(Question 2: (P and T) Describe the child’s or learner’s personality)
From what was reported by parents and teachers it is clear to the researcher that the learners were generally quiet and meek and not violent to others. P1 mentioned that L1 was always feeling down, tending to withdraw himself from people. All three groups’ respondents agreed that the visually impaired learners liked to socialize with other visually impaired learners, because they were experiencing the same challenges. The problem for the learners lay not in their blindness, but in the attitude of sighted people towards them. This sentiment has been confirmed in the literature (Landsberg, et al, 2005:336).

Conclusions:

(Question 13: (P) Does the child believe in him-/herself?; Why?)
The contradiction in the information from three parent-and-child sets could be explained as the children having confidence at home, but when not at home, losing confidence, because they felt secure only when with parents or people they knew very well. The other possibility is that the parents were not truthful in
their reporting and perhaps reported what they thought the researcher would like to hear, or what they would have liked to be true about their children.

Conclusions:
(Question 16: (T) Does the learner believe in him-/herself? (Is he/she confident, with high self-esteem?) Why?)
The teachers felt that most of the learners showed confidence and had high self-esteem; yet, the learners lied about their marks. What exactly the teachers considered as confidence and high self-esteem is not clear.

Conclusions:
(Question 30: (L) Do you wish you were somebody else?; Question 31: Why?)
Two learners still felt unhappy about their blindness. When they experienced problems, they regarded their blindness as the cause of the problem at hand. They made statements that if they were not blind, things would not be the way they were. All other learners seemed fine with their blindness. They consoled themselves by turning to God as the Creator, Protector, Provider, Healer and Being who had the Higher Power.

Conclusions:
(Question 20: (P) Do you blame someone for the blindness of your child?; Why?; Question 32: (L) How do you feel about being visually impaired?)
Parents’ attitudes generally affect their children either negatively and positively. Parents, who refuse to accept their children’s disability, tend to overprotect, neglect or abandon, or ridicule and criticise the child. Feeling pity for the child would delay development, including the vital learning process (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:44). Children who grow up with negative attitudes will feel timid, selfish, inferior, dissatisfied, aggressive and unhappy. Parents, who accept their disabled children as having the same needs and aspirations as other children, will be more supportive towards their children. Such parents include their disabled children in all family activities and appreciate them without pitying them.
They play with their children, which encourage learning, and are able to discipline their children in a firm but loving way (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:44).

The learners were trying to forget that they were different from sighted learners. They wanted to move on and, adapt themselves to their situation. Two parents were blaming hospitals, while one was blaming the Gelvandale School teachers for their children’s blindness. These parents were still hurt but what had happened to their children. All other parents were having put everything in God’s hands.

5.2.2 THEME TWO: SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Conclusions:
(Question 21: (L) What makes you happy?; Question 23: (L) Who is your best friend?; Question 24: Why?; Question 25: (L) Who do you trust the most to tell your secrets to?)

Three learners indicated a very strong bond between themselves and their mothers. This may also be an indication of a strong sense of dependence on the mother figure. Learners felt happy when they heard that their families were doing well or when they received calls from their parents. They emphasised peace and harmony in their families and homes as a cause of happiness and contentness.

Conclusions:
(Question 3: (P) Describe the relationship with this child and his/her brothers and sisters; Question 4: (P) How is the relationship between this child and other family members?; Question 5: (P) Is the child well liked by community members?; Question 6: Why/ / Why not?; Question 3: (T) Is the learner well liked by his/her peers?; Question 4: (T) Why is the learner popular or not liked by his/her peers?; Question 5: (T) Is the learner well liked by teachers?; Question 6: Why?)

It seems that most of this group of visually impaired learners found it easy to establish friendships, especially with visually impaired peers. This is
understandable, because they shared the same problems. Female parents seemed to get along very well with their children, while in two cases the father figure was totally absent from the lives of their children. All family members seemed eager to help the visually impaired child, although there seems to be contradictions regarding this statement.

The attitude of parents sometimes indicated excessive expectations of the child, which caused the learner to experience tension and insecurity. In the learner’s socialization with others he/she sometimes endured open or covert ridicule and rejection (Kapp, 1991:364). Verbal abuse was a great cause of unhappiness and despondency. Although the learners accepted their visual impairments, they did not wish to be constantly reminded that they were blind. The visual impairment was coupled with frustration at his/her own inadequacy, which required external support and destroyed the development of a positive self-image (Kapp, 1991:363). According to Landsberg, et al. (2005:336), it is not visual impairments but the attitude of sighted learners towards blind learners that are the hardest for them to bear.

5.2.3 THEME THREE: FUTURE ASPIRATIONS AND CAREER OPTIONS

Conclusions:
(Question 4: (L) What you want to become one day?; Question 7: (P) What future plans does he/she (child) talk about?; Question 9: (T) What future plans does he/she (learner) talk about?)
To be able to meet the requirements for a specific career depends on a learner’s ability in the specific learning areas needed for that particular career. Learners may dream of becoming doctors, but this depends on their ability to master those learning areas needed to become a doctor. Lack of true understanding of what their choices entail, may lead students to follow an inappropriate curriculum for their intended career (Bishop, 1996: 53).
Conclusions:
(Question 12: (L) What do you want to do after leaving school?;
Question 1: (P) What do you think this child will be doing in 10 years’ time?; Question 1: (T) Where do you see this learner in 10 years’ time?)
Due to the discrepancies in responses between the parents and their children, one may conclude that parent might have cited their own dreams and aspirations for their children.

According to the teachers, a career in business was the most popular career choice among visually impaired learners, because the learners did not consider it as requiring post-Grade 12 studies or extra training. The fact that none was very clear in exactly what kind of business venture they would like to become involved showed a further lack of insight in the reality of a “career in business”. The teachers also reported being optimistic, yet the reality of poor academic performance combined with financial and socio-economic restraints did not sit well for what learners could achieve in ten years’ time.

5.2.4 THEME FOUR: CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES FACING THESE LEARNERS

Conclusions:
(Question 15: (L) What are the most difficult things for you to do?; Question 16: (P) What are the three most difficult things in having and bringing up a blind child?)
Learners and parents cited the same difficulties, such as mobility, dressing themselves and being dependent on other people for almost everything in their lives. The learners’ total dependence on others seemed to be a serious concern to parents. The parents, without actually saying it, were aware of their own mortality and were concerned about their child’s care and wellbeing once they (the parents) pass on. Female parents felt that they were carrying a very heavy load alone, with no assistance from their partners and Government. Rearing children
is difficult under any condition, but bringing up a child with a serious problem such as blindness, complications and compounds the challenge.

Conclusions:
(Question 22: (L) Do you often lie awake at night worrying about things? If yes, mention some of your worries)
It was clear that learners were tormented and frustrated by family financial issues. One even mentioned that there was no income in their home; his mother was unemployed, his sister was doing Grade 12, and there was no hope that she would be able to pursue her tertiary studies in 2008, because there was no money for the registration fee. As a visually impaired learner, he was supposed to receive a Disability Grant, but for reasons he did not know, he did not receive any financial assistance from Government.

5.2.5 THEME FIVE: EMOTIONAL, ACADEMIC AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM HOME, SCHOOL AND GOVERNMENT

Conclusions:
Question 1: (L) Tell me more about your family)
A family can be torn apart by divorce, the death or imprisonment of one parent, or because both parents are working. This can hamper learners’ education and they may not perform well in their school activities.

According to Kapp (1991:115), a child’s emotional behaviour and disturbances can be traced to his/her socio-economical situation at home. Educational difficulties and disturbed family relationships, especially between the child and his/her parents, could affect the child’s educational situation disastrously. Different sorts of educational errors may have an input including the rejection of the child, inconsistency of conduct, over-strict and unexplained discipline, lack of love and affection and overprotection and overindulgence (Kapp, 1991:115). Alcohol abuse and alcoholism in the home, single parenthood, unemployment,
crime, poor housing conditions and many other factions can also contribute to the deterioration of the child’s educational situation.

According to Kapp (1991:115), education entails a happy reciprocal dialogue between parent and a child, which forms the basis of mutual respect and strong emotional bonds. If the educational communication is disturbed by negative actions, the child’s personality development will also be disturbed, and when educational dialogue is seriously disturbed, the child will experience educational distress. Such a child will not enjoy a close relationship with his parents and ultimately the child will feel insecure and anxious, creating a multitude of risks for emotional and behavioural disturbances.

Conclusions:
(Question 13: (L) What skills will you need to achieve your goals?; Question 14: (L) What are you doing to make sure that you will be able to do this?; Question 11: (P) What can the school do to help this child to fulfil that dream?; Question 12: (P) What can you as parents do to help the child to fulfil that dream?; Question 14: (T) What can parents do to help the learner to achieve that dream?)

In the feedback obtained, learners listed computer skills, and reading Braille, as the main skills needed in order to achieve their goals. All learners seemed positive about achieving their dreams if they could be taught the required skills.

Based on the responses given, it is clear that listening skills were very important for learners with visual impairments. It is also clear that the less a learner with a visual impairment is able to rely on vision for information from his/her environment, the more crucial it is that he/she becomes a good listener (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:180). All learners at the Khanyisa Special School used listening skills as their primary or only mode of communication. This presented some learning disadvantages, because recorded materials were limited and not always of the highest sound quality, yet it was being used at all times. Listening to recorded materials requires a great deal of concentration,
because if there is no tranquillity, some information may be missed (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:180).

All ten participating learners used audio resources to receive information about their favourite sport. Learners enjoy listening at the radio commentary, especially cricket and soccer, while two female learners enjoyed listening to music. Most learners have developed good listening skills; something that is of great value in any learning situation, especially that in the classroom.

The participating teachers and parents accepted that they had to work hand in hand to motivate and support learners to work towards achieving their dreams. The lack of proper learning guidance from teachers, parents, caregivers and family members can lead to wrong career choices, which may lead to learners dropping out of school, because they are not coping with their studies. Learners furthermore can easily become bored if they are not happy with what they are doing and may then lose interest.

All parents professed that they were willing to help their children, but none could cite a concrete example of how they planned to render such assistance. Their own lack of education definitely had an influence in this respect.

Parents lacked insight in and understanding of the requirements for passing Grade 12 and further studies; therefore, some of their demands on their children were not based on knowledge, but were mostly at an emotional nature. What is true is that the Government is not supporting its own laws in respect of the White Paper on Education for Children with Special Needs (Department of Education White Paper 6, 2001:7).

The researcher’s perception is that parents feel that their children had chosen subjects they thought would be easy for them to understand. They did not want to make matters more difficult for their children by insisting on them choosing more career appropriate (difficult) subjects.
Conclusions:
(Question 17: (P) Is there someone like a doctor, nurse or counsellor who you can talk to about your child’s future? If yes, who?)
The researcher found that none of the parents knew private professionals, as they usually resorted to state hospitals for their children’s care. Parents from this group of learners stated that they could not afford the fees of private psychologists, doctors and government social workers. This meant that the children had to depend on the limited available professionals at state run clinics. The school also did not have the services of professional counsellors.

Conclusions:
(Question 3: (T) Do you have professional help, such as counsellors who are trained to assist visually impaired learners in building skills and capabilities? Explain; Question 5 (T) What provisions are made by the Department of Education to assist teachers to cope with teaching visually impaired learners?; Question 6: (T) What are the types of problems visually impaired learners experience most often?)
Everything was more or less in the hands of the Government, for example it is the Government who must employ trained and qualified professionals who will assist visually impaired learners. It is the Government that will assist teachers financially to go back to University and upgrade their qualifications. Therefore, unless the Government resolves the problems encountered by teachers, learners will carry on experiencing learning difficulties. It seemed to the researcher as if parents and teachers remained trapped in a mindset about waiting for help from Government without taking any personal responsibility at all.
5.2.6 THEME SIX: PROBABILITY THAT LEARNERS WILL REACH THEIR GOALS

Conclusions:
(Question 7: (L) What are your favourite subjects?; Question 8: (L) Why do you like these subjects?; Question 9: (L) What percentage do you score in these subjects?; Question 7: (T) In what subjects does he/she do well? Give percentages)

Learners were very positive about their subject choices, believing that their choices would make their dreams come true. The percentages they quoted to the researcher were promising. Teachers expressed the concern that two of the learners were not doing well in their studies, while the rest were not doing well as the percentages quoted by them. Few of them obtained marks above 60%, while most of them achieved a mark between 49% and 55%. This indicated a lack of the basic requirements for entry to post-matriculation education.

Conclusions:
(Question 8: (T) Do you think it is possible that he/she can achieve that dream?; Question 11: (T) Why are you thinking this?)

Contrary to learners' perceptions, the teachers maintained that it was impossible that all learners would achieve their dreams, as their academic was not satisfactory, with percentages in most cases below 50%. However, four of the learners were studying very hard to reach their goals, and they were obtaining marks between 55% and 60%. These four learners may be able to achieve their dreams, provided that they put a lot of extra effort into their studies. These remarks contradicted the remarks about learners' confidence (in Theme One: Questions 28; 13 and 16) and a positive emotional life.

Conclusions:
(Question 10: (L) What subjects do you dislike?; Question 11: Why?; Question 8: (T) In what subjects does he/she do very poorly? Give percentages.
The truth of the matter is that the learners' actual marks were in most cases nowhere good enough for further studies. To obtain the true marks, was not easy, as the teachers emphasised to the researcher that marks were confidential.

**Conclusions:**

When learners did not understand the subject, or did not study enough they tend to blame the teachers. The researcher came to the conclusion that the learners failed because they did not study and they were not truthful and honest about their own shortcomings.

Regarding the research questions about vision for the future and how learners at the Khanyisa Special School perceive their 'selves’. It became clear that all the learners who participated in this study were very positive about their own capabilities and options available to them regarding their future life and careers. It also became clear from their academic marks and skills profiles that they (and their parents) seemed to overestimate their abilities and were to a large extend not realistic regarding options available to them.

**5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations for the learners, parents and teachers are presented.

**5.3.1 THEME ONE: AFFECTIVE AND PERSONALITY TRAITS**

A greater variety of materials for using and developing listening skills should be available, because recorded materials are much quicker and easier to use than Braille (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:180). At the Khanyisa Special School, more audio entertainment programmes for visually impaired learners, books written in Braille and recorded stories, dramas and comedies with different sounds interpreting different actions should be introduce.
The researcher suggests that the learners be taught how to use musical instruments as an accompaniment to their voices and to make their music more interesting to audiences. As the learners have no money to buy musical instruments, they should try to make musical instruments using any material they have. For example, empty bottles and empty tins, covered by animal skin, could serve as drums. Empty polish tins could be filled with small stones, or soda can tops to make jingles. The internet could be a good source of information in this regard.

The researcher also suggests that visually impaired learners should try to avoid violent and aggressive people and at all times try not to hurt their friends’ feelings by unthoughtful remarks. Teachers could play a role in developing improved social skills.

When in a bad or despondent mood, learners should try to stay away from people who usually criticise or irritate them, because when one feels irritable, one’s temper may get out of hand. Learning to control their temper by, for example, breathing exercises may help.

According to Gous and Mfazwe (1998:37), feelings of inferiority, fearfulness, depression or anxiety occur as a result of temporary situations and are easily overcome if the learner is exhorted to stay calm and reassured that everything will be fine. The world is a cruel enough place for sighted and normal people, so these learners should receive encouragement, lots of love and affection to ease their difficult journey towards adulthood.

It is important that learners develop and maintain a positive attitude, because this will help them to cope with daily challenges. The learner, his/her family and peer group need guidance and support to place the implications of living with a disability into perspective and to live in peace with it (Kapp, 1991:364). Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:336) confirm this by stating that learners should be helped to accept the reality of their blindness and to adapt to it.
Parents and teachers should support learners who are visually impaired and assist them to accept their problems and deal with them. Their strengths should be emphasised and praised, as this will greatly boost their self-esteem and their perception of their own potential Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:341).

Learners should try to ignore people who are trying to erode their feelings of self-worth and learn not to take to heart everything that said. Learners should be guided to personal independence and to heightened integration with the wider community of people into which they were born. Their inability or reluctance to participate in daily activities, increases their separation from the sighted world. Sensory stimulation should be administered to visually impaired learners by exposing them to concrete experiences such as self-activities and training in using cutlery, getting dressed (doing buttons up and shoe laces), toilet hygiene and mobility, so that the learners will become more self-reliant and socially acceptable (Kapp, 1991:365).

According to Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:336) educators should provide the type of guidance and care that also influences the learner’s personality and interpersonal relationships. The educators should reinforce the positive aspects of the visually impaired learner’s emotional and social development rather than focusing on their impairment and the problems facing them.

Learners should be taught that it is acceptable and normal to cry to ease the pain. Counselling should be provided on the death of a parent. Boys should be included, as they should also feel that it is acceptable and safe to have and express emotions.

Parents should realise that new goals have to be set, both for themselves and for their children, and they should learn to accept their children as they are (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:44). They must focus on their children’s future and take responsibility for beginning to make a difference themselves.
5.3.2 THEME TWO: SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Visually impaired adolescents need extra encouragement to walk and run towards a voice that they trust. They must be encouraged to climb up and down, for example in a jungle gym, not only to exercise and build their muscles, but also to build confidence to try new and unknown things. Exercise will also help them overcome boredom and frustrations Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:339). Feeling fitter and becoming more active will have a positive effect on these adolescents’ moods and outlook in life.

Other factors that will assist in building positive social relationships are the quality of involvement, unconditional acceptance and support by family members and the quality of professional support and the degree of collaboration between support specialists and parents to promote all spheres of the development of these adolescents (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:178). The researcher recommends that the use of various types of professional support such as career counsellors should be available in order to support and encourage learners to explore their career options wisely.

5.3.3 THEME THREE: FUTURE ASPIRATIONS AND CAREER OPTIONS

Career guidance classes should be introduced to support learners, so that they may choose suitable and correct careers according to their capabilities and interests. Self-knowledge and a realization of personal limitations are of utmost importance and should be provided by career counsellors and teachers Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:336). The parents all lacked the skills to be truly of help here. As most of the learners wanted to carry on with their studies, a Special School like the Khanyisa Special School should offer a concentration of specialist knowledge and experience, with trained personnel, teaching aids, equipment and teaching programmes that are developed and implemented to satisfy learners’ special learning needs.
5. 3. 4 THEME FOUR: CHALLENGES AND DIFFICULTIES FACING THESE LEARNERS

To improve the mobility of visually impaired learners, there are four general aids from which they may choose: They (learners) may use human guides who are available and are the safest and the best way to move about for visually impaired learners, or use trained dogs to guide them. The guide dog will also be a safeguard when entering dangerous areas, and although such a dog is very expensive, it will not get tired or bored like human beings. The long cane is the device professionals often recommend: the long cane is swept in an arch, lightly touching the ground in front. The user receives information about the surface he/she is walking on, for example a warning about steps and the cane also protects the lower parts of the body against being hurt. A cane is reliable, long lasting, and easy to use. The last aid recommended, is an electronic device, such as the laser cane, which changes infra-red beams into sound when it touches objects in the path of the user (Smith, Polloway, Patton and Dowdy, 2001:181).

According to Swallow in Pauw (Landsberg and Kemp, 2005:336) a child who is visually impaired is at a serious disadvantage in experiencing things and situations in their totality. Learners should be trained in skills to cope with activities of daily life, such as eating, dressing, toilet hygiene, orientation and mobility, which come in different stages, from birth to adulthood (Kapp, 1991:365). Children should be trained to at an early age be independent and responsible and to take care of themselves. When children start school, they must be taught by their teachers to look after themselves.

As these learners often worry and fret about the financial problems facing their families, moral and emotional support should be given. As the parents are unemployed, older children are often in charge and responsible for their siblings. They should not have such a burden on their shoulders. The learner's responsibility should be his/her learning, not the family's financial problems.
5.3.5. THEME FIVE: EMOTIONAL, ACADEMIC AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT
FROM HOME, SCHOOL AND GOVERNMENT

Severe emotional neglect develops because of a lack of maternal-love and affection. According to Kapp (1991:115), the mother not interested in her child, the depressed and the impatient mother, and the unapproachable and very strict mother may hamper the development of a healthy emotional bond with her child. An early separation between mother and the child may also cause a lack of love between them. These factors may mean that the child does not receive the necessary love and security which he/her requires from early childhood years. In the absence of a healthy emotional bond with the mother, the child’s emotional life does not develop properly. Such a child may find it difficult in later life to show empathy to other or to maintain emotional relationships towards others (Kapp, 1991:115).

The education of visually impaired learners must focus on the enhancement and utilization of all the talents and assets that they possess and not primarily on those that are lacking. A strong relationship of trust between the learner and the teacher is a prerequisite and will enhance proper support to visually impaired adolescent learners. According to Kapp (1991:364), sympathetic yet realistic educational guidance leads to the successful management and elimination of the relevant effect-laden problems. Visually impaired learners will generally find it difficult to accept their handicap if their parents are negative toward them and their impairment. The attitude of parents usually is one of excessive expectations of the child, but sometimes the opposite holds true. In both situations, children experience great tension and insecurity. All those who are involved with such children need to give the necessary guidance and support to place the implications of the impairment in true perspective.

Learners are studying hard to fulfil their dreams, but they need proper guidance and proper skills that will meet career requirements to increase their chance of realising their dreams. Listening skills should be deliberately cultivated through
teaching. Electronic audio recording on magnetic tape has served as an important aid to complement Braille for many years (Kapp, 1991:367). Learners should employ tape recorders for study purposes, and teachers should be in a position to offer guidance in this regard. The educator has the task of stimulating the child’s interest in and motivation to learn.

The school should administer computer lessons to interested learners, as this could unlock employment doors. Schools for visually impaired learners should have a good tactile centre, along the same lines as the resource centre, or as an integrated part of the latter. A collection of objects that can be used should be kept and loaned on request to teachers or be available in the centre for the learners to use.

The researcher recommends that Government must subsidise teachers to return to university to improve their qualifications in order for them to equip themselves to teach and help children with special educational needs.

Parents need to be aware that besides the support services that the Department of Education and Health and Welfare offer, there are other services which support learners with Special Educational Needs, such as the Department of Labour that provides sheltered employment to those who cannot work elsewhere in the open market. A community could be strengthened if everyone stood together in support of children with visual impairments (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:44), by providing job and skills training opportunities and accepting them as valued individuals who can make a contribution to society at large.

5.3.6 THEME SIX: PROBABILITY THAT LEARNERS WILL REACH THEIR GOALS

According to Kapp (1991:469), it is important for the visually impaired learners’ future that they are timeously enlightened as to their own abilities as well as to the possibility of one day being able to practise an occupation. This is very
important, especially if it concerns the career independence of the learner in the open work market, not only to strengthen the child’s initiative to work diligently at realizing his/her potential at school, but also to broaden the child’s perspective on the future (Kapp, 1991:469). Learners should be encouraged to live a meaningful life. Teacher should continuously pay attention to learners’ development through formal and informal studies.

Parents should be involved in their child’s assessment and should be consulted at every level. They must be included in their child’s education by teaching them to reinforce the skills learnt at school. Parents’ fears should be dealt with by ensuring that a good communication system is in place, such as written notices; phone calls and visits; meetings and workshops; and keeping parents informed of their child’s progress (Gous and Mfazwe, 1998:50). Teachers in special schools should intervene more purposefully to prevent or remedy inadequacies in visually impaired learners’ education. However the teachers should do this in such a way as not to estrange insecure and anxious parents.

Learners need assistance from both parents and teachers so that they will master their subjects and the high failure rate among learners will be reduced. The atmosphere in a classroom depends a lot on the teacher’s attitude and teaching style. A positive atmosphere will make learners feel at ease and will encourage their interest in the subject presented to them.

Visually impaired learners require a truly educational environment as well as teachers who can gauge their unique educational needs. In order to create a suitable educational environment, teachers should transform the school into a supportive life-space which is also a learning-space, and the school hostel into a home in which favourable learning is administered to learners. Teachers should use various ways of teaching to make even disliked subjects interesting. Learners should be guided by teachers when they choose their subjects, because teachers are aware of the learners’ strengths and weaknesses.
5.4 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

- The research was limited to one school in Nelson Mandela Bay, called the Khanyisa Special School for Visually Impaired Learners.
- The researcher could not reach the full complement participants, because some learners stayed far away from the hostel.
- Due to geographical distances, the researcher could not reach some of the parents physically. The researcher contacted these parents telephonically where possible.
- Some teachers were reluctant to participate in answering the questionnaires.
- Some of the participants were sick during the period of doing interviews.

5.5 CONCLUSION

To answer the primary research question, it seems as if the participating learners have a positive vision for their future. The learners generally hold high expectations for their future. They wanted to become successful lawyers, social workers, minister of religion and business tycoons. Under very difficult circumstances, they are trying their best to fulfil their goals, and they need and deserve the full support of their family and the broader community. Unfortunately the data analysis seems to predict that the majority will not reach the fulfilment of their dreams.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it clearly showed flaws in the education received by these participants. With the Government clearly stating its commitment to Inclusive Education and Education for learners with Special Needs, serious attempts should be made to not only improve education, but to also improve guidance and Life Orientation (LO) to all learners to develop better self understanding and establish realistic life goals.
REFERENCES


PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

At present I am studying towards a Masters Degree in Education (Special Needs) at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. In order to complete my studies I must write a research report on the empirical research executed.

My research exercise deals with visually impaired learners. I am hereby requesting permission to enter your institution and conduct the research exercise by means of questionnaires and interviews to teachers, learners and parents. The research will focus mainly on the 20 Senior Secondary School level learners. This study will hopefully lay the foundation for future studies which could centre on finding solutions to the identified problems. All information will be anonymous and treated as most confidential.

I hope that my request will be considered in a favourable light.

Yours faithfully

........................

Nontobeko Monica Ciyana (Miss)
5 February 2007

Ms. N.M. Ciyana
3077 Siyavuka Crescent
KwaNokalo
PORT ELIZABETH
6059

Dear Ms. Ciyana

PERCEPTIONS ON FUTURE FULFILMENT OF VISUAL IMPAIRED ADOLESCENT LEARNERS AT KHANYISA SPECIAL SCHOOL

Permission is hereby granted to conduct the above-mentioned research at Khanyisa Special School. The approval of research is however subject to the following conditions:

- All the arrangements concerning your research should be done by you and the Department of Education should not be responsible for costs involved.
- Your involvement in the schools should be negotiated with the principal to ensure minimum disruption of teaching time.
- The principal, educators, learners and parents are under no obligation to assist you with your research project.
- The schools, principal and educators should not be identifiable from the results of your research project.
- All information from the schools and the Department of Education should be treated as highly confidential.
- A copy of this letter should be submitted to the principal of the school where the intended research is to be conducted.
- A copy of the theatre on completion of the research must be submitted to the District Office, Education Support Programmes at the above address.
- A letter to, and permission from the parents of the participants is still needed.
- A permission letter to the principal of the school involved is also necessary. Please submit these to me before you start your research. Collection of data cannot be done during this term as the teachers are busy with examinations.

We trust that you will be successful in this interesting busy research.

Yours sincerely,

DR. J.M. JANSEN
SES: EDUCATION SUPPORT PROGRAMMES
The Principal  
Khanyisa Special School  
Kwa Dwesi  
Port Elizabeth  
6001  

Dear Sir / Madam  

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH  

At present I am studying towards a Masters Degree in Education (Special Needs) at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. In order to complete my studies I must write a research report on the empirical research executed. 

My research topic deals with problems experienced by visually impaired learners. I am hereby requesting permission to enter your institution and conduct the research exercise by means of questionnaires and interviews to both teachers and learners. The research will focus mainly on the 20 Senior Secondary School level learners. This study will hopefully lay the foundation for future studies which could centre on finding solutions to the identified problems. All information will be anonymous and treated as most confidential. 

I hope that my request will be considered in a favourable light. 

Yours faithfully  

………………………….  
Nontobeko Monica Ciyana (Miss)
1 Feb 2007

Dear Madam

ERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Ermission is hereby granted to Ms Giyana to conduct her research at our institution. This approval is subject to the following conditions.

- Not to use tuition time for research.
- Not to conduct the research over the weekend.
- Research be conducted between 2:00 to 3:00.
- Any change from the above will be per prior arrangement.
- Info of the learners be treated as highly confidential.
- No names of learners and educators to be used mentioned in this research.
- This research should not be used for any media or public purposes.
- The school will review your research before you may leave with it.

We as the school trust that you’ll be successful on your research.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

PRINCIPAL
Ref: Dr Greyling

Dear Parent(s),

You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study. We will provide him/her with the necessary information to assist him/her to understand the study and explain what would be expected of him/her (participant). These guidelines would include the risks, benefits, and rights as a study subject. You or your child should please feel free to ask the researcher to clarify anything that is not clear to you.

To participate, it will be required of you to provide a written consent that will include your signature, date and initials to verify that you understand and agree to the conditions.

You have the right to query concerns regarding the study at any time. Immediately report any new problems during the study, to the researcher. Telephone numbers of the researcher are provided. Please feel free to call these numbers.

Furthermore, it is important that you are aware of the fact that the study has to be approved by the Research Ethics Committee (Human) of the university. The RECH consist of a group of independent experts that has the responsibility to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants, in research are protected and that studies are conducted in an ethical manner. Studies cannot be conducted without RECH’s approval. Queries with regard to your rights as a research subject can be directed to the Research Ethics Committee (Human) you can contact the Director: Research Monogomoni at (041) 504-4500.

If no one could assist you, you may write to: The Chairperson of the Research, Technology and Innovation Committee, PO Box 77000, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 6031.

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in any research. If you choose not to participate in medically related research, your present and/or future medical care will not be affected in any way and you will incur no penalty and/or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

If you do partake, you have the right to withdraw at any given time, during the study without penalty or loss of benefits. However, if you do withdraw from the study, you should return for a final discussion or examination in order to terminate the research in an orderly manner.

If you fail to follow instructions, or if your medical condition changes in such a way that the researcher believes that it is not in your best interest to continue in this study, or for administrative reasons, your participation maybe discontinued. The study may be terminated at any time by the researcher, the sponsor or the Research Ethics Committee (Human) that initially approved the study.

Although your identity will, at all times remain confidential the results of the research study may be presented at scientific conferences or in specialist publications.

This informed consent statement has been prepared in compliance with current statutory guidelines.

Yours sincerely,

Motsoebo Ntshane

RESEARCHER
Ref: Dr Greyling

Dear Teacher,

You are being asked to participate in a research study. We will provide you with the necessary information to assist you to understand the study and explain what would be expected of you (participant). These guidelines would include the risks, benefits, and your rights as a study subject. Please feel free to ask the researcher to clarify anything that is not clear to you.

To participate, it will be required of you to provide a written consent that will include your signature, date and initials to verify that you understand and agree to the conditions.

You have the right to query concerns regarding the study at any time. Immediately report any new problems during the study, to the researcher. Telephone numbers of the researcher are provided. Please feel free to call these numbers.

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If no one could assist you, you may write to: The Chairperson of the Research, Technology and Innovation Committee, PO Box 77000, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 6031.

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in any research. If you choose not to participate in medically related research, your present and/or future medical care will not be affected in any way and you will incur no penalty and/or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

If you do partake, you have the right to withdraw at any given time, during the study without penalty or loss of benefits. However, if you do withdraw from the study, you should return for a final discussion or examination in order to terminate the research in an orderly manner.

If you fail to follow instructions, or if your medical condition changes in such a way that the researcher believes that it is not in your best interest to continue in this study, or for administrative reasons, your participation maybe discontinued. The study may be terminated at any time by the researcher, the sponsor or the Research Ethics Committee (Human) that initially approved the study.

Although your identity will, at all times remain confidential the results of the research study may be presented at scientific conferences or in specialist publications.

This informed consent statement has been prepared in compliance with current statutory guidelines.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

RESEARCHER
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LEARNER.

LEARNER: ________________________
AGE: ____________________________
GRADE: __________________________
DATE: ____________________________

Answer the following questions orally.

1. Tell me more about: your family

2. Your hobbies

3. Your likes and dislikes?

4. What you want to become one day.

5. What you like most about yourself.

6. What you like least about yourself.
7. What are your favourite subjects?

8. Why do you like these subjects so much?

9. What percentage do you score in these subjects?

10. What subjects do you dislike?

11. Why?

12. What do you want to do after leaving school?

13. What skills will you need to achieve your goals?

14. What are you doing to make sure that you will be able to do this?
15. What are the most difficult things for you to do?

16. How do you cope if you cannot get something right?

17. What do you find fun to do?

18. How do you handle criticism?

19. What do you do when you feel irritable or bad tempered?

20. What makes you cry?

21. What makes you happy?

22. Do you often lie awake at night worrying about things? If yes, mention some of your thoughts.
23. Who is your best friend?

24. Why? *

25. Whom do you trust the most to tell your secrets to?

26. Why?

27. If you can change something, what would you change?

28. Do you feel foolish when you have to say things in front of other students?

29. Why?

30. Do you wish you were somebody else?

31. Why?

32. How do you feel about being visually impaired?
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN.

PARENT:...........................................
CHILD:...........................................
AGE:...........................................
GRADE:.........................................
DATE:...........................................

INSTRUCTIONS: May you please answer the questions on empty lines.

1. What do you think this child will be doing in ten years' time?

2. Describe the child's personality.

3. Describe the relationship with this child and his/her brothers and sisters.

4. How is the relationship between this child and other family members?

5. Is the child well liked by community members?

6. Why? Why not?
7. What future plans does he/she talk about?

8. Do you think it is possible that he/she can achieve that dream?

9. Why are you thinking this?

10. What does the child do to improve the skills needed for reaching that dream?

11. What can the school do to help this child to fulfil that dream?

12. What can you as parents do to help the child to fulfil that dream?

13. Does the child believe in him/herself? Why?

14. What strategies do you use to assist this child to gain confidence to reach his/her dreams?
15. What social activities is he/she engaged in?

16. What are the three most difficult things in having and bringing up a blind child?

17. Is there someone like a doctor, nurse or counsellor who you can talk to about your child future? If yes, who?

18. What are the types of problems your visually impaired child experiences most often?

19. Please add any suggestions on ways to assist visually impaired learners to prepare themselves better for their future as adults in society?

20. Do you blame someone for the blindness of your child? Why?
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EDUCATOR ABOUT LEARNERS.

EDUCATOR: ..............................................
LEARNER: ..............................................
GRADE: ...................................................
AGE: ......................................................
LEARNING AREA: ......................................
DATE: ......................................................

INSTRUCTIONS: Answer fully the following questions on empty spaces.

1. Where do you see this learner in ten years time?

2. Describe the learner's personality.

3. Is the learner well liked by his/her peers?

4. Why the learner is popular or not liked by his/her peers?

5. Is the learner well liked by teachers?

6. Why?
7. In what subjects does he/she do well? Give percentages.

8. In what subjects does he/she do very poorly? Give percentages.

9. What future plans does he/she talk about?

10. Do you think it is possible that he/she can achieve that dream?

11. Why are you thinking this?

12. What does the learner do to improve the skills needed for reaching that dream?

13. What can the school do to help the learner to fulfil that dream?

14. What can parents do to help the learner to achieve that dream?
15. What more can be done at school to support this learner to make his/her dream come true?

16. Does the learner believe in himself/herself? (Is he/she confident with high self-esteem?) Why?

17. What strategies do you implement to help this learner to gain more confidence?
GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS ABOUT ALL LEARNERS AND WHAT SKILLS THE EDUCATORS NEED TO COPE WITH.

EDUCATOR: .............................................
GRADE: ................................................
LEARNING AREA: .....................................
DATE: ..................................................

Please answer the following questions honestly.

1. What social initiatives would be useful to visually impaired learners in improving their self-esteem?

2. What difficulties do you encounter when teaching the visually impaired learner who does not believe in his/her capabilities?

3. Do you have professional help, such as counsellors who is responsible to assist visually impaired learners in building skills and capabilities? Explain.

4. What has been done by the principal to assist teachers to cope with the problems faced by the learners' disabilities?
5. What provisions are made by the Department of Education to assist teachers to cope with visually impaired learners?

6. What are the types of problems visually impaired learners experience most often?

7. Please add any information on ways to assist visually impaired learners to prepare them better for their future as adults in society?