PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR CHILDREN'S TRANSITION FROM A MAINSTREAM TO A SPECIAL SCHOOL

by

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DECLARATION

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Date: 20 February 2014

DEDICATION

For my Parents

i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)

e.e. cummings

Wallace Hyman   Rosemary Hyman

(1947 – 2011)   (1943 – 2011)

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ABSTRACT

Education White Paper 6, implemented in 2001, completed a significant period of policy development and change after the end of Apartheid in South Africa. The change in South African educational policy and the schooling system has given rise to many changes in the governance of special schools; this has further influenced this study. Education White Paper 6 (2001) introduced a comprehensive range of educational support services; schools now include mainstream schools, full-service schools and special schools. These schools offer varying levels of support with the view to minimise barriers to learning. While this research was conducted in a private special school, the parents who participated had all transitioned their child from a mainstream school.

This research study attempted to understand parents' perspectives of transitioning their child from a mainstream school to a special school, focusing in particular on parents whose children were in the Senior Phase of their school career. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model was used as the theoretical framework for this study because of the overlapping systems that are interconnected and influence the participants' lives and the lives of their children. For the research study, the parents were placed in the centre of the model; the other microsystems include the school, family and the child.

This study made use of a qualitative case study design and a qualitative methodology which is rooted within an interpretive paradigm. Purposeful sampling was used to select the parents from the selected special school in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town, as participants for the study. The study made use of three measures to collect data; a semi-structured interview, a life-line activity, as well as an open-ended questionnaire the parents were asked to complete at home. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data generated by means of the three data collection methods.

The findings of this research paper suggest that the transient process at a later stage in the child's academic career was a difficult experience for the parents who participated in the study. However, as the children gradually adjusted to the change, the parents felt the move had been worth it and had experienced a positive change

in their children's academic achievements. It should also be noted that the parents' perspectives on special education were not based on the policy documents governing the South African school system and more parental education is needed regarding this area. While the findings of the study cannot be generalised to all schools in South Africa, from this research study recommendations could be made to the special school to assist in ensuring a smoother transition for both the parents and the learner.

SAMEVATTING

Onderwyswitskrif 6 wat in 2001 geïmplementeer is het die periode van die beleidsverandering ná die beëindiging van apartheid in Suid-Afrika voltooi. Die verandering in die Suid-Afrikaanse opvoedkundige beleid en die skoolstelsel het aanleiding gegee tot baie veranderinge in die bestuur van spesiale skole, en dit het hierdie studie beïnvloed. Onderwyswitskrif 6 (2001) het 'n omvattende reeks van opvoedkundige ondersteuningsdienste voorgestel wat die volgende strukture insluit; hoofstroom-, voldiens- en spesiale skole. Hierdie skole bied verskillende vlakke van ondersteuning aan met die oog om die hindernisse tot leer te oorbrug. Die navorsing is vanuit 'n privaat spesiale skool gedoen. Die ouers wat deelnemers aan die navorsing was, het hulle kinders uit 'n hoofstroomskool gehaal en oorgeplaas na 'n spesiale skool.

Hierdie navorsingstudie het gepoog om ouers se perspektiewe te verstaan rakende die oorplasing van hulle kind vanuit 'n hoofstroomskool na 'n spesiale skool, met spesifieke fokus op die ouers wie se kinders in die Senior Fase van hul skoolloopbaan was. Bronfenbrenner se bio-ekologiese model is as die teoretiese raamwerk vir hierdie studie gebruik in die lig van die klem op die oorvleuelende sisteme wat met mekaar verbind is en die invloed daarvan op die deelnemers se lewens en die lewens van hul kinders. Vir hierdie navorsingstudie is die ouers in die middel van die model geplaas, met die skool, gesin en die kind as verdere mikrosisteme.

Hierdie studie het van 'n kwalitatiewe gevallestudie en 'n kwalitatiewe metodologie gebruik gemaak wat in 'n interpretatiewe paradigma gegrond is. Doelgerigte steekproefneming is gebruik om die ouers te kies uit die aangewese spesiale skool in die suidelike voorstede van Kaapstad, as deelnemers vir die studie. Die studie het gebruik gemaak van drie maatreëls om data in te samel: 'n semi-gestruktureerde onderhoud, 'n lewens-lyn aktiwiteit, en 'n oop vraelys wat die ouers tuis voltooi het. Kwalitatiewe inhoudsanalise is gebruik om die data wat gegenereer is deur middel van die drie data–insamelingsmetodes, te ontleed.

Die bevindinge van hierdie navorsing suggereer dat die oorgangsperiode op 'n later stadium in die kind se akademiese loopbaan 'n moeilike ervaring vir die ouers, wat

aan die studie deelgeneem het, was. Namate die kinders egter by hulle veranderde omstandighede aangepas het, het die ouers gevoel dat die skuif die moeite werd was en hulle het 'n positiewe verandering in hul kinders se akademiese prestasies opgemerk. Kennis moet ook daarvan geneem word dat die perspektief van die ouers op spesiale onderwys nie gebaseer was op die beleidsdokumente van die Suid-Afrikaanse skoolstelsel nie. Dit beklemtoon dat ouerontwikkeling ten opsigte van hierdie aspek noodsaaklik is. Die bevindinge van die studie kan wel nie na alle skole in Suid-Afrika veralgemeen word nie, maar daar kan vanuit hierdie navorsing aanbevelings gemaak word om spesiale skole by te staan ten einde die oorgang vir beide ouers en leerders makliker te maak.

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It would be ideal for the child to remain in a mainstream school and get support, but not enough is being done by the schools, the education department and society to help children with special needs. Our education curriculum should cater for children with special needs in the mainstream school. Our teachers should empower themselves with the knowledge that each child is different. If our mainstream schools and teachers were better equipped to teach my son, then I would not have made the change. We are forced to do so because of our education system

A Parent's Perspective

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This thesis reports on a qualitative research study embedded in an interpretative paradigm that seeks to explore the perspectives of parents who have children in need of particular learning support in special schools within the South African education system. The study has a specific focus on parents' perspectives of their children's transition from a mainstream to a special school. An essential component of the study is an understanding of the transformation of the education system since the demise of Apartheid in 1994 and also the current education policy directives as informed by global initiatives and national realities.

South Africa is a highly dynamic country, faced with a series of challenges due to its unique historical development. A core political ideal of the leading party, as enshrined in the Constitution, is to achieve equality and equity for all its citizens. As a means to make consequential inroads into resolving the multiplicity of challenges, education policies are constantly being adapted and improved. Recently, inclusion has become a useful principle and value in policy making for combating segregation and exclusionary practices in all spheres of life, but in particular in education.

In outlining the background of the study, the various definitions of inclusion are first discussed. Inclusion can be seen in many different ways, and incorporated into different contexts. The development of inclusion and inclusive education is then discussed as played out within the South African context. Inclusion within the South African context has had a necessary and far-reaching effect on the country's education system. From this perspective it is necessary to understand the influences of inclusive education on all levels within the system.

Swart and Pettipher (2011) suggested that inclusion can mean different things to different people, depending on the interpretation and implementation within different contexts. However, these authors believed that there are a few commonalities that form a foundation for all definitions of inclusion. They cite Dyson (2001), who

suggested that the broad principles of inclusion are about the building of a more democratic society, an impartial and superior education system and a shared belief that it is the responsibility of mainstream schools to accommodate the various learning needs of all individuals (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

Swart and Pettipher (2011) also suggested that inclusive education is based on a value system celebrating diversity. The value of inclusion, and thus inclusive education, looks to foster a sense of belonging in all individuals, leading to inclusive education looking beyond the notion of ability and disability, and placing a focus on comprehensive education, through which all learners can receive the same opportunity (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). If inclusion is defined as an approach to ensuring recognition for all through the valuing of human diversity and dignity, the policy of inclusion influences the development of inclusive education.

Inclusive education, an educational imperative based on inclusion as a value, is considered a complex, multidimensional and problematic concept, although the common denominator of approaches to inclusive education seem to be the recognition and valuing of human diversity within education systems (Mitchell, 2005). Inclusive education is defined in many different ways. It is often narrowly defined as being only about "teaching of disabled and non-disabled children within the same neighbourhood school" (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007, p. 5).

The Department of Education (DoE) in South Africa has however opted for a broader definition of inclusive education, based on diversity and social change perspectives that do not only include issues of disability but also barriers to learning and development induced by differences in gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, culture, ability and socioeconomic background (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007; DoE, 2001). The implementation of inclusive education practices internationally have influenced and are still influencing its implementation within the South African context. The international movement to inclusive education is discussed in some depth in Chapter 2.

Engelbrecht (2006) contended that the implementation of inclusive education within the South African context can be distinguished from the implementation of inclusive education in other countries, due to the "extent of the complex, contextual influences

on education in South Africa" (Engelbrecht, 2006, p. 254). Previously in South Africa, the policy of Apartheid had pervaded all aspects of the South African government and dictated the policy of all departments. The legislation that came into being in 1948 resulted in separate education departments and distinct governance fragmented along racial lines. With the end of Apartheid in 1994, the new democratic government inherited an education department divided along racial lines and based on segregation and discrimination (Engelbrecht, 2006).

The adoption of the policy and values of inclusion within South Africa corresponded with the establishment of the South African Constitution, in which the principles of human dignity, freedom and equality are entrenched. The development of a successful democracy requires the acknowledgment of the "rights of all the previously marginalised communities and individuals as full members of society and requires the recognition and celebration of diversity, reflected in the attitudes of its citizens and in the nature of its institutions" (Engelbrecht, 2006, p. 254). According to the South African Bill of Rights (RSA, 1996a), everyone has the right to basic education, including adult basic education, and further education. Furthermore, the right to receive education in the official language of one's choice is universal, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that the funding for schools is equal, and in South Africa in particular this is not always the case. The people of South Africa also have the right to establish independent educational institutions that do not discriminate according to race, are registered, and maintain high standards of education (RSA, 1996a).

In South Africa various policy documents were drawn up between 1995 and 1997 that stressed the principle of education being a basic human right. Education White Paper 1 on Education and Training (DoE, 1995), the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (DoE, 1997b) and the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996b) stated that all learners have the right to equal access to education; the documents recognise the wide diversity of education and the needs shared by all learners. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996b) embodies the principles of the Constitution and recognises student diversity and quality education within a single system of education. The Act removes all previous legislation dealing

with education and makes provision for a single system of education (Howell, 2000; Oswald & Engelbrecht, 2004).

According to the Schools Act (RSA, 1996b), the newly established national education system will redress past injustices in educational provision; provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities; advance the democratic transformation of society; combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance; contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society; protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages; and uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators.

In 1997, the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) gave the first clear indication of the required acknowledgement of the complexity of educational needs and the "role that social and political processes that operate within education systems play in excluding children" (DoE, 1997a, p. 255). Education White Paper 6 was based on the findings and recommendations of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) report published in 1997. The report stated the following:

> (i) (S)pecialised education and support have predominantly been provided for a small percentage of learners with disabilities within 'special' schools and classes;

> (ii) (W)here provided, specialised education and support were provided on a racial basis, with the best human, physical and material resources reserved for whites;

> (iii) (M)ost learners with disability have either fallen outside of the system or been 'mainstreamed by default';

(iv) (T)he curriculum and education system as a whole have generally failed to respond to the diverse needs of the learner population, resulting in massive numbers of drop-outs, push-outs, and failures; and

(v) (W)hile some attention has been given to the schooling phase with regard to 'special needs and support', the other levels or bands of education have been seriously neglected.

(DoE, 2001, p. 5)

These findings resulted in the recommendation being made for the promotion of inclusive education and the fostering of support centres for learning within the South African school system. South Africa adopted and supports the internationally renowned Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which introduced an approach to creating an equal and fair education system in developing countries. With the end of Apartheid in South Africa the government believed that the trend of inclusive education would support the constitutional rights of all people in the country, particularly the right to education and freedom from discrimination (Walton, 2010). The connecting theory is that inclusion is based on a belief in individual human rights and the initiation of social justice (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education – Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, published in 2001, outlined a process of creating an inclusive education system for South Africa (Engelbrecht, Oswald & Forlin, 2006). Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) states that inclusive education for the South African context is aimed at increasing the participation of all learners within education institutions and decreasing the number of barriers facing learners on a constant basis. These changes can only be realised by changing the attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula, school environments and the system as a whole. Walton (2010) demonstrated that adapting curriculums in particular ways can ensure the individual is able to achieve at some level. However, the national curriculum has once again been modified and schools are currently implementing the

new curriculum known as CAPS (curriculum and assessment policy statements). Within this curriculum each subject is given a specific policy document defining everything the teacher is required to teach on week by week basis, thus ensuring the consistency of education across the country (Variend, 2011). The changes in the curriculum have occurred separately from the changes laid out in Education White Paper 6, however, the introduction of the CAPS curriculum is in line with the implementation of inclusive education.

The broad strategies described in Education White Paper 6 include the following:

> …acceptance of principles and values contained in the Constitution and Education White Papers on Education and Training; human rights and social justice for all learners; participation and social integration; equal access to a single, inclusive education system; access to the curriculum, equity and redress; community responsiveness; and cost-effectiveness.

> (DoE, 2001, p. 5)

Mainstreaming, integration and inclusion are words that are all evident within the South African education system. However, they are terms that cannot simply be interchanged with one another and each has a different connotation and significance within education. In South Africa, Education White Paper 6 (2001) distinguished between inclusion, mainstreaming and integration. Inclusive education aims to recognise the differences among all individuals; to create support for learners and educators through the development of good teaching strategies; and to overcome the barriers to learning, enabling the learner to meet their full potential; whereas mainstreaming and integration require that learners fit into the school environment by giving them additional support. Mainstreaming and integration focus on the changes that need to take place within the child rather than the changes that should be made in the environment to accommodate all individuals.

Mainstreaming is an educational imperative that supports the medical model of disability and difference that focuses on the problem as located within the individual.

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Mainstreaming and the medical model are often associated with the normalisation principle. Culham and Nind (2003) discussed the notion of normalisation in more depth. Normalisation dominated social and education policy for individuals with disabilities for more than three decades until the end of the 1980s (Oswald, 2010). Normalisation led to individuals with varied disabilities and learning difficulties being taught skills and competencies in the hope that they would be able to overcome their challenges in order to fit into 'normal' society. Originally normalisation strategies did contribute to an increased focus on the plight of individuals with disabilities, and the levels of respect, status and dignity for all individuals with disabilities were raised. These individuals were also allowed to gain new abilities and, sometimes, socially accepted roles within the community (Culham & Nind, 2003).

Culham and Nind (2003) however criticised the current configuration of the normalisation principle for constructing the idea of 'normality'. Vlachou (1997) cited by Oswald (2010, p. 31) argued that "the needs of the clients come last on the agenda of the 'super system's' priorities within the process of normalization, the focus has increasingly been on normalizing people". The medical model has legitimised the main functions of such a system by implying that the characteristics of the individual, which set him apart from the 'norm' in the first place, need to be fixed, treated, cured or remedied to be acceptable to the dominant system (Culham & Nind, 2003).

Difference is therefore portrayed as a deviance from the general (i.e. 'normal') rule. Normality thus opposes difference and to be accepted into 'normal' society, individuals with disabilities are expected to change. According to Culham and Nind (2003), inclusion is the answer to the above dilemma as it chooses to confirm and celebrate diversity, and difference is seen as an ordinary part of any society. Inclusion as a value in action attempts to have all individuals who are considered different within society accepted for their differences.

If we were to configure inclusion as a process of mainstreaming children into general education, the understanding would be that this is all inclusion entails. If this was true, it would be a simple act, but it would not necessarily bring with it the celebration of difference and result in changes to the education system to accommodate all learners successfully (Culham & Nind, 2003; Oswald, 2010).

Integration is based on the social and political influence in education. Integration emphasises the right of each individual to public school education. In contrast to mainstreaming, integration aims to involve individuals with differing abilities in the community. Within integrated schools there is a more holistic approach to accommodating and accepting the participation of individuals with disabilities (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

If the values, principles and philosophy of inclusion are to be correctly applied to the education system of South Africa, it is necessary to define inclusive education in the following manner: Inclusive education is about the *presence*, *participation* and *achievement* of all learners in the education system. The notion of presence implies that all learners should be granted the opportunity to gain access to their local schools. Learners should also feel invited to participate in classrooms, providing them with the necessary support to achieve success (Engelbrecht, 2006). The definition of inclusive education, as it is laid out in Education White Paper 6 (2001), is discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4.2.

Education White Paper 6 introduced both long and short-term goals for establishing an inclusive education and training system in South Africa. The long-term goal, as explained in the White Paper, involves "the development of an inclusive education and training system that will uncover and address barriers to learning and recognise and accommodate the diverse range of learning needs" (DoE, 2001, p. 45).

This goal forms part of the Education Department's programme for building open, life-long and high-quality education and training in the 21st century. This system will include special schools as resource centres, full-service and other schools, adult learning centres and higher-education institutions. Education White Paper 6 placed these goals in a 20-year developmental perspective. The short to medium-term goals focus on the current school system and address the weaknesses and deficiencies as well as the expansion of access for all children of a school-going age. Education White Paper 6 stated that by doing this it is possible to lay the foundations for the education system described in their long-term goal (DoE, 2001).

The changes made by the government in view of creating a support system to ensure the proposed goals are met are discussed next. The following changes on various levels were suggested as strategic areas of change:

- Capacity in all education departments and advisory bodies needed to be increased;

- District-based support teams were to be established;

- Special schools were to be audited, improved and converted to resource centres and further and higher education institutions;

- Institutional-level support teams were introduced;

- Mechanisms were to be established in the community for early identification of severe learning difficulties; and

- All educators were expected to develop their professional capacity in curriculum development and assessment.

(DoE, 2001)

These are the changes laid out in Education White Paper 6 that would help in the implementation of inclusive education for the South African school system. The Department of Education has endeavoured to promote quality assurance and improvement in curriculum development to ensure all learners have access to the required level of support. The strategies have also involved the mobilisation of public support and the monitoring of the effect and influences of HIV and AIDS and other infectious diseases. Education White Paper 6 included a way of developing an appropriate funding strategy to ensure a realistic way of achieving the goals (DoE, 2001).

As is often the case, there is however a marked gap between policy initiatives and what happens on ground level in schools and classrooms. Research (Engelbrecht, 2006) indicated that ten years after the establishment of democracy the implementation of inclusive education continues to be a complex and difficult practice. As a policy, it demonstrates great commitment towards inclusive education; however, within society the conservative and traditional attitudes still continue. Engelbrecht (2006) stated that without examining the pressure for exclusion that still exists within the school culture, the racially entrenched attitudes carried over from the years of Apartheid result in discriminatory practices continuing in the classroom.

The successful implementation of inclusive education requires the complete involvement of all within the school community within the specific context. Schools need to be supported in the participation and learning of the diverse range of learners and their shared needs (Engelbrecht, 2006).

The implementation of inclusive education in South African schools requires funding and budgetary allowances that do not exist at this time. Schools have reservations about the process and feel under-staffed and under-resourced (Walton, 2010). It is now compulsory for all individuals (also those with disabilities) to attend school from the age of 7 to 15 or Grade 9, depending on which one comes first. This means that there are now more children in school in South Africa than previously. Individuals experiencing barriers to learning now have to be educated in the single education system. This same system also needs to include those individuals over the age limit, those affected by poverty, and those who refuse to go to school. All these individuals require the services of supportive schools and inclusive communities. Mainstream schools do not seem to have the facilities to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities and many remain marginalised within society and do not attend school (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Walton, 2010).

Education White Paper 6 (2001) stated that in South Africa inclusive education aims to recognise and respect the differences between learners and build on the similarities they share. This view of inclusive education, and how it is implemented in the school system, is discussed and expanded upon in Chapter 2, section 2.4.2.

This particular research study aims to understand the effect the above changes had on the education system, the learners and, in particular, their parents. The focus of this study is to understand the perspectives of those parents whose children require more intensive support from the school system and their views on moving their children from a mainstream to a special school.

However, due to the nature of the study, its qualitative style and focus on a small window within the South African context, it is not possible to suggest that the information gathered in this study can be generalised for the whole country.

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

During the Apartheid dispensation, special schools were segregated from mainstream education. Special schools were divided on the grounds of race and disability, and schools accommodating white learners benefited from this arrangement. Resources were unequally divided and therefore changes were necessary. Education White Paper 6 acknowledged that only a small percentage of learners received adequate specialised support in the past, and suggested that the education system needs to become an integrated system where the 'special needs and support services' are incorporated throughout the system (DoE, 2001).

Learners with various learning needs can now be educated in any school of their choice and receive appropriate support. Provision should be made for all learners, especially those who have previously been excluded from the education system to receive equal educational opportunities (DoE, 2001).

Figure 1.1 below shows the different levels of support in the school system as recommended by Education White Paper 6.
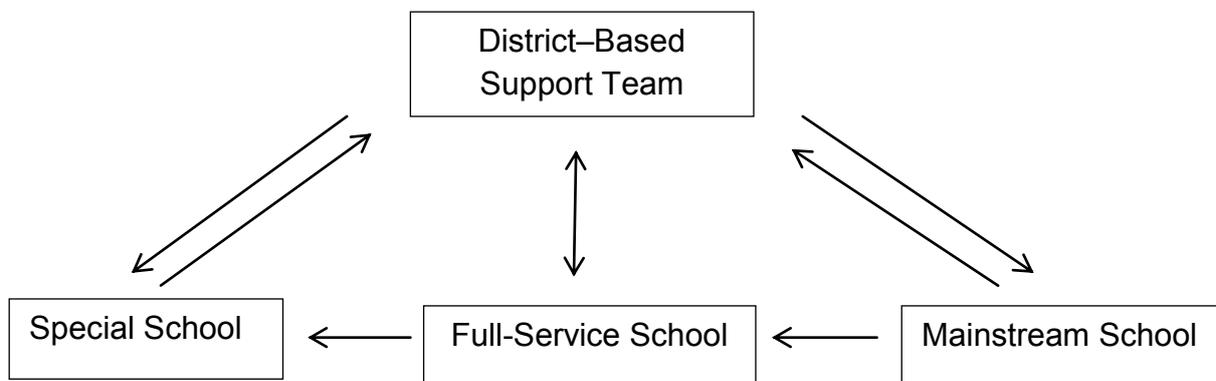
Figure 1.1: The Network of Support (Landsberg, 2011)

There is now a broader range of educational support services: firstly, learners who require low-intensity support can be educated in the mainstream school; secondly, learners who require moderate support can attend a full-service school; and, finally, learners who require high-intensive educational support can attend special schools.

The full-service school provides access to moderate levels of support, deploys specially qualified teachers to other schools in the area when required, gives guidance with regard to barriers to learning and works in collaboration with the district-based support team (Landsberg, 2011). The role of special schools has been redefined. Apart from accommodating learners in need of intensive levels of support, such schools are also required to serve as resource centres for other schools in the area (DoE, 2001).

District-based support teams, which will include special schools as resource centres, should provide integrated support to education institutions, for example Early Childhood Development (ECD), schools, colleges and adult learning centres, and ensure support with regard to the development of effective teaching and learning. District-based support teams should support schools in their district.

The primary guidelines are as follows:

• Specialist/professional education officials working in district support structures. These include:

    (a) psychologists, specialised and general counsellors, therapists and other health and welfare workers employed by the Department of Education, and various learning support personnel, e.g. remedial teachers and facilitators, language and communication teachers, and special needs teachers; and

    (b) department officials providing administrative, curricular and institutional development support at district levels.

• Specialist support providers and teachers in special schools.

• Members of the school/education institution community itself, including:

    (a) educators and other members of staff;

    (b) the learners themselves, who can provide peer support to one another.

The secondary guidelines are:

- Specialists/professionals from other government departments involved in supporting schools and other education institutions, e.g. health workers and social workers.

- Community organisations and role players, including:

    (a) parents, grandparents and other care-givers of learners at ECD centres and schools;

    (b) community organisations, e.g. non-governmental (NGOs) and community based organisations (CBOs) directly and indirectly linked to education; and

    (c) individuals within the community who have contributions to make on particular issues and challenges.

(DoE, 2005)

With the special schools acting as resource centres, the resources they share should be integrated into the district-based support team. By doing this, the support team can provide "specialised professional support in curriculum, assessment and instruction" (Landsberg, 2011), as illustrated in Figure 1.1. Teachers are also expected to be part of a district-based support team, which includes teachers, support staff and therapists, as well as medical professionals and local representatives of government (Landsberg, 2011).

In general, the majority of learners start their schooling in a mainstream school setting. These schools, as indicated above, should be able to accommodate learners with a low level of learning support needs. Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) suggested that all schools should gradually be transformed into inclusive/full-service schools. Currently, several schools in the Western Cape Province have been ear-marked to be developed into full-service schools. In the interim, these full-service schools will be required to accommodate learners in need of moderate learning support, while special schools will take in learners with intensive support needs. As the development of full-service schools is a long-term project, special schools are

currently still the first port of call when mainstream schools want to refer learners for specialised support.

The purpose of this study was to explore parents' perspectives about their children's transition from a mainstream to a special school, and to understand how the transition unfolds. The study was conducted at a private special school in the Western Cape Province. It was anticipated that the research findings will make a contribution to understanding parents' navigation of the education system in order to find the most appropriate placement for their children who, due to various factors, struggle to learn in significant ways. The study may also be able to make a contribution to the successful implementation of inclusive education in South Africa.

Parents play a key role in the education of their children. Their involvement in schools as well as the education system occurs through a range of interactions taking place between home and school. These interactions often feature the parents' quest for insight into their child's progress, their participation in the decision making, and their criticism of the education system. McKenzie and Loebenstein (2007) acknowledged that it is widely accepted that active involvement of the parents in their child's education has a positive impact. They also suggest that assistance and participation during the early stages of the child's education contributes to greater achievement in the later stages.

Both internal and external factors affect the level of parental involvement. The dynamics and level of pressure experienced within the family itself can positively and negatively affect parental involvement. The organisation and philosophy within the school, and the interaction between the parents, staff and community can subtly and directly affect the parental involvement with the school and the child's education (Mckenzie & Loebenstein, 2007).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), special schools still have an important role to play in the South African education system. However, there needs to be a clearer understanding of the perception of special education by the

management of both the mainstream and special schools within the new education system. It also seems that the perspectives shared by parents of children with learning disabilities and other disabilities, have not been sufficiently interrogated.

The network of support, as described in Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), is complex, and based on the policy and values entrenched in the theory of inclusion and inclusive education. Each education district is responsible for the schools in their respective areas. In Education White Paper 6 (2001) it is argued that the level of support given to learners will depend on the level of support required by the learner. The support relies on a flexible scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being low-intensity support and 5 being high-intensity support. Landsberg (2011) explained that the support teams accept that even learners requiring high-intensity support can move down the scale to a lower level depending on the success of the support given.

In complex community settings it seems as if some learners are not receiving the appropriate level of support. Research conducted in South Africa (Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009) on the transition of one learner from a mainstream school to a special school illuminated the gap between policy and practice in education and shed some light on the challenges with regard to the implementation of inclusive education. The study suggested that successful inclusive education requires a whole school approach and the involvement of both the community and policy makers however, it also accepts that South Africa is still developing in the field of inclusive education. While the policy of inclusive education has been accepted by many, the human and other resources available in South Africa are often not equipped to meet the needs of successful inclusive education (Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009).

Due to the lack of adequate and far-reaching resources needed for the successful implementation of inclusive education, there is a trend in South Africa for learners with specific support needs to frequent schools in more specialised settings. Pillay and Di Terlizzi (2009) claimed that, currently, special schools are subsidised by the government more than mainstream schools, thus they are able to offer support and therapeutic interventions as part of the fee structure. The learner's individual needs can then be more appropriately met on site and during the school day.

The study further found that the learner acting as participant in the study benefited from attending the special school, suggesting that the mainstream schools of South Africa are not always able to meet the needs of all learners within the mainstream school system. A successful inclusive school requires specially trained staff, specialist therapists and access to teaching assistants. The environment should lend itself to regular multidisciplinary team meetings, ensuring that all the needs of the learner are constantly met. Inclusive education in South Africa is currently dependent on the socio-economic situation, considering the need for access to resources for curriculum adaptation, learning support and progress facilitation (Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009).

To ensure the continued development and implementation of inclusive education in the South African school system, mainstream schools require more staff training to ensure the staff and educators are equipped to assist learners. The educators require skills in identifying barriers to learning, addressing the barriers and creating graded tasks allowing all learners to achieve success irrespective of their level of ability (Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009).

Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) did make reference to the development of full-service schools within the South African school system. Such schools should be developed and equipped to provide for a full range of learning needs of all learners. The full-service schools are expected to act as a centre of support for the surrounding schools, thus fostering the idea of inclusive education. Full-service schools, as laid out in Education White Paper 6 (2001), are schools converted from original primary schools, which will perform various roles within the community. Full-service schools will cater for learners with moderate disabilities and also act as resource centres for teachers and schools in the area. Specialised educators are then deployed to the full-service schools and can be sent to various schools where the need arises. This means that specialised educators can be shared amongst the schools rather than being seconded to a specific school.

Successful inclusive education further requires development on the level of infrastructure. Mainstream schools require similar resources and structures to those provided by special schools. In South Africa, mainstream schools currently need increased funding to employ on-site therapists and specialists in learning support

and curriculum development. The instructional ability of the educators influences and affects the effectiveness of the implementation of inclusive education. The teaching staff needs to be properly trained in various approaches to teaching and in developing ways to ensure individualised attention. Adjustments in the manner of teaching style can lead to a more positive and nurturing environment and ensure a more inclusive education system (Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009).

To address the complex challenges experienced with regard to the implementation of inclusive education effectively, it is necessary to determine and understand where the problem(s) is arising within the education system. The intention of this study was to understand the experiences and perspectives of the parents and the role they play in the education system, as well as the subsequent influence they may have.

Parents, as stated in section 1.2, play an important and influential role in their child's education. Parents ultimately decide which school their child will attend, and the new legislation ensures that no child is discriminated against with regard to race, gender or academic ability. However, how parents make decisions regarding their child's education is important to understand, as their decisions have a long-lasting impact on their child; more so if their child requires intensive support in the classroom. Thus it is important to understand the perspectives the parents share regarding inclusive education.

1.3.1 Aim of Study

In light of the above, the aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of parents' perspectives of special schools, and in particular how they experienced the transition their children had to make from a mainstream to a special school. As this study was conducted from the perspective of a special school, it was also important to consider the parents' recommendations for ensuring a smooth transition from mainstream to special schools.

The discourse of inclusive education suggests that the child should first be placed in mainstream education. Inclusive education aims to ensure that all learners receive the level of support needed to achieve to their full potential. A special school will by nature of the policy only become an option later in the child's school career. For this

reason it is important to understand the perspective of the parents to ensure a smooth transition from the mainstream to the special school.

1.3.2 Research Questions

This study therefore aimed to answer the following overarching research question:

- How do parents of children with specific support needs experience their children's transition from a mainstream to a special school?

The following sub-questions also guided the study:

- How do parents perceive the role of special schools in South Africa?

- What are the shared reasons for the transition from mainstream to special schools?

- What recommendations can be made to special schools to ensure a smooth transition from mainstream to special schools?

1.4 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

1.4.1 Introduction

This section endeavours to outline the research process for this investigative study systematically. As qualitative research (the methodology for this study) acknowledges the researcher as the main collector of data, the researcher was centrally positioned in this study and the lens that the researcher used is therefore subjective; an objective stance is impossible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In light of this it is important to first introduce the researcher and explain her role as a teacher, an educational psychologist in training and, most recently, a researcher. The theoretical framework plays an important role in the study and is also introduced and discussed below. The research paradigm and methodology is then discussed and, finally, the research design is introduced.

1.4.2 Introducing the Researcher

As indicated above, Finlay and Evans (2009) suggested that a qualitative research methodology recognises that the researcher takes a central role within the research process. The authors further stated that the researcher, as the central figure in the research process, influences the collection, selection and interpretation of data. The researcher's past and personal experiences as well as her own understanding of the world around her will affect the manner in which the findings are constructed (Finlay & Evans, 2009).

It therefore seems important to present the world view of the researcher, and her own approach to the study. The researcher work has previously worked as a primary school teacher in the special school (acting as the research school) in an urban area of the Western Cape Province. The school accommodates learners with mild learning difficulties as well as learners on the Autistic Disorder Spectrum, and over the past two years seen how learners who received specialised and individual education from a younger age make better progress, academically, within the particular school. Learners who enter the school at a later stage in their schooling struggle in the new environment and show fundamental gaps in their learning. This thesis forms part of a Master's degree in Educational Psychology currently being completed by the researcher. As an educational psychologist it is necessary to work within the system to ensure the best for the child. By understanding the process that parents go through when deciding on schools, or the transition between schools, and their perspectives about the education system at this point in time, it may be possible to assist parents properly in their decision-making process. The researcher aimed to discover why learners who need specialised support do not seem to find the required help in mainstream schools and thus only make the transition to a special school in the Senior Phase. The researcher was also interested in understanding how the parents of these learners perceive the school system and the process they eventually follow to place their child in a special school.

However, it should also be noted that as the researcher was previously a teacher at the school where the research has taken place, and is currently completing an internship as an educational psychologist at the school. These dual roles within the

school need to be taken into account during the analysis and interpretation of the data.

1.4.3 The Theoretical Framework

It is necessary that researchers ascribe to a theoretical framework, because it positions the research within the discipline in which they work. With the framework in place, the researcher is able to theorise about the research and research findings. Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004) argued that it allows the researcher to make the assumptions regarding the interconnectedness of the related world explicit.

This research study was underpinned by the work of Bronfenbrenner that is briefly introduced in Chapter 1 and described in more detail in section 2.3 of Chapter 2. The bio-ecological model developed from an ecological paradigm first introduced in 1979 by Bronfenbrenner. This paradigm represented the reaction to the restriction placed on research undertaken by developmental psychologists. Prior to the development of the ecological model, a medical deficit model was widely populated in the field of education and disability studies. This medical deficit model was a diagnosis and treatment model, which ultimately viewed the problem to be within the child. This model did not take into account the social aspects of the situation, the location, risk factors, barriers and assets (Swart & Petipher, 2011). Bronfenbrenner (1994) believed that to "understand human development, one must consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs" (p. 38).

By underpinning the research with this theoretical framework it was possible to understand the individual and the factors that influenced their development and growth. The framework takes all aspects of society into account, allowing for the impact of community and cultural differences, socio-economic factors and the greater policy changes within the government at the time.

As indicated before, the bio-ecological model represents a paradigm shift away from the medical model. Swart and Pettipher (2011) suggested that understanding the complex influences, interactions and interrelationships between the individual learner and his or her various connected systems allows research that concerns the processes and contexts affecting human development within the environment in which human beings live to occur. The model is based on the idea of progressively

complex reciprocal interactions and the power, content and direction of these interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner (2005) argued that humans have both objective and subjective experiences. Few "external influences significantly affecting human behaviour and development can be described solely in terms of objective physical conditions and events", thus both objectivity and subjectivity need to be considered (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 5). The bio-ecological model allows for the integration of several role players that influence the education system: schools, parents and learners. It is the integration of the different interconnected systems interacting with one another across time that influences the experiences, perception and development of individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The experiences and perspectives shared by the participants in this study, namely the parents of children in need of more intensive learning support, are developed by and are dependent on the interactions within their world and the way they are able to make sense of (derive meaning from) those experiences throughout. To understand the perspectives held by parents it was important to understand the different systems and influences affecting their lives. An individual's development is affected by his or her social context in which they are brought up. The different subsystems of the bio-ecological interact and result in physiological, biological, psychological, social and cultural growth and development. As these systems interact, they affect one another and create change (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

1.4.4 The Research Paradigm

According to Groenewald (2004, p. 6), a paradigm is a "pattern of thinking" a particular person adheres to. Alternatively, it is a model according to which design actions are taken in research, and involves systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define, for researchers, the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. These assumptions – ontology, epistemology and methodology – act as perspectives and commit the researcher to particular methods of data collection, observation and interpretation. Ontology is the description of concepts and relationships within the study, and how the nature of the reality is understood; epistemology describes the relationship

between the researcher and the knowledge yet to be acquired; and, finally, methodology is the approach used by the researcher to bring the unknown to the known (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

The interpretive research paradigm allowed this researcher to study the parents' (as participants) subjective reality and their perspectives regarding their child's transition from a mainstream school to a special school. From within the interpretive paradigm the researcher is able to recognise, understand and appreciate the behaviour, attitudes and feelings of the participants within the study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Ontologically, the interpretive paradigm maintains the belief that human beings have the ability to construct their own perspectives, beliefs and meanings about the world and their reality that will bring forth multiple realities. There is also a key assumption underlying the interpretive approach that human beings construct their own realities through their social interactions (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster & Prozesky, 2001; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

The term 'epistemology' derives from the Greek word 'episteme', meaning knowledge (Henning, *et al.,* 2004). With regard to the epistemological dimension of the interpretive paradigm, the researcher is seen as the main instrument of data generation. A distinct characteristic of an interpretive approach is therefore that the researcher views "people, and their interpretations, perspectives, meanings and understandings, as their primary data sources" (Mason, 2002, p. 56). In order to develop insight into an individual's reality, their perspectives and the meaning they construct about their world need to be explored. The researcher therefore tried to make sense of the participants' experiences and understand the participants' experiences in their everyday environments, taking into account the significant influences of their unique contexts, backgrounds and proximal processes (Henning, *et al.*, 2004). In this study the researcher attempted to understand the perspectives of parents regarding their children's transition to a special school. These perspectives were specific to each individual and were seen as the principal source of data. The researcher also recognised that the meaning and understanding placed on certain events could differ from person to person. An interpretive approach to the research allowed the researcher to understand the realities of the parents and how they had been constructed.

Methodologically, qualitative research aligns best with an interpretive paradigm. In this study, the interpretive paradigm therefore also guided the selection of appropriate methods, design and methodology for exploring the subjective perspectives that parents had constructed regarding their children's education.

1.4.5 Research Design and Methodology

Durrheim (2006, p. 34) described the research design of a study as "a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research". This research paper will make use of a qualitative case study design and employ a methodology which is qualitative in nature. As indicated above, a qualitative methodology is usually the methodology of choice within an interpretive research paradigm. A qualitative research methodology describes the approaches and processes used by the researcher in an attempt to understand how the research participants make meaning of their environment through interaction and observation. It is through these methods that the researcher is able to bring the unknown to the known and gain greater insight into the situation, the experiences and perspectives shared by the participants in the study (Maree, 2007).

Qualitative research as an umbrella term covers various forms of inquiry that attempt to understand and explain the meaning the participants make of their worlds (Merriam, 2009). The research study followed a qualitative case study design which, according to Yin (2003, in Walshe, 2011), is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Walshe (2011) defined case study research within the bounded nature of the case and its relationship to its context as "a method for learning about a complex instance, based on a comprehensive understanding of that instance obtained by extensive description and analysis of that instance taken as a whole and in its context" (Walshe, 2011, p. 775).

By using a qualitative case study design it is possible to explore new areas and issues and describe the effects a situation could have on different parties; this type of research also creates an opportunity to explain complex phenomena (Kohn,

1997). Gerring (2006) described case study research as qualitative, holistic, comprehensive and thick. Qualitative case studies incorporate a particular type of evidence that is gathered in a naturalistic manner in order to investigate the properties of a single phenomenon or example (Gerring, 2006).

A case study, according to Yin (2011), is a research method used in various situations to supplement our "knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena" (Yin, 2011, p. 4). Yin (2011) suggested the reason for completing a case study would be to understand complex social phenomena – such as parents' perspectives of their children's transition from a mainstream to a special school in the context of this study. The researcher was able to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events.

Stake (1978) explained that in a bounded system the individual cases do not have to be one single person. The bounded system is considered to be the unit of interest. This system can be composed of a group of individuals, a programme or a responsibility. A case study does not define the methodology but rather the phenomenon of what is going to be studied. A case study is distinct in its design as it defines the boundaries of what is being researched. In case study research the focus is on the aspects of the research that are significant to the study. As suggested above, a case study is an intensive investigation into the particular unit of analysis; in this case the parents and their perspectives. Case study research is dependent on rich and complete detail that take the development of the unit into account and the changes that have occurred over time. The case study will also take the context of the unit into account (Flyvberg, 2011; Stake, 1978); in this research paper this included the family and their immediate environment.

In the case of this research design, each parent, or parental unit, interviewed was considered as a single bounded case. Data for this research was gathered in the form of four multiple case studies. When the contexts of the cases differ from one another, they are defined as multiple cases. In this design it is possible to analyse the data within each case study as a first phase of analysis and then across the various cases as a second phase of analysis. In a multiple case study design it is possible to examine and understand the similarities and differences between cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The data collected from each of the case studies, and thus

each parent (or unit of parents) was then analysed and compared with the data collected from the other case studies. The parents, who were thus considered to be the bounded system, each had a child or children attending a single special school in the Southern suburbs of Cape Town.

1.4.6 The Research Plan

1.4.6.1. Introduction

The research plan looked at four principles that, when applied in order, could help to achieve design coherence. These were: the purpose of the research; the context in which it takes place, which is discussed in section 1.4 and is discussed in detail in Chapter 3; the research paradigm, discussed in section 1.4.3; and the techniques used, discussed in section 1.4.6. Below, Figure 1.2 represents the design principles as they are applicable to this study. Aspects of this figure are discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.
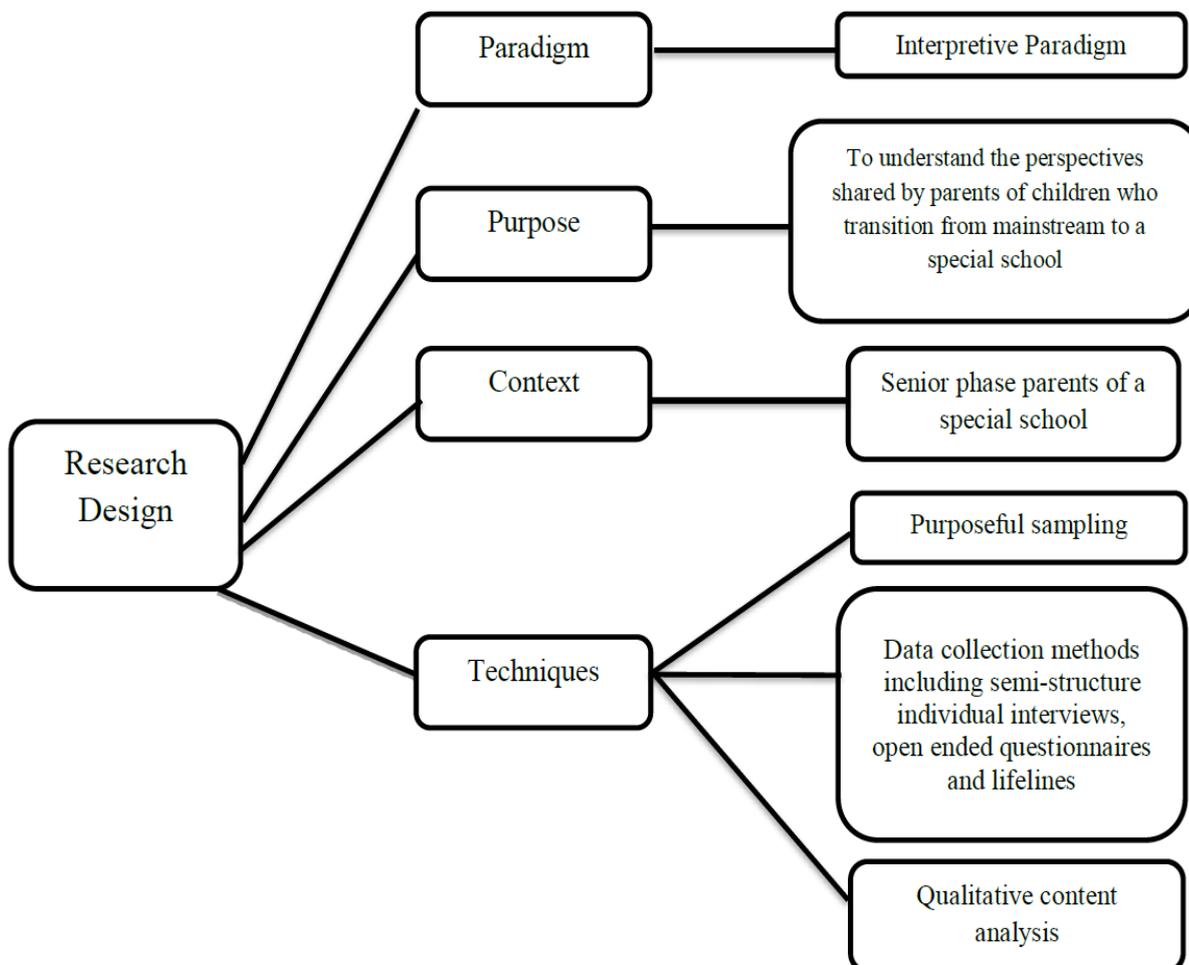
Figure 1.2: A Schematic Representation of the Research Plan

1.4.6.2 Selection of Participants

Sampling refers to the way in which the researcher attempts to define the population of interest, or the unit of analysis that is the focus of the study. In the case of this study, the unit of analysis is parents of children who are in need of more intensive learning support who transferred their children to a special school when the child was in the Senior Phase of their schooling. The parents' perspective of their children's transition to a special school is the unit from which the data will be drawn. Boeije (2002) stated that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to decide what data will be gathered and from whom the data will be collected; these decisions are made based on theoretical ideas.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used purposeful sampling. In a research study, the reason for using purposeful sampling is to ensure the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study. Patton (2002) described information-rich cases as those from which the researcher can gain a large amount of information about the questions in the particular research study.

The participants for this study were selected based on the following criteria: the parents have children attending the particular special school; their children were transferred from a mainstream school; and the transition between schools occurred while their child was in the Senior Phase of their schooling, or in grade seven, eight or nine. With permission from the school the parents were contacted by letter. Once the parents had volunteered to participate in the study, each set of parents, or single parent, was considered a single case that would be studied and compared to other cases during the data analysis process.

1.4.6.3. Methods of Data Collection

Methods are specific research techniques that are used to gather the relevant data that is needed to achieve the goals and aims of the research study. There are several methods of collecting data that can be incorporated within a qualitative methodology. These include observation, interviewing and the reviewing of artefacts or documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). By using these methods, it is possible to elicit information that is rich and detailed; the data can then be analysed and interpreted in ways that are laid out in the research design.

Methods of data collection in this study included in-depth individual semi-structured interviews with the participating parents. Of the four interviews conducted, two of the interviews were conducted with both parents, while the other two interviews were conducted with only the mother. Interviews enable the researcher to collect data that cannot be obtained through observation. The interview is aimed at gaining insight into the world in which the interviewee lives and a sense of how they make meaning of the world around them and of the phenomenon under investigation (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

A general interview guide approach was used in this study. This approach involves using open-ended questions acting as guidelines during the interviews; this creates a relaxed conversational atmosphere in which interviewer and interviewee are able to interact. The participants were also asked to complete an open questionnaire and a life-line activity was completed during the interview. Open questionnaires allow the participant to share their own experiences rather than choosing one option over another (Mertens, 2005).

The life-line activity is a tool most used in career counselling approaches. In this research paper it was used to elicit information regarding each stage of the participant's life with regard to their child's learning difficulty (Maree, 2011). The methods of data collection are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

1.4.5.4 Data Analysis

Yin (2008) suggested that data analysis in a case study involves the examination, categorising, tabulating and recombining of the data with the view to address the research questions of the research study in question. Yin (1984) had previously stated that the analysis of the data in a case study is often reliant on the experience of the researcher. Each case study should be viewed as a general analytical strategy.

Trochim (1989) suggested that pattern-matching is the most applicable version of data analysis for a case study. This technique "compares the empirical based pattern with a predicated one" (Trochim, 1989, p. 13). Explanation-building involves the analysis of the case study by creating an explanation of the case. This process is

repetitive and circular in nature, as it involves beginning with a theoretical statement, refining it, revising the proposition and then repeating this process.

Qualitative content analysis is described by Elo and Kyngäs (2007) as a "systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena". By using this method of analysis, it is possible to test the theoretical issue while enhancing the understanding of data. Qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to make duplicable and valid deductions from data within the specific context. This is done with the aim of providing knowledge, insight and representation of facts (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p. 108).

For the qualitative content analysis process in this research an inductive process was used, which required preparing, organising and reporting. The process followed open coding, the creation of categories and the generalisation of ideas. Inductive content analysis requires open coding and categorising of the main headings; the similar categories could then be combined and generalisation of the topics could occur. This process does not occur in a direct fashion and is complex in its less standardised process. The process of analysis is flexible and exaggerated; however, it is dependent on the skills and experiences of the researcher (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007).

The data analysis process took place in two phases and the findings are, likewise, presented in two sections in Chapter 4. The first phase of this data analysis process was a within-case analysis. Here the themes unique to the particular case were identified and discussed. This phase also identified further information, which influenced the systemic factors that might have bearing on the case (Merriam, 2009). On the completion of the within-case analysis, the second phase, that of cross-case analysis, could begin. The cross-case analysis was used to explore the shared themes of the cases and how each related to the research questions. Yin (2003) describes cross-case analysis as a process of 'testing' themes from each case while considering all the cases. Doing this builds a complete, rich description of the answers to the research questions illustrated in the case studies. The process of cross-case analysis involves identifying similar patterns, which are evident in the single cases, and further identifying the similar as well as differing themes across the cases (Merriam, 2009). An elaborative discussion on qualitative content analysis as well as the within-case and cross-case analysis is presented in Chapter 3.

1.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics are aimed at ensuring the safety of people within society. Practising professionals are required to live out these principles to guarantee fair and just service. Ethics, according to Alan (2008), form a part of philosophy known as moral philosophy which studies the idea of morality. Morality defines how individuals make decisions that influence other individuals in society.

To complete ethically correct research it is necessary to receive institutional approval. According to the Department of Health (DoH), the process requires gaining the consent of the organisations involved (DoH, 2006). This chapter served as part of the application process and was assessed by the Ethical Clearance Committee at Stellenbosch University (DESC_HYM/2012). The process also requires permission from the school where the research will take place.

It is also important to receive informed consent (DoH, 2006). Informed consent is based on one of the four basic principles of ethical decision making, namely autonomy, which is closely related to respect for human dignity. Autonomy refers to people's ability to make their own decisions, provided that they do not harm others (Allan, 2008). Another consideration, based on the principle of autonomy, is that of confidentiality, which rests on the participants' right to privacy. The specific ethical considerations as applicable to this study are discussed in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 3 the focus is on the complete data collection and analysis process. For the validity and credibility of the research paper it was important that all aspects of the research were properly tracked and recorded.

1.6. A REVIEW OF THE KEY CONCEPTS

1.6.1 Inclusive Education

This study attempted to distinguish between the use of inclusion and inclusive education. Inclusion defines the policy, value or philosophy of including all individuals. Inclusive education is about the presence, participation and achievement of all learners in the education system (DoE, 2001).

1.6.2 Mainstream Schools

Mainstream schools described in this research study refer to the ordinary schools as defined in Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). These are ordinary in the sense that they cater for the average learner who is able to function in the mainstream school environment and is in need of low intensity support.

1.6.3 Special Schools

Special schools, as defined by Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), describe schools that are resourced to assist those learners who have high-intensity support needs and would not be able to manage in an ordinary school or a full-service school.

1.6.4 Full Service Schools

A full service school, as defined in Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), is a school within the community that will prioritise the orientation to and training in new roles, focusing on multi-level classroom instruction, co-operative learning, problem solving and the development of learners' strengths and competencies rather than focusing on the shortcomings of learners. These schools are currently equated with inclusive schools in policy documents (DBE, 2010).

1.6.5 Transition

The Oxford Dictionary of English (3ed.) defines transition as the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another; the example given is of a student who moves from one programme to another. In the USA the word is also used as a verb and describes the process of undergoing a process of transition (OED, 2012). For the purposes of this research study, transition refers to the movement of learners from a mainstream to a special school.

1.6.6 Perspectives

Perspectives describe the relationship of aspects of a subject to one another and to the whole. They can also involve the subjective assessment of relative significant experience of a particular individual; it is a subjective point of view. A fair perspective

held by the individual is one that perceives experiences for their actual importance. For the purposes of this study the word perspective relates to the parents' understanding and experiences regarding the particular topic and research questions. This research sought to understand the subjective meaning they placed on certain experiences (OED, 2012).

1.6.7 Parents

For the purposes of this research study the term parent will refer to the parents of the learner who has made the transition from a mainstream to a special school in the Senior Phase of their schooling. Parents are also considered a key resource in this research. The parent plays a role in sharing the necessary information regarding their child, and collaborating with the school and educators to support their child to achieve success (Landsberg, 2011).

1.7 STRUCTURE OF PRESENTATION

Chapter 1: Chapter 1 focuses on introducing the study and contextualising the research. It also outlines the research process that was implemented to conduct the research.

Chapter 2: This chapter provides an in-depth review of existing literature with a focus on the constitution of South Africa and governmental policies that have influenced the education system, as well as the role that society, community, families and schools have on the learner. This chapter also focuses on the particular role of the parent and the development of the individual.

Chapter 3: This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion on the research process, including research methodology, design, and paradigm, as well as the ethical considerations taken into account.

Chapter 4: Chapter 4 presents the research findings, which are then discussed and interpreted.

Chapter 5: This chapter focuses on recommendations, as well as possible limitations to the study, and summarises the findings of this research.

1.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter was aimed at providing the reader with the background to the study and orientating the reader to the way in which the research was conducted. The chapter informed the reader of the motivation for the study, the problem statement and the research questions. It also described the research paradigm, methodology, methods and data analysis that were used in the study. The chapter serves as a framework for the rest of the study. Chapter 2 explores the existing literature that influenced this research paper. The literature review allows the researcher to position this research in a manner that will lead to a positive impact within the field.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In a research study, the literature review is a central component as it aims to assist in conceptualising the research; this is done through a discussion of the existing literature related to the research topic. The review of the literature makes it possible to identify a gap within the relevant body of knowledge, thus allowing the researcher to focus the research in a particular direction. It provides the foundation from which the researcher is able to discuss the research findings and place the research within the present body of work (Henning, *et al.,* 2004).

By being cognisant of the current and existing literature it is possible to conduct appropriate research that assists in the understanding of the particular topic. Good research is always aimed at furthering the collective understanding within a particular field. This literature review builds on the argument introduced in Chapter 1, in that it continues to position the work from the perspective of the original body of knowledge. The literature review can then also be used to create meaning and assist in the interpretation of the collected data (Henning, *et al.,* 2004).

This chapter uses the bio-ecological framework introduced in Chapter 1 to structure the literature pertaining to the study. The chapter first defines inclusion and inclusive education in more depth, continuing on from the discussion in Chapter 1. Then, using Bronfenbrenner's model, policies and literature are explored, starting with the macrosystem and the international and national policy, and ending with the microsystem and understanding the parent, child and school relationships. By using this framework to discuss and expand on the literature, it is possible to understand how the policies, international and national, the education system, community culture, family relationships, and individual development affect the perspectives of parents concerning their children's transition from a mainstream to a special school.

2.2 DEFINING INCLUSION AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusion can be considered a policy of values and beliefs that view all people as equal. Pather (2001, p. 1114) stated that, from a South African perspective, inclusion is viewed as "value-based and about community, rights and compassion, belonging and respect". Inclusion as a philosophy lends itself to inclusive education. Pather (2001) further described inclusion as being a value put into action within the educational arena. Inclusive education can be seen as an education system that is responsive to the diverse needs of learners. Inclusive education is a policy within the school government that requires the inclusion and input of all stakeholders. Furthermore, the community, parents, educators and learners can all play a meaningful, collaborative and positive role in ensuring an inclusive school environment for all.

Inclusion includes a sense of belonging and acceptance (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart, Kitching & Eloff, 2005). Sebba and Ainscow (1996) suggested that inclusive education is the process of ensuring that the school attempts to view all learners as unique individuals through the reconsideration and restructuring of its organisation. It also attempts to reallocate resources and enhance the equality of opportunity. Inclusive education, as a policy, means that marginalised children, previously taught in special classes and schools, can attend regular classes in mainstream schools, given the availability of appropriate and adequate schooling and support. However, inclusive education is not simply about placement. In order for quality education to be achieved for all citizens, the education system needs to ensure that the needs of the learners are met. Education should be seen as a basic human right to be received by all, irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age (Siebalak, 2002).

Walton, Nel, Hugo and Muller (2009) stated that the unique history shared by South Africans results in a specific educational and socio-economic context. This context then influences the manner in which inclusive education is implemented within schools. South Africa is relatively new to the theory and policy surrounding inclusion and, as a result, can gain much insight from the development of the theory in other countries; however, local response is altered due the historical factors guiding the changes made within the education system.

Walton (2006) argued that inclusive education aims to create a heterogeneous classroom that reflects the diversity of the population. Inclusive education needs to serve the community and be responsive to the needs of all individual learners. Full inclusion would be the result of all learners being accommodated in a particular classroom without there being a focus on the particular disability. This form of inclusion means there is a no rejection policy; all learners are accepted and supported through a co-operative learning style and special support within the classroom (Sailor, 1991). An alternative to full inclusion is the notion of a continuum of services. This model means that learners with various special needs can be accommodated in a variety of ways within an inclusive education system. The best interest of the child is taken into account when placing the individual in the appropriate educational programme.

In South Africa, the government opted for an inclusive education system while providing a continuum of services. Special schools have been kept as part of the continuum and continue to serve the community and cater to a wide range of individual learners (Walton, 2006).

2.3 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

The theoretical framework, as introduced in Chapter 1, section 1.4.1, allowed the researcher to position herself and the findings of her study within current research in a particular focus. The framework for this research paper was underpinned by the bio-ecological model first introduced by Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s. The bio-ecological model is based on a theory of interrelated subsystems affecting the individual's development and growth. As described in Chapter 1, the framework incorporates the proximal processes or personal interactions, the individual's characteristics, and the context of time and environment. Through understanding the interaction between the systems within the context of an individual and the effect they can have on each other to a greater or lesser extent, the development of the individual is better understood.

The bio-ecological model is made up of distinct properties, which require the incorporation of both objective and subjective elements of the human experience.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) theorised that the external influences that affect the individual's behaviour and development are dependent on objective physical conditions and events. This developmental model devised by Bronfenbrenner (2005) makes allowance for the incorporation of several key components – the government, community, culture, schools and economic status – which all affect the shared experiences and perspectives of the parents; for this reason the model was used as the theoretical framework for this research study. These systems, which often directly influence the learners, include the individual, parents, school and peers. The focus of this thesis is however the perspectives of the parents. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the factors affecting the child will, in turn, affect the parents. The factors influencing the individual are not in one direction, but are rather bi-directional and, at the same time, the individual also affects the environment through interaction with it. The system is based on an idea of reciprocity, where changes within a system affect and influence other changes (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Rogoff, 2005).

The perspectives of parents who have children in a special school will depend on their interaction with their world and how they interpret and make meaning of their experiences through the different stages of their life (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Rogoff, 2005). The decisions made by parents are influenced by their experiences and how they perceive those experiences. As a researcher, it is not possible to understand these perspectives unless the different systems and influences affecting the parents are taken into account. The parent and child are centrally positioned within the bio-ecological system in this study and interact with each of the other systems in one way or another. There are also the interrelated dimensions of the environment and the individual that need to be considered. These are proximal processes, personal characteristics, systems and time (chronosystem).

Below, Figure 2.1 illustrates how the model used to underpin this thesis can be shown in diagrammatic form.

The diagram shows the interaction within and between each subsystem. As introduced in Chapter 1, the framework is made up of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem within the context of time. In this diagram the individual, in this instance the learner, is at the centre and thus influenced by peers, school and family.

For this research paper, the parents, in relation to their children moving from a mainstream to a special school, were at the centre of the diagram.
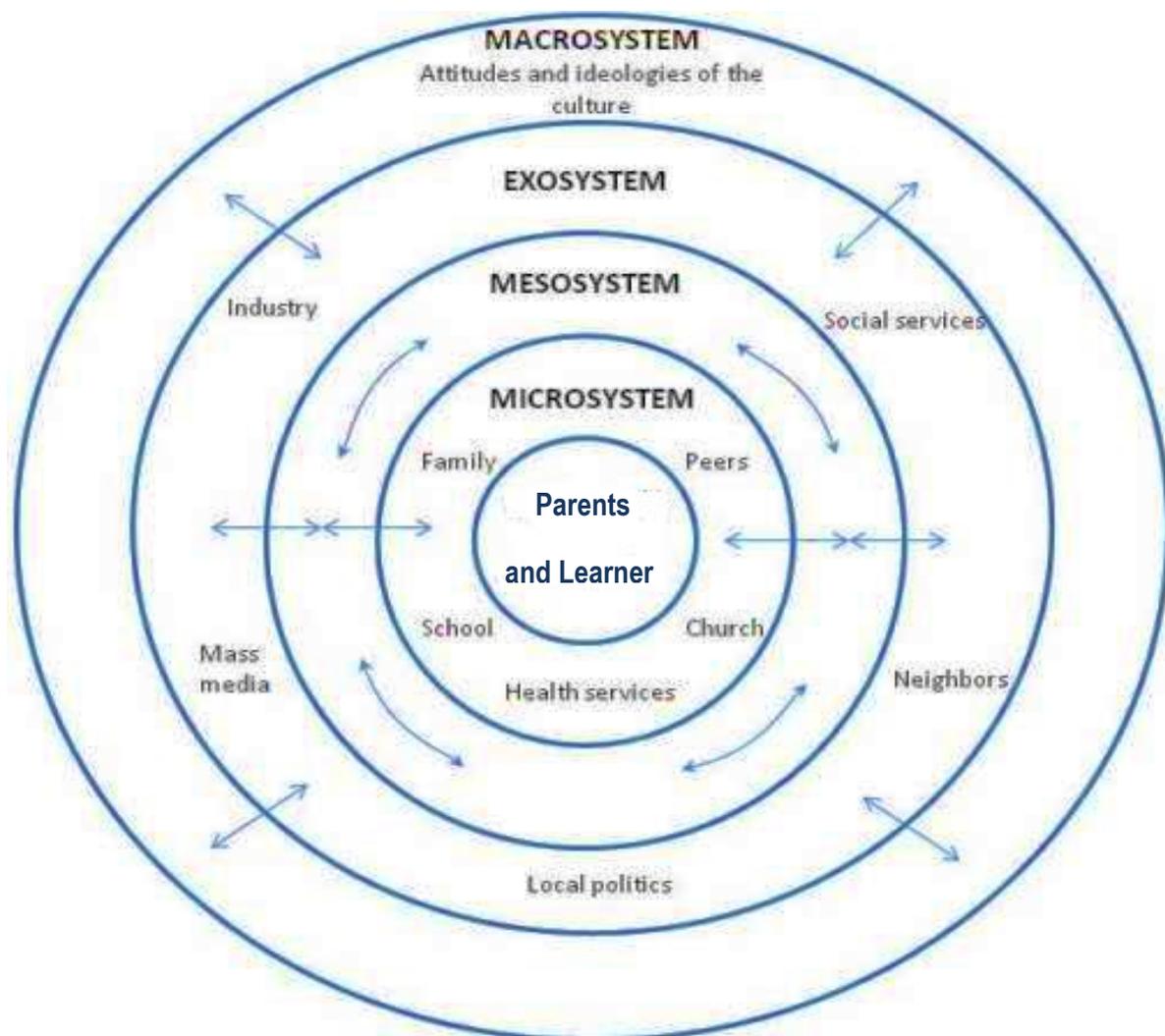
Figure 2.1: A Schematic Representation of the Bio-ecological Model

The focus of the study was therefore the parents' interaction with their child, the schools available to them, the community, their extended family, and their peers. The family and school relationships are further discussed in section 2.2.

Bronfenbrenner (1994) understood how the influences of family, community and culture would affect the development of the individual and thus their education. At an advanced stage of his career, Bronfenbrenner extended his theory by highlighting the importance of the "biological resources in understanding human development" (Oswald & De Villiers, 2013, p. 6); henceforth the theory became known as the bio-ecological approach. He then referred to his theory as the 'Process-Person-Context-Time model' (PPCT). The bio-ecological model is centred on four main components: proximal processes, person characteristics, context and time. This model makes the assumption that human development takes place through complex and reciprocating interactions involving the individual as active agent and the environment (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

Firstly, the proximal processes are considered the core of the bio-ecological model. It describes the types of interaction between individuals and their immediate environment. These processes have a direct influence on human development and occur in a reciprocal relationship with other individuals, objects and symbols on a regular basis over an extended period of time (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

Secondly, the person characteristics play an important role in human development. The individual has a specific disposition, for example being impulsive or insecure, which will affect the development of individuals and the manner in which they build knowledge from the world around them. Ecological resources also play a role. These resources affect the ability of the individual to participate in proximal processes. Examples of this include genetic defects or physical impairments. Demand characteristics involve the capability of an individual to encourage interactions with the social environment. These characteristics influence the person's future and their development (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

If one is to describe the person characteristics of an individual and their direct influence on human development, it is important to incorporate protective and risk factors affecting the individual. Protective factors positively influence the individual's

development, whereas risk factors can have a negative impact. These factors occur on various levels, for example the individual, family and social level. Protective factors within the individual are high intelligence and self-esteem; within the family they include caring parents and economic support; and on a social level, attending good schools and influential adult relationships. Risk factors include poor self-esteem, living in poverty, dysfunctional family relationships and attending under-resourced schools. All these factors play a role in human development (Haugaard, 2008).

The third component within the model is the context or environment with which the individual is connected. This component is based on four systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem within the individual's context. These systems also interact with the chronosystem which describes time, which is always passing (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010).

The microsystem describes the interaction between an individual, the interpersonal relationships and system in which they live. The individual is in direct contact with the microsystem, which includes the family, school and the individual's peers. These interactions, known as the proximal processes, occur on a regular basis within the microsystem and shape and develop the individuals within a particular system. This system plays a role in supporting the individual's feeling of belonging and love (Donald, *et al.,* 2010; Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

The interactions that develop and exist between the microsystems are represented by the mesosystem. For example, the school, home and peer group of an individual interact and thus influence one another. If the interactions between home and school are negative, the individual's development can be negatively affected. The influence of the school, family and community partnerships within the mesosystem are further explored in section 2.6 (Donald, *et al.,* 2010; Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

The exosystem represents the subsystems that do not directly interact with the individual but have an influence on his or her life in one way or another. In the case of this research paper the parent's perspectives and experiences were in the centre of the model, and thus the exosystem looked at how these outlying factors affected the parents. The education system; a parent's place of work and financial situation;

and the health service are examples of exosystems that influence the parents' perspectives of their children's schooling and may influence their decisions, though not directly (Donald, *et al.,* 2010; Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

The macrosystem represents the system that is the most distant from the individual but still affects their environment. It is a cultural guide that predetermines the structures within society. It incorporates the dominant social and economic structures within the community, and includes the wider community and society as a whole. However, the factors within the macrosystem will ultimately have an effect on the individual in the micro-system; in this instance the community and culture bias and socio-economic status would influence the parents. In South Africa, the change in government structures and policies from the Apartheid regime to a democratic society had an impact on all people and the economy. These social and governmental changes on a macro level affect interactions between the microsystems within the mesosystem: the parents, children, schools and communities are thus affected. More closely related are the changes in the education system. South Africa has undergone various changes within the school system, which affect the policies, curriculum and management of schools. Education White Paper 6, as a policy structure, has impacted the role of special needs education in this country (Donald, *et al.,* 2010; Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

Finally, this model incorporates time as one of its systems. The history of an individual will affect his or her development. The fact that an individual develops over a period, means that this progression in time will be part of the development of an individual and should be taken into account (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

2.3.1 Proximal Processes

Through engaging and interacting with others, individuals are able to make sense of their world. They can begin to understand their place and the part they will play in the world, whether it is to change their world or find their role within the existing one.

> [H]uman development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human

organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes.

(Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996)

Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield and Karnik (2009) suggested that proximal processes are fundamental to the bio-ecological model and the proximal processes vary depending on the individual as well as the context.

The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person; of the environment—both immediate and more remote—in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration; and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived.

(Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996)

Effective interaction between individuals should occur on a regular basis and over an extended period of time. The proximal processes result in various kinds of development outcomes and actualising of effective functioning. Effective interaction includes parent-child and peer-peer activities, group or solitary play, reading and learning new skills (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

For the purposes of this research paper the parents were in the centre of the model. Their interactions with their child were important for this research, as well as their interaction with the school and teachers. These interactions would influence the development of the parents and the meaning they make of their experiences and that of their children.

2.3.2 Person Characteristics

Each individual brings his or her own personal characteristics to any social situation. The biological and genetic differences between individuals need to be acknowledged; however, Bronfenbrenner believed it is the person characteristics that are the most important. These characteristics can be divided into three types – demand, resource and force (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

Demand characteristics were previously known as personal stimulus characteristics. These stimuli are immediately apparent, for example age, gender, skin colour and physical appearance. These characteristics are able to influence the interaction between individuals as the expectations are instantly formed (Tudge, *et al.*, 2009). Swart and Pettipher (2011) suggested that demand characteristics have the capacity to stimulate or reduce interaction within the social environment.

Resource characteristics are made up of 'bio-psychosocial' liabilities and assets that influence the capacity of the organism to engage effectively on proximal processes. These characteristics were described by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) as conditions that affect the functional integrity of the individual, for example genetic defects, low birth weight, physical disability or impaired brain function. Resource characteristics are associated with the mental and emotional abilities, including past experiences, skills and intelligence. The resource characteristics can also be described as the ability individuals have to interact effectively with their environment. Factors that affect the individual's ability include genetic defects, low birth weight, skill, knowledge and intelligence (Swart & Pettipher, 2011; Tudge, *et al.*, 2009).

The force characteristics describe the individuals' temperament, motivation and persistence. Individuals, given the same resource characteristics, will have different development lines as development is dependent on their motivation to succeed and persistence (Tudge, *et al.,* 2009). Swart and Pettipher (2011) described force

characteristics as dispositions; these forces can be instrumental in implementing the proximal processes and then maintain or hinder their development.

It is also important to keep the theory of the chronosystem in place. Swart and Pettipher (2011) described this system as 'developmental time-frames' that cross through and affect the interaction between the systems and, in turn, their influence on individual development. This view of time, as a factor in development suggests that as the individual, in this case the learner matures his or her force characteristics and dispositions also develop.

Again, for the purposes of this study the parents were the focus and thus at the centre of the model. The person characteristics of the parents would influence their own strengths and weaknesses. Their own school experiences, level of education, ability to express themselves and their relationship with their child were all important factors in this research.

The applicability of the bio-ecological model to this study is discussed in subsequent chapters. In this chapter it is employed as a way to organise the literature review, as previously indicated.

2.4   THE   MACROSYSTEM: THE   INTERNATIONAL   AND   NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SCENE

2.4.1 The Macrosystem: The International Context

It is important in the context of this chapter and the bio-ecological model to acknowledge that the macrosystem characterises the system furthest removed from the individual. However, true to the nature of the bio-ecological model, it continues to have an influence on the individual and his or her other contextual systems. The international system has a more direct effect on the national system of education in South Africa and the policy initiatives regarding inclusive education, while having indirect effects on the individual parent or parental unit.

The origin of the movement to inclusive education goes back to the 1960s and was first rooted in the principle of normalisation, as indicated in Chapter 1 (Culham &

Nind, 2003). The present discussion on the international movement to inclusive education however starts in the year 1990 with the first global commitment towards Education for All (EFA).

On a global level, EFA is an international commitment made in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. The goal of this commitment was to ensure that all children had access to quality education. The Jomtien Conference, with the backing of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and four other agencies, namely the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the World Bank, aimed to embrace and implement a new vision for basic education. The conference stated that by the year 2000, all children would receive education (DoE, 2001).

The Salamanca Statement, a document outlining the principles, policy and practice in special needs education, and introduced in Chapter 1, was readily accepted at a 1994 conference in Salamanca, Spain by the more than 300 participants representing 92 countries and various organisations. South Africa was invited and attended the conference, adopting the statement along with the other participating countries. The Salamanca Conference ended with all the participants reaffirming their commitment to Education for All and the adoption of the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994).

The Salamanca Statement proclaimed that all children have the right to education and the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. Education systems should, regardless of the unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs of the child, accommodate all individuals within a child-centred pedagogy that can meet the needs of the learner. The statement called on all governments to ensure that education departments receive budgetary priority and that the system adopts a principle of inclusion where all children are offered mainstream education. The first option of placement should therefore be the mainstream school and classroom and these systems should change to be able to accommodate the learning abilities and needs of all children (UNESCO, 1994).

The Salamanca Statement was guided by the principle that schools should be integrated irrespective of the individuals' physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or cultural backgrounds. The statement framework used the term 'special educational needs', referring to individuals who have needs arising from disabilities and learning difficulties. The statement further suggested that numerous children would have some form of learning difficulty in their school career and it is important that the schools and the schooling system are able to educate these learners successfully. An inclusive school is challenged with the role of developing a child-centred pedagogy in the hope of ensuring that all children may be offered mainstream education. An inclusive schooling system is not only able to provide quality education to all but should also be able to address discriminatory attitudes within communities and society (UNESCO, 1994).

Within social policy that has developed over the last twenty years, integration and participation, and overcoming exclusion have been promoted. It is now understood that inclusion and participation are essential for human dignity, and the implementation and application of human rights. The policy changes have resulted in strategies being developed within the field of education that strive to ensure genuine equalisation of opportunity. The Salamanca Statement stated that the successful integration of individuals with special needs is best achieved through all-inclusive schools that serve all individuals within the community. While the inclusive school is able to provide a constructive and positive environment, achieving equal opportunity, the success of the system is dependent on the full support of the educators, school staff, peers, parents', families and volunteers. Inclusive education, viewed from this standpoint, requires the commitment and conviction of all individuals within the community (UNESCO, 1994).

In 2000, when the participating countries reassembled in Dakar, Senegal it was realised that the goal of Education for All, laid out in Jomtien, Thailand ten years earlier had not been realised. It was at this meeting that the goal was reviewed and the countries adopted six goals, three of which had a timeline attached; these were: 1) to see every child completing a quality basic education; 2) to increase literacy levels by 50%; and 3) to ensure gender equity in education – all by 2015. The Dakar Conference concluded that the timeline created a situation where there would be

greater effort required on the part of the governments, non-governmental organisations and civil society (UNESCO, 2005). Currently, on an international level, a distinct link between the movement to inclusive education and the realisation of the EFA goals is recognised. Dyson (2001) suggested that it is imperative that every country finds its own contextualised version of inclusion, which will ensure an inclusive education system that will address the above commitments in a unique way.

As indicated before, the international movement to inclusive education influenced what happened in education in South Africa, especially after 1994. The focus is now on the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa.

2.4.2 The Macrosystem: The South African Educational Arena

The Constitution of South Africa was promulgated in consideration of the fact that South Africa was proclaimed a sovereign democratic state in 1994, founded on the values of human dignity, the achievement of quality of human rights and freedoms, non-racialism and non-sexism, openness and accountability. The Constitution is the supreme law of South Africa and any conflicting law is considered invalid in comparison. In South Africa all citizens are equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship; and equally subject to the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. The Constitution also makes provision for a national anthem, national flag and the eleven official languages recognised in South Africa (RSA, 1996a).

Chapter 2 of the South African Constitution concerns the Bill of Rights. The Bill is the cornerstone of democracy in South Africa and protects the rights of all citizens in South Africa and fosters the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom (RSA, 1996a). Discrimination on grounds of several social categories such as race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth is not allowed.

What is most important within the context of this study is that the South African Constitution states that everyone has the right to basic education and to further education made available by the state. Everyone has the right to receive education in one of the eleven official languages as the language of their choice, where

practical. The state is required to consider all alternatives to education including single medium schools while always remembering the ideals of equity, practicality and the need to address the racially discriminatory past of South Africa. The Constitution also makes allowances for the right to establish independent institutions; however, they may not discriminate on the basis of race, are required to register with the state and must maintain a level of standards expected at public educational institutions (RSA, 1996a).

The principles of the South African Constitution informed the South African Schools Act 84 that governs schools and educational settings. The Schools Act of the Republic of South Africa came into effect in November 1996. The Act provided the guidelines for a uniform education system which includes the organisation, governance and funding of schools. It also aimed to change and abolish laws that resulted in discrimination against certain groups of people (RSA, 1996b).

The Act was developed to create an education system that could address the inequalities of the past and ensure high quality teaching and learning for all learners. The Act held the belief that education could lay the foundation for the development of the necessary abilities and skills to ensure a democratic society in which all members can play a positive and collaborative role. Education could also lead to an accelerated transformation towards democracy and ensure that sexism, racism and intolerance is eradicated. The Act also protected the right of educators, learners and parents and created a strategy by which these parties are given responsibility in organisation, governance and funding of schools. The Act made the following allowances with regards to learners: 1) all parents are required by law to ensure that all children under their care in school going age attend a school; 2) school-going age is from the year in which the child turns 7 until they reach the age of 15 or the ninth grade; and 3) for learners with intensive support needs the age of compulsory attendance will be dependent on the Minister for Education. The government is required to ensure that there are enough school placement options for every child (RSA, 1996b).

In 1996 the government of South Africa appointed the National Commission on Special Needs on Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS). These committees worked together to assess

all aspects of special needs and support services and made recommendations regarding the situation at the time. The subsequent report led to significant contributions in educational policy development within the South African context. The NCSNET/NCESS commission was guided by a democratic, transparent and participatory process which involved members of the public and considered relevant opinions of all stakeholders involved (DoE, 1997a).

The NCSNET/NCESS Report stated that support services in the past only ensured the delivery of specialised interventions for the minority of individuals within society. The report found that replicating or extending the individualised specialist interventions, which were of a curative nature, was not suitable for creating a cohesive South African society. It suggested the need for alternate methods of support that focused on prevention and development. The Commission argued that the terminology *'learners with special educational needs'* held a negative connotation, indicated that an individual did not fit into mainstream education, and did not take into account the reason for learning breakdown. This led to the Commission proposing the idea of 'barriers to learning and development' in an attempt to ensure that transformation within the system could occur. It is important to take into account the reciprocal effects that both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors have on barriers to learning. The Commission proposed the notion of minimising and preventing barriers to learning in creating an education system that was responsive to individual needs (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001).

The following key barriers to learning were identified by the Commission: socio-economic barriers; discriminatory negative attitudes; an inflexible curriculum; language and communication blocks; inaccessible and unsafe built environments; inappropriate and inadequate provision of support services; lack of parental recognition and involvement in the support for educational provision to learners; lack of human resource development; disabilities and moderate to mild learning difficulties in reading, written language, maths and speech; language and communication difficulties; and lack of protective legislation and policy to support the development of an education and training system (Lomosfsy & Lazarus, 2001).

In response to the NCSNET/NCESS Report the Department of Education published the Green Paper on Emerging Policy on Inclusive Education (DoE, 1999), and using

public response to this draft policy the Department of Education released Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System in 2001. Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) was previously discussed in Chapter 1. In Education White Paper 6 (2001) an inclusive education and training system is defined as:

- Acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support;

- Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all students;

- Acknowledging and respecting differences in students, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV or other infectious diseases;

- Broader than formal schooling and acknowledging that learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal settings and structures;

- Changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula and environment to meet the needs of all students;

- Maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and the curriculum of educational institutions and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning.

(DoE, 2001, p. 6)

Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001) contended that with the publication of these policy initiatives, the South African government suggested that it was moving towards an inclusive education system that would attempt to redress the discrimination and inequality of the past. They claimed that the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa would be challenging due to the access to resources required for successful development of the policy. The process would be particularly difficult in South Africa, as a successful inclusive education system requires organised support structures on an integrated and community-based level (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001).

Several policy documents have been published since Education White Paper 6 (2001) to support the implementation of inclusive education. Conceptual and operational guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education with regard to the role of district-based support teams, full-service schools and special schools as resource centres; a Working Document on Guidelines for inclusive learning programmes; and the Draft National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support document were published during 2005 alone (DoE, 2005). These documents have been followed by several others, such as the Guidelines to Ensure Quality Education and Support in Special Schools and Special School Resource Centres (DoE, 2007); Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (DBE, 2010); and Guidelines for Full-service/Inclusive Schools (DBE, 2010). The new curriculum documents in South Africa, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements for the different phases also refer to inclusive education and the importance of differentiating teaching to address diverse learning abilities and needs in the classroom (DBE, 2010). From the above discussion it is evident that inclusive education is considered the way forward for South Africa, albeit at policy level.

2.5 Exosystem

The exosystem describes the system within the context of the individual that is still removed from direct interaction with the individual; but could affect the individual. In this study the exosystem discussion is devoted to a school as an inclusive school community and what that entails, as well as the independent school system in South Africa; the research school being an independent school founded, owned and managed by private stakeholders and not the state.

2.5.2 Defining Community

According to sociological theory, a community would be defined as "people who share a common locality" (Kepe, 1999, p. 418). However, Kepe (1999) suggested that the term *'the community'* better describes the people residing in a single location. The term *'community'* tends to describe the common ties and social components shared by the individuals as members of the particular community.

School communities are described as the groups of people who are associated with the school within a specific community. For this research paper, the school-community is the school, the immediate environment and the role players with an interest in the school, including the educators, learners and parents (Oswald, 2010). Within the inclusive education discourse schools are often viewed as inclusive school communities where the emphasis is on the fostering of mutually sustaining relationships among schools, parents or care-givers and their communities. There should be "an evolving collaboration between the school staff, parents, children, and other members of the community" (Zollers, Ramanathan & Moonset Yu, 1999, p. 169).

Carrington and Robinson (2006) underscored several key principles for creating schools as inclusive school communities. Parents and the broader community in which the school is embedded should actively and successfully be invited to become partners, and there should be respect for the full range of the contributions that these members of the inclusive school community can make. In partnership with the parent body and the community, schools should position themselves as inclusive *learning* communities, where collaborative learning and problem solving are needed, and members of the learner body are accepted as active participants. Whole-school teamwork, shared decision making and a positive, nurturing school culture are therefore indispensable for schools as inclusive school communities that want to cultivate a sense of belonging for all their members (Oswald, 2010).

It is clear from the above discussion that for a particular school (mainstream or special, state-funded or independent) to be configured as an inclusive school, it needs to offer full membership to parents and the local community. The above was important in the context of this study, as parents of children with learning difficulties accommodated in a private and independent special school were the focal point of this study. The decision made by parents when sending their child to a particular school can be influenced by the school itself. It is therefore important that the school creates a welcoming environment where the parents feel included and accepted.

2.5.3 The Independent School System

The rights of independent schools are reaffirmed in the Constitution of South Africa. An independent school is required to be registered with the provincial department of

education, offer a standard level of education and ensure there is no discrimination based on race. Independent schools are founded, managed or owned by stakeholders rather than the state, and thus are able to make independent decisions regarding the management of the school; however, their decisions may not discriminate against the individuals within the school. Independent schools are not bound to the policies laid out by the Department of Education, and can find innovative ways of responding to the challenges of successfully implementing inclusive education within their schools. Being accountable to a Board of Directors, rather than the Department of Education, independent schools can decide how best to meet the needs of the particular learners in their school (Walton, *et al.*, 2009).

Independent schools rely on the school fees from learners, as they are not funded by the South African government. Research by Walton, *et al.,* (2009) indicated that, due to the nature of the independent school and higher fees structure, there is generally a low incidence of socio-economic deprivation as an extrinsic barrier to learning; however, the schools still need to remain committed to ensuring a diverse learner population. It is thus the responsibility of the independent school to create ways of ensuring a diverse population through bursaries, scholarships or individual fee structure. Independent schools are financially able to employ special support staff, including special needs educators and therapists. The research indicated that it is the resources available at independent schools that result in a higher level of support given to the learners. There is often a low learner to educator ratio: smaller classes allow for effective support and the teacher is given the freedom to used co-operative learning and teaching for various learning styles. Walton, *et al.,* (2009) suggest that inclusive education is possible in South Africa, but an increase in level of support is required within schools for both the learners and the educators.

2.5.4 School Policy

The research school is an independent school in the Western Cape Province. As an independent school, the management team is able to make decisions that are not dependent on the policies of the government. While the school continues to follow the government-mandated curriculum and yearly timetable, the school is able to make decisions regarding intake and acceptance of learners independently, as long

as the decisions do not transgress the individual's human right of a non-discriminatory process.

The school caters for learners with special needs, and makes a concerted effort to ensure that the individual needs of the learners are met. The criterion for entrance to the school includes a full psychological and educational assessment and a complete history of previous physiological, biological, social and scholastic development. The school looks for learners with a specific learning difficulty and an average intelligence. The school management therefore looks for signs of intellectual potential within the individual before allowing them access to the school. In this sense the school as a special school does not adhere to the requirements of Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). The school tends to exclude learners who need intensive learning support due to intellectual disabilities. The school follows a programme of learning support, as the staff is specifically qualified to assist learners with specific learning difficulties within the classroom and in one-on-one situations. All learners are exposed to various teaching methods and a differentiated curriculum.

The school currently caters for learners with various learning difficulties at varying levels of severity; the commonality among the learners is that they all struggle with some learning difficulty on a day to day basis. The school also attempts to achieve an inclusive school community where the learners are not discriminated against for any learning barrier they may have.

The school also takes a team approach among the staff and educators. It is divided into three phases, each led by a phase head. Each phase works as a team to assist the learners to achieve their full potential. Through a collaborative process, educators are able to share past and present experiences when dealing with various situations. The school functions using multidisciplinary teams, which involve the management team, educators and support staff. It employs the services of a speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, learning support educators, counsellors and a psychologist. The specialist staff works within a multidisciplinary team to help the learner in various ways. With the close involvement of the parents and educators, it is possible to ensure that all learners receive a well-rounded and individually specific education. Engelbrecht (2006) stated that collaborative partnerships within an inclusive school require a new way of viewing the pre-existing

roles and responsibilities of the parents, teachers and support staff within the school community. Both parents and learners in conjunction with the teachers are identified as "critical elements in the development of inclusive school communities" (Engelbrecht, 2006, p. 178). A multidisciplinary team is dependent on effective collaboration between the parties involved. Engelbrecht (2006) discussed the challenges involved in ensuring effective collaboration; these include the changes in the role of the parents and learners, and of the professionals who have been trained to believe their knowledge gives them authority to make decisions without regard for those around them. The author also suggested that the attributes needed for collaboration are communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust and respect.

It is important to note that, due to the fact that the school is not funded by the government, the fees are set by the management team and school director. As the school is self-funded, the fees are generally higher than those of regular government schools in the same area. This does exclude learners of lower socio-economic status, whose parents cannot afford the higher school fees. However, with higher fees the school has more resources at its disposal and smaller classes.

The independent school is often a final option for learners who have struggled in mainstream education. The option to attend such a school is not available to all children, but the school does attempt to make a difference in the lives of the learners and the lives of their families. An inclusive school incorporates core values which relate to teaching and learning, these include; valuing learner diversity, support for all learners, working with other and continuous personal development (Watkins, 2012). The Department of Basic Education published the guidelines for full-service schools and inclusive schools in 2010. This document defines full-service schools as schools which accommodate all learners and ensure a full range of learning needs, while promoting a sense of belonging for all; the learners, parents and staff, creating a learning community (DBE, 2010).

2.5.5 Conclusion

The structure within the community as well as the school community is one that affects the learners, even if it is indirectly. The context of the community and school will affect the learner, and it is only through a collaborative approach that involves

the parents, the community and the school that an inclusive school community can be fostered.

2.6 MESO- AND MICROSYSTEM

The meso- and microsystem are defined as the centre of the theory and describe the individual and the interpersonal interactions that occur between him/her and the environment. These interactions include those with the family, school and friendship circle. The following sections discuss each system individually and explain how it affects the individual in the centre. To understand the interaction between the systems, namely the school, family and community, it is necessary to understand the nature of collaboration and how the philosophy influences the level and type of interaction within this particular system (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). This is of particular importance to this study.

Bronfenbrenner (1994) defined a microsystem as the complex relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person. The microsystem is the system that the individual is directly in contact with. In this study the parents with children experiencing learning difficulties were centrally positioned and therefore their perspectives informed the data. The individual parent or the parent unit is linked to the school by means of their child. This implies that parents should be invited in as important members of any school within the inclusive school community.

The interaction that develops and exists between the microsystems is known as the mesosystem. For example, the school, home and peer group of an individual interact and thus influence one another. Through the interactions between home and school the individual's development can be either positively or negatively affected (Donald, *et al.*, 2010; Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Within the inclusive education approach collaboration is preferred as the way or style of working together across the different microsystems in the mesosystem. Collaboration receives more attention in the next section.

2.6.1 The Philosophy of Collaboration

Collaboration can be described as a co-operative endeavour founded on shared power and authority. The philosophy assumes that power is based on knowledge rather than position or role. It is characterised by the common goals shared by all participants involved. Participants are defined as those that have a stake in the action, and it is thus in their own interest to develop special working relationships. A defining attribute of collaboration is the involvement of two or more participants willing to commit to the shared ideas and partake in the planning and decision-making process. Collaboration is also defined by a team approach, shared responsibility and non-hierarchical relationships (Henneman, Lee & Cohen, 1995; Lawson, 2004).

Lawson (2004) identifies two categories within professional collaboration. *Intra-professional* collaboration is defined by the participants involved being from the same field. The educators within a particular school working towards a common goal would be an example of this. *Inter-professional* collaboration, noted as a more common form, involves the participation of individuals from two or more specialised professions. For example educators, principals, social workers and psychologists working towards a collaborative school community (Lawson, 2004).

Collaboration can be seen as the goal as well as the process. It can be viewed as a strategy that can lead to an integrated approach within a school system. The collaboration between educators within a school can then potentially lead to improved academic performance among the learners. If collaboration is seen as the goal, the continued collaboration within the team of stakeholders can result in continued service delivery (Lawson, 2004).

When independent people (with a stake in the school) reach the conclusion that they are unable to reach their goals individually, the need for collaboration arises. It is then important to reach awareness of required interdependence; only then can collaboration begin. Collaboration can be seen as both competent and optimal practice. Competent practice describes the process of doing the correct thing at the correct time to ensure the needed results are achieved (Lawson, 2004).

Idol (2006) suggested that collaboration can lead to the re-conceptualisation of special support programmes in place to assist both mainstream and special education. Collaboration can also promote a sense of well-being among the participants and creates a nurturing environment that is accompanied by a sense of accomplishment. Henneman, *et al.,* (1995) discussed the cyclical or repetitive nature of collaboration as a process which is informed by respect that eventually results in still greater respect among the collaborators. Respect for each other within society, the community or a school, ensures collaboration and consequently greater respect among its members.

Blue-Banning, Summer, Frankland, Nelson and Beegle (2004) described the term family centred as various practices focused on family strengths, family choices and control over decisions with regard to specialists and collaborative relationships. Creating meaningful and respectful partnerships engenders a sense of self-worth within the parents resulting in greater satisfaction in the school systems (Blue-Banning, *et al.*, 2004). Effective collaboration can lead to parents having a positive view of the service being provided and improve the parents' perceived ability to work together with the professionals.

2.6.2 Family, School and Community Partnerships

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model gave rise to Epstein's theory of overlapping systems – the community, school and family – which influence one another and share a mutual responsibility for the learning and development of the child. This model allows the understanding of how families and schools are embedded in the community and the influence of parental involvement.

The theory suggests that individuals receive optimal support in situations where the schools and families work in collaboration with educators, parents and community. This collaborative relationship leads to the attainment of shared educational goals (Swart & Phasha, 2011).

Force B: Experience, philosophy and practices
of family

Family

Community

School

Force D:
Experience,
philosophy and
practices of
community

Force A: Time, age, grade

Force C:
Experience,
philosophy and
practices of
school
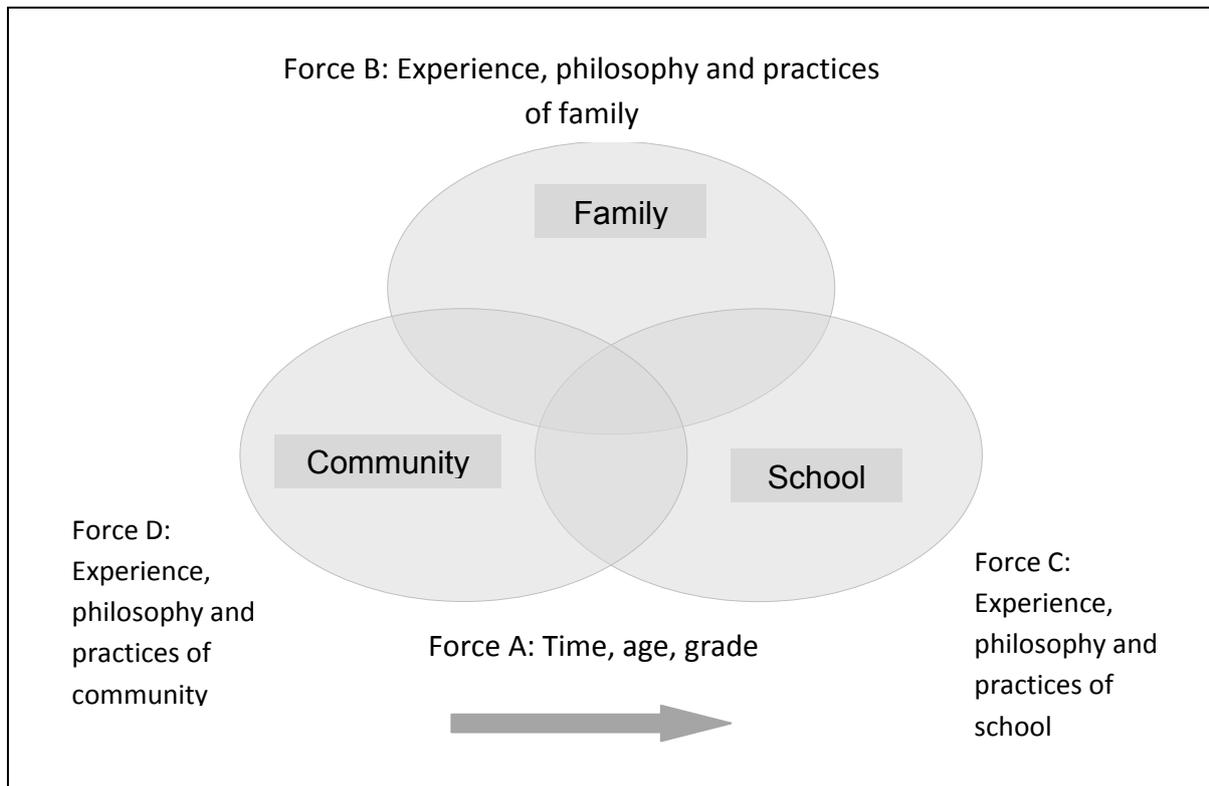
Figure 2.2: Family and Community Partnerships (taken from Swart & Pasha, 2011, p. 233)

Within the Epstein model (see Figure 2.2*)* it is possible to distinguish between the external and internal model of influence. The external model of influence is determined by the extent of the overlap between the spheres, the forces of time and the forces involved in experience, philosophy and practices of the three spheres.

The external model of influence is made up of family, community and school as well as the extent of their overlap and interaction. The external model is also influenced by the forces of time, age or grade as well as the experiences, philosophies and practices of each sphere. The level of overlap and thus interaction is dependent on the perspectives and actions of the educators, families and members of the community (Swart & Phasha, 2011).

The internal model of interaction is defined according to where and how the interpersonal interactions take place. These interactions can occur on an individual and institutional level. Swart and Phasha (2011, p. 233) stated that *"*the focus and purpose of the interaction is always on how these contexts can best support the

achievement and development of the child," and it is these interactions that are important and necessary for the development of inclusive schools.

The internal model of interaction establishes how and where interpersonal interactions occur between school, family and community (Swart & Phasha, 2011). The formation of collaborative partnerships between family, school and community will add to the learning and development of the child. Swart and Phasha (2011) suggested that these partnerships are able to increase the learners' self-esteem, motivation, academic skills and independence.

Epstein (2002) described various strategies to ensure successful school-family-community partnerships. These strategies involve the following: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community.

Firstly, families need to be assisted with parenting skills and understanding child development through to adolescence. Schools also need to be assisted in understanding families and the home environment. Secondly, there needs to be effective home-to-school and school-to-home communication, where the progress of the learner and school programmes are shared. Thirdly, in an effort to support the school programmes and learners within the school, it is important to improve recruitment and training to involve families as volunteers within the school. The fourth strategy involves families and the learners doing at-home activities, these can include homework as well as other curriculum-based activities. The fifth involves decision making in all areas of school life – governance, school councils, committees and parent associations. Lastly, it is important to coordinate the resources and service for the learners, families and other services in the community. These types of involvement are not placed in order of importance, but should be used in conjunction with one another to ensure successful learning. This model also highlights the importance of proximal processes and reciprocal relationships between the spheres, rather than just influencing each individual context. It is also important to forge a good relationship between home and school that is reciprocal in nature and based on continuity with mutual trust and vested interest (Swart & Phasha, 2011).

The individual learner needs to be placed in the centre of the overlapping spheres, and it is their development that is the reason for the partnerships and interactions. The partnerships should be attempted to increase self-esteem, motivation, academic skills and independence among the learners and ensure that they are able to develop to become successful in their own lives and achieve their own goals (Swart & Phasha, 2011).

The value of the individual is highlighted in inclusive education. Inclusive education is more than educating able and disabled students in one classroom. Individuals should be included because they are unique individuals and have the right to be treated with respect and kindness. It is also important to involve the wider community in the school. This is important, particularly when one views a school from a bio-ecological perspective. The wider community may not have a direct effect on the individual in the classroom; however, it can indirectly affect the development of the individual. Parents and social groups that are invited to the school and made to feel welcome and involved will increase the feeling of inclusive education in the school (Zollers, *et al.,* 1999).

As discussed in section 2.6.2, the model as designed by Epstein (2002) shows the influence the school and family have on each other. Understanding the multifaceted and harmonising effects on these systems can encourage communication and collaboration. As seen in Figure 2.2, the various systems of the family, school and community overlap, indicating the amount of influence and effect the one system has on the other. Deslandes (2001) suggested that when the school and family interaction is genuine, there is positive reciprocity and shared activities. Research suggested that schools that implement a programme for school-family partnerships achieve increased parental involvement. It is perceived that by encouraging the parents they do become more involved (Deslandes, 2001). Parents make the decision to become involved in their child's education, based on various factors: whether the parents understand that collaboration with the school is part of their role as a parent; the shared belief that they can positively influence their child's education; and the shared perception that the school and educators want them to be involved. Involved parents participate in activities where they feel comfortable, and their participation is often shaped by their own perceived set of skills. The

involvement of parents then positively influences their child's education through modelling, reinforcement and instruction (Deslandes, 2001).

According to Deslandes (2001), research has also indicated that parents with a lower level of education or non-traditional relationships tend to be less involved with their child's schooling. In general, it seems as if parents have a tendency to assist their child more in primary school, especially if the child is doing well. In the instance where the child suddenly experiences a problem at school, the parent will often step in and try to help, but if the child has experienced a long-standing difficulty the parent is less likely to notice. Thus parents, irrespective of their level of education, whose child performs well at school for a lengthy period of time and suddenly begins to struggle, will notice this dip in their child's academic ability. If the child has always struggled in school it is unlikely that the parent will necessarily notice that their child is underperforming. Schools need to be aware of these factors when establishing partnerships with parents. The community and its role in society are further discussed in Section 2.5.2.

2.6.3 The School as a Microsystem

When the bio-ecological model is superimposed on a school it is important to view the whole school as a single system. Organisational development aims to ensure that the changes in human and organisational systems are correctly managed. As the bio-ecological model explains, changes in one part of the system affect other parts and this can have positive and negative effects on the system and the individuals involved (Donald, *et al.*, 2010).

A supportive and understanding culture within a school system is critical for the successful implementation of inclusionary practices. An inclusive school system requires inclusive leadership. The values and beliefs of the principal of the school will directly affect the manner in which the school is managed. It is important that the leadership in the school creates an environment where all individuals feel safe and secure, and are given the opportunity to achieve within the school system. It is necessary for the school administrators and management to endorse inclusionary teaching practices amongst the staff to create a school culture that embraces diversity. It is also important that teachers play a role in building connections

between the school and the community; the school cannot function in isolation and interaction will have a positive impact on the learners (Riehl, 2000). Zollers, *et al.* (1999) suggested that a democratic approach will ensure transformation on a cultural and behavioural level. However, this cannot be sustained through a top-down approach; it is rather a participatory approach that should be introduced within a school. By adopting this approach through common understanding, long-term change can be implemented.

School development from an inclusionary perspective should be considered within the social context. Each school is ultimately embedded in the community and social constructs of the particular environment. When developing the philosophy of inclusive education within a school it is important to take these influences into account. To address the issues of race, social class and gender effectively at a school system level it is important to understand them on a macro-level (Donald, *et al.,* 2010).

Pillay and Di Terlizzi (2009) discussed the positive impact a trans-disciplinary team had on the development of the individual placed in a special school after being in a mainstream school. Trans-disciplinary teams were explained by Harris and Jones (2010) who introduced the idea of 'professional learning communities', which can occur within and across schools. This model, designed in Wales, attempted to assist professionals in gaining skills and knowledge in new teaching and assessment practices. Reinforcing teacher networking and collaboration leads to innovation and improved teaching practices, where educators show a higher level of self-efficacy and willingness to change and develop. It is suggested that for the school to meet the needs of the learner in a significant manner it is necessary for the educators to be given the opportunity to develop and learn together. The collaborative approach among educators leads to an increase in morale, effectiveness in the classroom and higher achievement among the learners (Harris & Jones, 2010; Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009).

Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) identified, as previously mentioned in Chapter 1, the need for strategic areas of change. It required that district-based support teams are established in all districts to ensure that education support service is strengthened. The teams would be made up of staff from the provincial and regional

district office and from special schools. The Paper also planned for converting schools that were originally special schools into resource centres that would ensure enriched learning specifically aimed at the target population and provide specialised professional support to surrounding schools. This collaborative approach within the education system is necessary within the South African context, as collaboration and support among educators and schools can have a positive effect on the education of the individual. This approach is of particular importance in the governance and functioning of state schools. For the purposes of this study the district-based support team and resource schools played a different role, as the study was focused on a private school setting. However, the parents participating in the study had transitioned their children from government-run schools, which were influenced by the district-based support teams; thus the learners had been influenced at their previous school.

2.6.4 The Parents as a Microsystem

Duhaney and Salend (2000) discussed the significant role the parents of learners. with or without special needs, play within the development and implementation of inclusive education. They suggested that understanding the perspectives of the parents of learners with or without learning disabilities is necessary for effective inclusive education. Duhaney and Salend (2000) gave the following reasons for the influence shared by parents: by legislation, parents are decision makers in placing their children with disabilities in inclusive settings; parents play a central role in their children's developmental and educational activities; parents are the driving force behind many of the services provided to their children; parents are potential initiators and advocates of reform; and parents' reactions are critical in ascertaining the social validity of inclusive education (Duhaney & Salend, 2000).

Parents also play a role in how successful inclusive education is implemented in a particular community or school. Working in collaboration with the district-based support team within their area and being supportive of the personnel and community members; sharing insights into their children's abilities and educational needs; regular and open communication with the school and educators; and the promotion of the inclusive educational programmes can readily improve the success of inclusive education. Parents are particularly affected by the impact of inclusive education and

can share feedback on the development of their child from an academic, social and behavioural perspective. This information can then be used to assess the effectiveness of the policies in place to ensure successful implementation of inclusive education (Duhaney & Salend, 2000).

Tucker and Schwartz (2013) discuss the strategies that can be used to engender positive collaboration and communication between parents and educational specialists; the authors also suggest these strategies as a way in which to improve the parents' perception of special needs education. They suggest that effective collaboration is dependent on their involvement within the multi-disciplinary team and their perceptions of the teacher and specialists. Effective communication between home and school as well as the parents' opinion of the teacher knowledge and ability will influence the perception they have of special needs education.

The parents form part of the microsystem, and their relationship with the school and community affect the development of the individual learner. The perspectives of the parents with regard to inclusive education can have a positive or negative effect on the development and implementation process of inclusive education. By sharing their opinions on inclusive education, and the education system and school in general, there is a positive effect on their child's education (Duhaney & Salend, 2000).

Bronfenbrenner (2005) reported that positive involvement from parents with regard to their child's education resulted in positive academic achievement. Intervention and participation by the parents can be used effectively in strategies for improving learners' academic performance. It is generally acknowledged that parent involvement has a positive impact on the child's success at school. Parent recognition implies that they can make a worthwhile contribution in the education of their children and it also implies a respect for the rights and responsibilities of parents (McKenzie & Loebenstein, 2007). Parents and educators have historically participated in a system that divided and separated, which is incompatible with the notion of shared responsibilities (Engelbrecht, 2006). This separation was never neutral in content, but reflected the power relations in society. What is currently considered necessary is that parents and the community are recognised as full partners and that in these relationships the unique perspectives, experiences,

knowledge bases and personal belief systems are all valued equally (Engelbrecht, 2006).

2.6.4.1 Parental Involvement in Schools

Research suggested that the involvement of parents within inclusive education leads to successful implementation (Engelbrecht, 2006). The South African School's Act of 1996 formalised the role of parents in the education of their children. Parents were now able to advocate for their children's rights and fight for the placement of their child with diverse needs within mainstream schools. At the time there was an increasing awareness that children with learning difficulties achieved a higher level of progress if given the opportunity to interact in an ordinary environment rather than an isolated and contrived setting. Traditionally, the role of the parent within the school system was simply one of fundraising and sports organisation. The role of the parent as advocate for his/her child was thus revolutionary at the time and led to parental involvement in decision making regarding inclusive education and their child's schooling (Engelbrecht, *et al.*, 2005).

Engelbrecht, *et al.,* (2005) stated that the establishment of parental partnerships is necessary for the successful implementation of inclusive education. The Schools Act (RSA, 1996b) instructed that the rights and decision of the parents override the admission policy of the governing body. The parents are able to make the final decision regarding their child's school placement. In Education White Paper 6 (2001) it was clearly stated that the active involvement of parents in the process of teaching and learning is necessary for effective learning development. For this to be successful, the parents need to be accepted as the primary caregivers and an important resource to the education system.

Grove and Fisher (1999, cited in Engelbrecht, *et al.*, 2005) suggested that the implementation of inclusive education is a complex process of decision making and reality construction The educational philosophy, the school setting and inclusive education are complex, as is the additional support their children might require, and could be difficult for parents to understand. Research completed by Engelbrecht, *et al,.* (2005) indicated that the main motivation for parents to place their child in a mainstream school was that they wanted their child to be socially included, and this was considered to be more important than academic achievement. The parents in

their study shared the belief that the inclusion of their child within a mainstream school would lead to the inclusion in society at a later stage. The attitude of the management and staff affected the decisions made by the parents about where to send their child to school. The willingness of the staff to accept their child as an individual with the right to an education was an important consideration in the decision-making process. In some schools excuses were made with regard to the acceptance of a learner due to their academic ability or a physical disability. Some parents were informed about the rights of the child and used Education White Paper 6 (2001) to insist on inclusion for their child. However, Engelbrecht, *et al.,* (2005) also stated that it is difficult for a learner who is placed in a mainstream school due to mandated policy and without the support of the principal or educators. Negative attitudes are not conducive to their successful inclusion. At the same time, parents need to understand that the lack of resources and high demands of teaching within a mainstream setting can result in a lack of enthusiasm shown by the educators (Engelbrecht, *et al.,* 2005).

Inclusive education requires collaboration and the involvement of parents. The collaboration between the stakeholders in the school, the psychologists, therapists and support staff can improve or inhibit the process of inclusive education, and it is often dependent on the perspectives and beliefs of the people involved (Engelbrecht, *et al.,* 2005).

Parents who view their child's education within a mainstream school as a right remain involved in their child's schooling by helping with the adaptation of the curriculum and giving clear guidelines with regard to dealing with their child. The parents also hold the educators responsible for the education of their children. Parents who view their child's education in a mainstream school as a privilege take a hands-on approach to their education at home. These parents play a supportive role and take responsibility to ensure their child is included. Alternatively, the parents who do not want to interfere tend to withdraw completely from the school, losing out on the opportunity to contribute in a positive way to the education of their child (Engelbrecht, *et al.,* 2005).

It is thus important for the school and teacher to advocate for the individual learners. It is the teachers who are the specialists in education and should give the parents

accurate and fair information about how their child is coping at school and where their strengths and weaknesses lie.

2.6.5 The Learner

For the purposes of this study, the researcher focused on parents of adolescent children in the early and middle phase of adolescence, who have learning difficulties and who have transitioned from a mainstream school to a special school. The reason for the focus is that these learners have different learning experiences to those learners who have spent their whole school career in a special school. These learners present a different dynamic in the transition between schools and can influence the parents in various decisions that are made (Steinberg, 2005). This period in the child's life is also characterised as a period of change and the changing of schools is normal during this time.

Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg and Ebata (1989) discussed the impact a school transition can have on a child; these included a negative impact on self-image and a drop in school grades. The research indicates that the transition between is a difficult process and learners would require support through the situation.

EARLY ADOLESCENCE	MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE	LATE ADOLESCENCE
Puberty heighten, emotional arousal sensation-seeking, reward orientation	Period of heightened vulnerability to risk-taking and problems in regulation of affect and behaviour	Maturation of frontal lobes facilities and regulatory competence
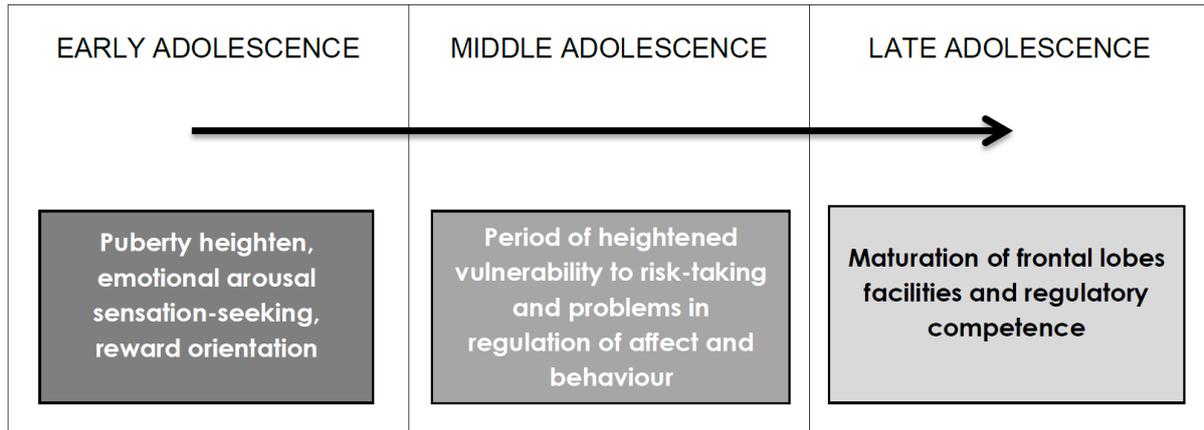
Figure 2.3: Brain Development In Adolescence (Taken From Steinberg, 2005, p.70)

Adolescence is considered to be the stage of transition between childhood and adulthood and, according to Macleod (2003), it is a stage of uncertainty. The developmental stage of adolescence is considered to be between the ages of 11 and 19 years. The adolescent phase can then be divided into early (11 to 13 years), middle (14 to 16 years) and late adolescence (17 to 19 years) (Macleod, 2003). Figure 2.3 below indicates the various stages of adolescence and the direction in which maturation takes place.

In this study the focus was on the parents of children in early and middle adolescence. These phases of adolescence are important for social, psychological and biological growth, however, it can cause stress in the individual. Early adolescence is a period of heightened puberty and maturation, as well as significant improvements in reasoning, especially in deductive reasoning, and processing of information. In middle adolescence learners tend to be vulnerable to risk-taking and find the management of emotions and behaviour challenging. Due to rapid change as a result of physical, emotional and sexual development, adolescence is often a turbulent period in the individual's life. The development occurs on various levels, namely biological, cognitive and social. Biological changes during adolescence are controlled by hormones produced by the hypothalamus in the brain, which alters the reproductive system as well as physical appearance (Smith, Cowie & Blades, 2003; Steinberg, 2005).

On a cognitive level, individuals obtain formal-operational thought during their adolescence. This stage in cognitive development is characterised by the individual's ability to reflect on and understand abstract issues and hypothetical situations. With this development in cognitive ability comes the pressure to make decisions and take responsibility for the choices made (Smith, *et al.*, 2003).

Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Miller, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan and Mac Iver (1993) discussed the problematic changes that can occur during the early phase of adolescence. The authors suggested that early adolescence can lead to the onset of a downward spiral for adolescent individuals resulting in academic failure and school dropout. The level of motivational constructs can decline and affect the individual's interest in school, intrinsic motivation, self-concept and self-perception, and the individual's confidence in their own ability can also be low.

Identity development was described by Soudien (2007, p. 314) as "a process in which young people bring resources, find new ones and constantly work to make sense of their position relative to others". It is during the adolescent years that a person develops their personal identity and the experiences of the learners may influence their personal identity development. Macleod (2003) suggested that the identity development of South African adolescents is intertwined with the apartheid ideology and South African historical and cultural practice. During adolescence, individuals begin to work out who they are through their interactions with others, through adult role experimentation and through their experiences. It is the time when they begin to develop their own unique identity. For this reason, it is essential to examine what identity is and how it develops to understand better the experiences of learners who have struggled within the school system (Kroger, 2007).

Erikson influenced the way in which identity is now understood – he described identity as the way people see us and the way we see ourselves, and how we respond to people across multiple contexts such as schooling, work or home (Thom & Coetzee, 2004). Erikson's first four stages of identity development are primarily concerned with identification with role models and developing ego strengths of hope, willpower, purpose and competence. The fifth stage (adolescence) is cited as being the most important (Thom & Coetzee, 2004) and is the stage most relevant to this paper; it is therefore discussed in greater detail. Stages that occur prior to

adolescence focus on how the child's identity is formed through identification with role models in their lives. Social interaction forms the basis of identity formation and development and, according to Erikson's theory, is dependent on a child acquiring "a sense of trust, autonomy, pleasure from achievement, an ability to work well with others" (Thom & Coetzee, 2004, p. 184).

Individuals can develop according to a genetic framework. This genetic framework ensures that a path that is biologically and sequentially predetermined is followed. Individuals at different ages develop physical and psychological characteristics, and they gradually build up to the person that they will become. Meyer and Viljoen (2002, p. 193) stated that "while one specific trait or developmental theme dominates the developmental scene at any particular age, changes are occurring simultaneously in all other areas of the individual development". At the same time, social influences and demands made by society provide 'opportunities for growth' at the different stages of development. Each part of the development process needs to occur at a particular time in the individual's development; when it does not, their psychologically healthy self may be at risk of not developing as it should (Erikson, 1959).

This section focused on the development of the individual child throughout adolescence. This research paper focuses on the parents and their perspectives, but the development phase of their child is also important, as it could influence the decisions made by the parents. It is during adolescence that the child begins to develop his/her own way of thinking and can begin to influence his/her parents in different ways. Decisions made by the parents can be vetoed by the child and this could lead to a difficult relationship or even family animosity.

2.7 Conclusion

It can be concluded that for inclusive education to be successful it needs to be implemented and viewed within the systems theory framework. All stakeholders within society can play an important role in ensuring that the best interests of the learner are met at all times. This research paper endeavours to understand how the policy of inclusion has influenced the way parents make decisions and their

perspective of the South African education system. Chapter 3 now focuses on the research process and discusses its various components in detail.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As was discussed in Chapter 1, the aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of parents' experiences with regard to the transition their children had to make from a mainstream to a special school. As this study was conducted from the perspective of a special school, it was also important to consider the parents' recommendations for ensuring a smooth transition from mainstream schools.

This chapter focuses on the research process as it was introduced in Chapter 1 and describes how the researcher structured the design in order to answer the research questions of this study. Furthermore, ethical considerations and issues of data verification pertaining to this study are examined.

Before engaging in further discussion on the research process and design implemented, it is necessary to revisit the research questions which were formulated in Chapter 1.

The main research question was as follows:

- How do parents of children with specific support needs experience their children's transition from a mainstream to a special school?

The following sub-questions also guided the study:

- How do parents perceive the role of special schools in South Africa?
- What are the shared reasons for the transition from mainstream to special schools?
- What recommendations can be made to special schools to ensure a smooth transition from mainstream schools?

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

As discussed in Chapter 1, section 1.4.2 a paradigm is a 'pattern of thinking' adhered to by a particular person (Henning, *et al.,* 2004, p. 6). Alternatively, it is a model according to which design actions are taken within research. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006, p. 6) stated that "(p)aradigms are all encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology". It is necessary, at this point, to discuss in detail the nature of the research paradigm of this study, namely the interpretive paradigm; attention will also be paid to how it is positioned philosophically within the research study. It is therefore necessary to readdress the discussion involving the epistemology, ontology and methodology of the interpretive paradigm.

The ontological dimension of a paradigm refers to its stance on how the nature of reality is understood and includes the description of concepts and relationships within the study. The researcher therefore had to question her beliefs with regard to the nature of reality and, by answering this question, it was possible to determine the epistemology, or how the reality researched in the paper could become known. Epistemology describes the relationship between the researcher and the knowledge yet to be acquired; it describes the process in which reality and knowledge become understood by the researcher (Maree, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Finally, methodology is the approach used by the researcher to bring the unknown to the known; the methodology of a study is the way in which the researcher approaches the question of epistemology and attempts to bring the unknown of reality into the known (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

The interpretive research paradigm allows the researcher to study the participants' subjective reality and perspectives. From within the interpretive paradigms the researcher is able to recognise, understand and appreciate the behaviour, attitudes and feelings of the participants within the study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

Within the interpretive paradigm, ontology, which describes the nature of reality, is viewed as the manner in which each individual holds a socially constructed view of their reality. Merriam (2009, p. 8) suggested that "there is no single, observable

reality rather there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event". If this view of ontology is accepted, there can be no one objective reality. The epistemology of the interpretive paradigm is then influenced and a process needs to occur where the differing realities can be accessed (Merriam, 2009). Maree (2007) suggested that the unknown can only become known by asking questions about the reality of the individual and the meanings people attribute to events in their lives. This leads to a situation where knowledge is constructed interactively, between researcher and research participant. It is then possible to understand the contexts in which these participants exist, as they play an important role in the manner in which they influence the way in which the participants construct reality (Maree, 2007).

The methodology of the interpretive paradigm then needs to ensure that, through the specific methods used, it is possible to create a situation where the reality becomes known through positive interaction between the researcher and research participant. The structure of the methodology within interpretive paradigms is usually interactional, interpretive and qualitative in nature (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). A qualitative methodology was therefore employed in this study.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Durrheim (2006, p. 34) described the research design of a study as "a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research". For the purposes of this research paper the research design involved a qualitative case study design while the methodology was qualitative. The research plan looked at four principles which, when applied in order, could help to achieve design coherence; these were: the purpose of the research; the context in which it took place; the research paradigm; and the techniques used. The purpose of the research and the research paradigm were explicated above. The context is discussed next, followed by the research methodology and methods of data generation.

3.3.1 Context of the Research

The context of the research study was influential on the decisions made within the research design. The decisions made with regard to the purpose and paradigm of the research design were dependent on the control the researcher had within the context. This study was conducted within an interpretive research paradigm and therefore the meaning people attributed to various situations and experiences could only be understood through researcher and research participant interaction. This research made use of in-depth interviews supplemented by the use of a life-line activity to elicit additional data and open questionnaires to find the meaning shared by the participants (Durrheim, 2006).

The research study focused on a particular urban school situated in the Western Cape. The school is considered to be a special school and caters for those learners who struggle to achieve their potential in a mainstream classroom. The school caters for children from Grade R to Grade 9 with specific learning difficulties, and attempts to provide specialised teaching for children with dyslexia, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders (AD/HD), autistic spectrum disorders, dyspraxia and other specific learning difficulties. Some of the learners at the school do not present with the above conditions and disabilities, but still require a more supportive environment in which to learn. The school's mission is expressed as follows: Our priority is to restore confidence and to develop a positive attitude to learning. We achieve this by providing a happy atmosphere with support and understanding for each child's individual needs.

The school also have specific acceptance criteria based on a full psychological and educational assessment. The main level of support given to the learners at the particular school is dependent on small classes and specialised training of the educators. The school is also able to offer the services of a team of educational specialists, who offer one-on-one support to the learners and their families within school hours. At the special school there is a school-based support team made up of various members of staff. The team meets regularly and holds case discussions regarding each learner. The support team is made up of the individual teacher, the head of the phase, learning support teacher, educational psychologist, school principal and school director. This collaboration between the educators and the

specialised professional creates a supportive environment where the learner is given the opportunity to thrive and achieve success.

The school was established in 2006 as an alternative to other special schools in the area. Due to the nature of the school and the education system of South Africa, the school draws learners from a large urban area. The school is not bound by feeder schools or catchment areas as other Government run schools are. The school also does not discriminate against learners based on race or language. The school is an English medium school and only offers Afrikaans as a first additional language.

The curriculum at the research school follows a specialised, multi-sensory approach with an emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy skills combined with access to the full National Curriculum. The full National Curriculum is followed to ensure the learners are offered a curriculum which will give them the opportunity to return to mainstream education if possible. The school offers an enriching school experience, and the learning areas of art, music, physical education and computer studies form part of the weekly timetable.

The school incorporates individual programmes for learning. Before learners are accepted in the school they are assessed in their individual literacy, numeracy, and perceptual skills and ability. It is then possible to ensure that the learner's individual needs are met. Their progress is then closely monitored to ensure progress is made.

The school is also able to offer specialised therapy, in the form of speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. This therapy is done during school time, and on site. However, at this time the therapy is an extra cost to parents, and does not form part of the school fees structure. The school also offers a range of free psychological services to address the social, emotional and behavioural needs of the learners; all therapies are conducted by the onsite clinical psychologist and school counsellor. The school is also able to offer learning support for those learners requiring intensive one-on-one instruction and extra support; this therapy also takes place at the school during the school day. Class teachers and therapists work closely together to ensure continuity is maintained. Therapists are part of the multidisciplinary team and they are involved in all case discussions and feedback meetings with the relevant parents.

The school maintains a low teacher to learner ratio because it believes that small classes ensure individual attention and a caring and supportive environment. A ratio of 1:10 in the foundation and intermediate phases, and 1:15 in the Senior Phase, enables educators to work towards developing each child's strengths as well as guiding them to use compensatory strategies to overcome areas of weakness.

This special school is an independent school and therefore able to create its own criteria for acceptance and request fees in accordance with their own policy. This creates a situation where the school maintains an elite status. The school is not open to all children and is not an option for most people in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town due to the high school fees, as well as the small size of the school itself. At approximately 180 learners the school is full to capacity. According to Education White Paper all individuals need to be included in the South African school system. The nature of this school fills a gap in the need for specialised support for learners with special needs, but this opportunity is not available to all children who need it.

3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology is characterised by empirical, descriptive and detailed data, and the way of working with the data is inductive and interpretive. The study seeks to gain insight and understanding into the perspectives and experiences shared by the parents as research participants (Maree, 2007).

Qualitative research, as explained by Merriam (2009), aims to understand the meaning people construct about their world, and is characterised by four central characteristics, namely: 1) a focus on meaning and understanding, on the way in which people make sense of their world; 2) the researcher is regarded as the primary instrument of data collection and its analysis; 3) the qualitative research process is inductive in nature; 4) and it aims to provide a rich description of the research findings. In addition to this, the researcher needs to be flexible, as circumstances concerning the research may change.

For this research study qualitative research was applied to understand the perspectives of parents who had transitioned their children from a mainstream school to the special school. Qualitative research is characterised by the notion that individuals, and thus the research participants, each construct their own reality

influenced by the social context and their experiences. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described the qualitative researcher as a 'bricoleur' which, if directly translated, is a handy(wo)man who is able to take snippets of information from people's lives and put them together by using the tools and methods needed to collate them. The collation of the gathered information is then processed, resulting in psychological and emotional unity, to an interpretive experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

In the ever-changing society there is a need for research to take the subjective views of all individuals into account. Qualitative research takes the changing society into account, and thus also the ever-changing perspectives of the research participants. In qualitative research there are various design approaches that can be applied. These include ethnography, phenomenology, heuristics, chaos theory, grounded theory, the case study, ethnomethodology, narrative study, discourse analysis and systems theory. With all these options, it is important to examine the characteristics of each design type, selecting one that best suits the intended research (Henning, *et al.*, 2004; Merriam, 2009).

To understand the perspectives of the parents within this research study various approaches could be used, but the choice was made to use a qualitative case study approach as research design. Bergen and While (2000) suggested that the term 'case study' is at times left unclear by researchers and this leads to assumptions made regarding the research and results in challenges to the robustness of the method (Bergen & While, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the term 'case study' refers to the collection of detailed, relatively unstructured information from a range of sources about a particular individual, group, phenomenon or institution (Gerring, 2006). The case study is therefore a descriptive method within the qualitative framework used in this research study. The case study relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data converging using the method of triangulation and benefiting from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Bergen & While, 2000).

Yin (2008) described a two-by-two (2x2) matrix, where the horizontal axis represents single and multiple case designs, while the vertical axis differentiates between 'holistic' and 'embedded' designs, since, within these two types, that is single and multiple case designs, there can be unitary or multiple units of analysis. For the

purpose of this study a type 3 case study design was followed. Yin's notion of designating a unit smaller than the case for purposes of analysis, in order to build up the case picture was adopted. Thus, the case (the experiences of parents who have transitioned their children from mainstream to a special school) was subdivided into its component parts (the experiences of the individual parents or parental units). In order to be clear about terminology, the former (the case) was termed the main unit and the latter (individual experiences) a subunit (Figure 3.3) (Bergen & While, 2000). The unit and subunit are qualitatively the same; that is, comprised of individual experiences rather than, for example, individuals.

	Single case designs	Multiple case designs
Holistic (single unit of analysis)	Type 1	Type 2
Embedded (multiple units if analysis)	Type 3	Type 4

FIGURE 3.1 Basic Types Of Design For Case Studies (Yin, 2008).

Yin (2008) differentiated the term 'unit of analysis' to have two distinct meanings. Sampling units are defined as the sources of data collection and units of enquiry as the subjects or variables that are investigated.

This differentiation of the term indicates that the units of the enquiry, in this case, the parents, with their individual experience, are the subunits. Yin (2008) also suggested that in the case study the boundary between the phenomena and context is not clearly defined, and thus information regarding the context of the study bleeds into the data. The contextual issues surrounding the phenomena were shown in the literature to be important in case studies. The family systems, professional support and community organisational structures, which are all included in the theory of

inclusion and inclusive education, were pertinent in this research study, and formed part of the context which influenced the case study; these are known as the contextual units of enquiry (Yin, 2008).

3.5 RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods used were selected due to their coherence with the research design and questions and could provide numerous sources of data to be used for analysis. These methods included purposeful sampling techniques, two data collection methods, including a life-line activity to enrich the data and qualitative content analysis.

3.5.1 Selection of Participants

Without a clear set of guidelines assisting the researcher in the selection of participants in a particular study it is likely that confusion may occur. It is not possible to simply select a random sample of individuals, as occurs in quantitative research. Rather, the participants need to have the relevant data and be willing and reflective in their sharing of information. The process of selection of the participants, within qualitative research, has an influential effect on the outcome of the research (Coyne, 1997). To properly ensure the external validity within the case study it is important to understand the nature of the sampling unit (Bergen & While, 2000).

Case study research is criticised due to the fact that it is not possible simply to generalise the findings of case study research; however, this criticism is based on the traditional sampling theory based on a representative sample of the population, allowing the researcher to make inferences to the general population. Gerring (2006) suggested that extensive research, not just case study approaches, is seldom an entirely new understanding of phenomena, but rather a 'refinement of understanding'. This is particularly the case with what is termed the collective case study design, where several cases are selected in order that, by counter-example, each case study invites modification of the generalisation, though a positive example is neither likely to establish a generalisation nor to modify one, but may increase the confidence that readers have in their (or the researcher's) generalisation (Gerring,

2006). Analysis is based on a search for patterns across a number of cases and for a refinement of understanding through what Stake (1978) termed 'categorical aggregation of instances'. However, to Bergen and While (2000) the single case could also be seen as representative in its own right, provided that there was a sufficiently detailed description, since this would lead to a clearer understanding.

The selection of participants for the research study is a decision-making process used by the researcher to identify and select participants. The selection process identifies the group, individual or organisation that is pertinent to the study. The participants are the unit of analysis defined within the research study as the population the study is focused upon, and the group from which the data will be collected (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Kagee, 2006; Durrheim, 2006).

As introduced in Chapter 1, the unit of analysis in this study was parents with children in a particular special needs school who had moved their children to the school while the children were in the Senior Phase of school. This study made use of purposive sampling, one of the more common forms of participant selection within qualitative research. This approach to participant selection is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). The process of purposive sampling facilitates the identification and selection of information-rich sources for the collection of relevant and valuable data that will provide an understanding for the specific research study and answer the research questions. The motivation behind the specific selection of research participants allows the researcher to create a small sampled group that is able to provide insight about the topic that can then be generalised to a larger group (Patton, 2002).

Merriam (2009) introduced the term criterion-based selection as an alternative term for purposive sampling, and suggested that creating the criterion on which the participants are selected is the first step in purposive sampling. The process begins with identifying the characteristics required by the researcher that pertain to the research questions for the study. Creating the criteria involves outlining the particular features needed by the researcher for the study; it is then necessary to identify units of analysis: in this research study it was the parents that shared the required features stated in the criterion which follows below.

The following criteria were formulated in order to facilitate the selection of the sample of this study:

- The sample was drawn from Willow Park School (pseudonym), situated in the Western Cape. This school is an independent Special School catering to learners from Grade R to Grade 9. This particular Special School was chosen as the researcher is familiar with the school as she has worked there as a teacher for a time. The researcher is also currently a learning support teacher at the school and completing her internship for Educational Psychology.

- A sample of four parental units was selected. The selection of the four parent units as the unit of analysis was based on their shared experiences of transitioning their child from a mainstream school to the particular Special School, Willow Park School. It was also required that the parents had transitioned their child while the child was in the Senior Phase of the school career, in Grade 7, 8 or 9.

Eight learners in the Senior Phase at the special school were identified for this study. Their selection was based on the fact that they had transitioned in their Senior Phase of high school and had moved from a mainstream school. The parents of these learners were then contacted and their help was requested for this study. Of the eight parental units that were contacted, four parent units were willing and able to be interviewed for the study.

The learners were chosen as they had transitioned to Willow Park School in the Senior Phase of their schooling and they therefore offered different experiences to those learners who had attended a special school since the start of their school career. Thus, their parents were able to offer insight into the process of transitioning their children from a mainstream to a special school that other parents could not.

3.5.2 Methods of Collection and Analysis

The methods used to collect data during the research process need to be congruent with the research paradigm and methodology of that study. This study is what is known as a qualitative case study, employing qualitative methods, using interviews and open-ended questionnaires that lend themselves well as data collection

methods to the nature of such qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). In Chapter 1, the data methods used in the study were introduced. This section of Chapter 3 discusses the methods and procedure used to interact with the research participants in more depth and thus creates an audit trail of the process followed. This section also discusses the research procedures, specific methods of data collection and data analysis.

3.5.2.1 Procedures

Permission to conduct research at the particular special school, Willow Park School was requested from the director and founder of the school as well as the Principal and Deputy Principal of the school. Permission was granted by the Principal of the school and she signed a letter of consent (see Addendum B). Application was also made to the Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University and permission was granted to conduct the study (DESC_HYM/2012) (see Addendum A).

The parents were then selected, based on the selection criteria developed specifically for the research project. The parents were contacted by letter describing the research and this was followed by a telephone call to answer any follow-up questions. Once the parents had consented to the research the individual interview was scheduled with each participant, where the consent forms were discussed and the interview occurred (see Addendum D). During the interview the life-line was drawn up (see Addendum H). The participants were then asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire (see Addendum E). Follow-up appointments were then arranged to collect the questionnaires and answer any subsequent questions.

3.5.2.2 Data Collection Methods

As was stated in Chapter 1, the researcher and research participants need to interact in an attempt to understand the meaning the participants placed on their various experiences pertaining to the research questions. The data is generated by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews (including a life-line activity) and open-ended questionnaires, as these methods lend themselves to this qualitative case study research design (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the methods are specific research techniques that are used to gather the relevant data needed to achieve the goals and aims of the research study. There are several methods of collecting data that can be incorporated within a qualitative methodology. These include observation, interviewing and the reviewing of artefacts or documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). By using these methods it is possible to elicit information that is rich and detailed; the data can then be analysed and interpreted in ways that are laid out in the research design.

- **Interviews**

An in-depth semi-structured interview was used to elicit the information needed to answer the research questions. Fontana and Frey (2005) described the interview as a narrative where both the interviewer and interviewee(s) construct the story surrounding the situation within the context of the research study. The semi-structured interview, which was used in this study, allowed the researcher to discuss and probe the different experiences of the parents'. A general interview guide (see Addendum D) was used to ensure that all the relevant themes were covered and at the same time allowed the researcher the flexibility to explore and probe the information that the participant gave. The open questions included in the interview schedule were derived from the literature review as discussed in Chapter 2. On completion of the in-depth interview it was possible to gain an understanding of the experiences of the participants. Feelings, opinions and perspectives of the parents in this particular study were essential for the accurate analysis of the information they provided. Interviewing, be it with individuals or a group, is a dynamic and active process in which both interviewer and interviewee play an important role (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

- **Life-Line**

Through the creation of the life-line it was likely that the participants would share events over the course of their child's school career and the transition process. Once this occurred it was possible to gather data that was rich and meaningful for the study (Maree, 2010).

- **Open–Ended Questionnaire**

The open-ended questionnaire was given to the participant after the completion of the interview. Answering the questionnaire in their own time allows the participant to reflect on answers given in the interview and include any information they may have left out in the actual interview. The open questions give the participant the opportunity to qualify their responses and express exact meaning. This format also reduces the potential power imbalance that may be present during the individual interviews and encourages interaction and collaboration between the participant and the researcher (Mertens, 2005).

3.5.2.3 Data Analysis

Data collected for a qualitative case study design is managed in the same way as in any qualitative study. Data analysis entails a dynamic process of interpreting and making sense of the data gathered. In a case study, such analysis seeks first and foremost to convey an intensive holistic understanding of the case (Merriam, 2009).

The process of data analysis in this multiple case study comprised two stages. In stage one, a within-case analysis was conducted, while in stage two a process of cross-case analysis was executed (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Data collected from the four cases was analysed separately during stage one, while in stage two a process of cross-case analysis was used in an effort to find themes that cut across the four cases. As indicated before, qualitative content analysis was employed to analyse the data generated by means of the different qualitative research strategies. Flick (2009) suggested that qualitative content analysis is one of the more readily used methods of data analysis by qualitative researchers. The method is applied to analyse the qualitative data collected by working on one level of the analysis (Henning, *et al.,* 2004). To be more specific, units of meaning are identified within the content of the data sources but are not analysed further. Consequently, this method is often used by beginner researchers, such as the researcher in this research study.

Qualitative content analysis, as indicated by its name, can only be used once the data sources are easily available. The interviews therefore need to be transcribed verbatim and read attentively; it is necessary that the researcher has a good overall sense of the data. Merriam (2009) suggested that "the researchers immerse

themselves in the data, listen to it, read it, touch it, play with it, copy it, write on it, colour code it, over and over again" (Merriam, 2009, p. 396). It is during this process of attentive reading that various themes and patterns start to emerge (see Addendum F). Henning, *et al.,* (2004) designated this at the first step in the data analysis process; and it is known as 'open coding'. The main objective of the open coding process is to allow the researcher to become familiar with the data and prevent the establishment of a narrow focus about the data. Even as the themes and various codes start to become evident, the researcher is not required to assign formal codes to the data at this stage (Berg, 2009).

During this step it was necessary that the data sources were read a number of times to ensure that the researcher was familiar with the content thereof. Nieuwenhuis (2007) suggested that researchers engage in a process of writing notes during this reading process. The *note taking* is done throughout the data analysis process and requires that the researcher record all impressions and reflections, becoming further familiar with the data. The researcher's reflections could be a useful resource when the codes and patterns are reviewed alongside the impressions recorded during the *note taking* process (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

Coding is the procedure of identifying meaningful units of information by allocating labels or explanatory terms to the specific pieces of data (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). This was an inductive process of analysis and was followed by assigning formal codes to sections of the data. After the open coding was complete, the researcher was able to group together various connected codes. This process is referred to as *categorisation* and it allowed the researcher to obtain a general view of the data (Henning, *et al.,* 2004).

Identifying the codes is regarded as a repetitious process, as the researcher has to move back and forth through all of the transcribed text and identify and group various units of meaning (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Henning, *et al.,* (2004) then went on to suggest that researchers should at this point ask themselves the following questions regarding the data texts:

- What are the relationships in meaning between all these categories?

- What do they say together?

- What do they say about each other?

- What is missing?

- How do they address the research questions?

- How do these categories (together) link what I already know about the topic?

- What has been foregrounded in the analysis?

- What additional data gathering and/or analysis has to be completed?

The above questions, irrespective of the manner of data analysis, should be answered with the view to expand the researcher's perspective of the data. These questions can be applied to the coding and categorising processes and support the emergence of patterns from the texts (Flick, 2009).

Once the questions have been answered, the various themes can be identified. As stated above, the process of analysis is repetitious and dynamic; this leads to the discussion of the themes. Following analysis, the themes are discussed and used by the researcher to address the research questions (Henning, *et al.,* 2004; Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

3.6 DATA VERIFICATION

In qualitative research the data produced is not based on numbers or data statistics, thus, to establish reliability or validity within a study, it is necessary to conduct 'the investigation in an ethical manner' (Merriam, 2009, p, 209). When doing this form of research, the researcher acts as the data collection instrument, and his or her ability in the process will affect the validity and reliability of the data collected. The ethical considerations made in the research process is discussed in a subsequent section, while this section focuses on data verification issues as relevant to this qualitative study.

In qualitative research one is likely to hear the terms credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in reference to increasing a qualitative research study's trustworthiness and rigour (Merriam, 2009). There are also strategies that can be used to ensure the validity of data; these include: triangulation, peer examination, an audit trail, engaging with the data, reflexivity and the use of rich descriptions. Before these terms can be discussed in relation to this research study it is necessary to describe the concepts individually.

3.6.1 Credibility

In quantitative research, credibility would be known as internal validity. Internal validity describes the similarity between the research data and reality; in qualitative research it is understood that the reality is subjective and influenced by the perspectives of the individual. Thus credibility is the link between how the researcher interprets the research data and the actual meaning and perspectives of the research participant.

Maxwell (1996, in Lewis, 2009) suggested five aspects of qualitative research that could lead to invalid qualitative research. These include description and interpretation of data (how they are done); conscious or accidental manipulation of data (to fit a theory); researcher bias towards the participants (inherent reflexivity); and a change in the participant's behaviour or responses owing to the interviewer's presence (reactivity).

In the case of this research study where the perspectives of the parents were being questioned, the perception of the research could also have an influence on the data. It was necessary that the researcher continued to refer back to the information collected in the interviews and questionnaire. In the case of the researcher it is important that the researcher be aware of the various aspects of qualitative research that could invalidate the research as discussed above, and at all times endeavour to avoid them.

3.6.2 Consistency

Consistency, also known as reliability in quantitative research, describes how consistent the research data would be if the study was conducted again. In

qualitative research the challenge lies in the different realities shared by people in society. The behaviour, social interaction, realities and experiences of the particular participants would all differ and thus influence the outcome of the research (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, consistency questions whether the "qualitative research results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam, 2009, p. 221).

Various steps needed to be taken to ensure consistency occurred within the study. It was important that the researcher was not biased towards the participants and the information gathered. The process of the sample selection was explicitly explained, as well as the process of gathering information from the participants. As this research was conducted by a single researcher, the interviews and interviewing techniques were the same, and the transcriptions were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer. All these components of the data collection process influenced the level of reliability for this research paper and its findings (Lewis, 2009).

To ensure research consistency in this research paper the researcher conducted all the interviews herself, asking the same questions each time. The sample group was based on the specific criteria and only parents who complied with the criteria were interviewed. The data collected from each parent or parental unit was related, compared and analysed, finding both the similarities and differences between the cases.

3.6.3 Transferability

Transferability describes the external validity of the study. External validity describes how the results of the research can be generalised to other situations, and is thus known as the external transferability. The issue of generalization is also not a simple task in qualitative research, due to the nature of the research and the size of the sample. Merriam (2009, p. 224) stated that it is necessary "to think of generalizability in ways appropriate to the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research", thus the results can only be generalised in certain contexts where the contextual factors are documented in the research and the research questions are applicable in other instances. For research findings to be transferable it is important to ensure rich descriptions of the specific context are used; these descriptions will then make it

possible for the reader to decide whether the findings would be applicable in another situation (Merriam, 2009).

In the case of this research study the number of cases studied was four, a relatively small number of cases. However, the context of the study is explained in-depth and the study hopes to offer recommendations rather than generalise the findings to other situations.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability describes the issue of neutrality and objectivity; an issue that is not easily achieved in qualitative research. By its nature the subjectivity of qualitative research requires that the researcher understands how their own susceptibilities could influence the research process (Patton, 2002). The researcher needs to ensure that the research findings are a true reflection of the experiences and perspectives of the participants and not unduly influenced by the preconceived notions of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). For this research to contain confirmability, it was important that certain strategies were undertaken by the researcher: triangulation, an audit trail and reflexivity are all strategies that were important here. The researcher, working independently, was the sole person involved in ensuring the triangulation, audit trail and reflexivity of the collected and collated data. These aspects are further discussed below.

3.6.5 Data Verification Strategies

All research, both qualitative and quantitative, needs to be properly valid and reliable. The strategies that need to be taken into account in the case of this research study are discussed below.

3.6.5.1 Triangulation

Triangulation can be used in both quantitative and qualitative research to ensure the credibility or internal validity of the research results. Triangulation uses multiple methods, measures and perspectives to increase research credibility. Denzin (1978 in Merriam, 2009), suggested that credibility can be increased through the use of different sources of data. The process of triangulation promotes credibility as it

increases the congruence of the researcher's findings with the reality experienced by the participants (Patton, 2002, Merriam, 2009).

Triangulation was applied within the research paper in two ways: through the triangulation of methods and the triangulation of sources (Patton, 2002). In the data collection process various method were used, including reflective notes and individual interviews. Data from these different methods was then triangulated in order to identify and validate themes. Various sources were also used to gather data from: four sets of parents were asked to share their perspectives of how they experienced their child's transition from a mainstream to a special school.

3.6.5.2 Audit Trail

Merriam (2009) described an audit trail as an account of decisions and descriptions of the research process focusing in particular on the collection and analysis of the research data. It can be seen as a "running record of your interactions with the data as you engage in analysis and interpretation" (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). Both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 serve as the audit trail for this research study; it is in these chapters that the research process and data analysis is described in detail. The data, in the form of transcriptions and tables attached as addenda, seeks to demonstrate the processes that were implemented for the research paper. The audit trail promotes the confidence in the research as it explains how the research findings came about (Merriam, 2009).

3.6.5.3 Peer Examination

Due to the fact that this study was completed as part of a Master's degree, it was completed under the supervision of a lecturing supervisor, who played an important role in the data verification process. The final product was subsequently reviewed by an external examiner. Through the peer review and examination process the researcher is exposed to the perspectives of others, and changes can be made in various areas (Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004).

3.6.5.4 Reflexivity

The researcher in a qualitative study is the central figure within the research process. The implication is then that it is necessary for the researcher to reflect on personal beliefs and assumptions, determining whether they have an influence on the research process and the interpretation of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As the individual working on the paper, the researcher's opinions and position are discussed where relevant for this paper.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics are the "moral principles or standards that should be met and upheld when working in the field of health care" (HPCSA, 2006, p. 42). Ethical standards in research attempt to prevent ethical abuses and violations, and provide researchers with an understanding of their responsibilities (Bless, *et al.,* 2006). The researcher's own ethical values will also be influential in the research process. As a researcher and an ethical and moral individual, it is important to consider the different aspects needed for the process of this research project to be deemed to have been done in an ethical manner. Some of these ethical principles are discussed below.

In qualitative research, ethical considerations form an integral part of the research, as the research involves people. Thus, the nature of the study required that ethical considerations were consistently taken into account. The ethical principles guiding this research paper were associated with the ethics guiding health care practitioners, as well as with human rights. Taking into account that the researcher is training in the field of Educational Psychology, the ethical principles guiding both research and psychology needed to be taken into account.

The ethical considerations made by the researcher can also contribute to the validity and reliability of the research. The main ethical considerations that were made in this study included obtaining approval from the organisations involved, including Stellenbosch University and the particular Special School, gaining informed consent

from the research participants, and ensuring the confidentiality of information regarding these participants.

The first ethical step in the research process was to gain permission from the institution involved. This study underwent a process of ethical clearance with the Ethical Clearance Committee at Stellenbosch University, after which permission was granted to conduct the study. The process confirmed that the study was feasible and used the appropriate method.

The ethical clearance obtained from the university, the consent from the special school, and an example of the consent form given to the participant are attached below (see Addendum A, B, and C).

3.7.1 Autonomy and Informed Consent

Autonomy and informed consent form part of the four basic principles of ethical decision making. Autonomy gives individuals the right to make their own decisions, without harming others. However, for the individual to make their own decision they need to have all the necessary information regarding what is being researched and the potential risk and limits to confidentiality. Due to the participants having autonomy within this research study they had the right to any information they required regarding the research, and needed access to information that would explain the extent and purpose of their involvement in the research. The Department of Health (2006, p. 42) offers a list of eight guidelines for informed consent and these can be summarised by the four components of informed consent as compiled by Wassenaar (2006, p. 72). These include: "a) provision of appropriate information; b) participants' competence and understanding; c) voluntariness in participating and freedom to decline or withdraw after the study has started; d) and formalisation of consent, usually in writing".

The ethical principle of informed consent suggests that the participant is of sound mind and has the legal capacity to consent to participate in the research process. Each parent received a letter outlining the study and each was asked to participate voluntarily (see Addendum C). This letter informed them fully of their responsibilities should they volunteer to take part in the study and allowed them to consider the risks and benefits of taking part in this study carefully. This full and open disclosure to the

participant was necessary for informed consent and showed that there was a 'commitment to respect' the participants involved (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 66).

3.7.2 Non-maleficence and beneficence

Both non-maleficence and beneficence are key ethical principle in research. Non-maleficence describes the absence of harm, and beneficence, the moral obligation of psychologists to act for the benefit of others. In research, non-maleficence would require the researcher to ensure that they avoid harming the research participants in any possible way. In a situation where unavoidable harm has occurred, steps should be taken to minimise the damage caused. Before the research starts, it is important that the researcher identify any harm that could possibly occur and put strategies in place to counteract the harm (Allan, 2008).

Beneficence obliges the researcher to ensure that the research will benefit the participants in some way. The research process will affect the participant in a positive manner. The contribution from the participant needs to benefit them in the future and the recommendations made in this study will be based on the research findings creating a beneficial contribution (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

3.7.3 Confidentiality

Confidentiality describes the participants' right to privacy and ensures that the names of the participants are kept private. In the case of a qualitative approach to research, where interviews are used, the name of the participant is known to the researcher; thus, the principle of confidentiality is particularly important, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the participants understand that the information will be disclosed and how this will happen. The participants' names have been changed so that their anonymity is maintained, and all information obtained is kept confidential and was and is not accessible to anyone but the researcher (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The data collected in this study will be kept electronically on a computer by the researcher for the next five years; this will be done in line with the request of the Stellenbosch University Ethical Committee.

3.7.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity describes the continued process of reflection the researcher undertakes on the values and preconceptions he or she may have, as well as the behaviour and values shared by the participants, and the effect they may have on the way the results are interpreted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The process of reflexivity was done throughout the study and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

3.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on discussing the research paradigm and methodology, as well as the research design and how it attempted to answer the research questions of this study. In addition to this, the ethical considerations made in the study and issues of data verification were discussed.

When designing a research project, there are many different components that need to be carefully considered and included in the research plan. All the different components were discussed here, as well as the considerations regarding validity and reliability within qualitative research. The findings made through the above research process are discussed in the following chapter. The findings of the research is presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout this research paper, the aim has been to answer the research question posed at the beginning of the research process.

- How do parents of children with specific support needs experience their children's transition from a mainstream to a special school?

The following sub-questions also directed the study:

- How do parents perceive the role of special schools in South Africa?

- What are the shared reasons for the transition from mainstream to special schools?

- What recommendations can be made to special schools to ensure a smooth transition from mainstream to special schools?

The study was designed to find answers to the above questions. An effort was made to elicit rich responses from the parents as the participants. The parents who acted as participants all had learners in the particular research school, Willow Park School, and their children had all transitioned to this school while the children were in the Senior Phase of their school career. The individual children have had different experiences in their former school careers owing to the different types of schools they attended, the level of support they received, their specific academic ability, their peer and friendship groups and their parental support, both financially and emotionally. However, although some of the experiences were different, there were several experiences that were noted by the majority of the participating parents.

In the case of this research study Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model was used as the theoretical framework. This model integrates a number of different interconnected systems that influence the education system and thus the schools,

teachers, parents and, ultimately, the learner. It is only through the interaction between the researcher and the participating parents in the interview process that it became clear how the various systems within their lives influenced their experiences and their perspectives of their experiences.

As previously indicated, the data analysis process was conducted in two phases by employing qualitative content analysis as method of data analysis. The findings are therefore presented in two phases. The first phase resulted from the within-case analysis of the data. The four cases are presented individually, using the data gained from the interview and the life-line activity conducted with the parents, as well as the open-ended questionnaire completed by the parents. The second section of data analysis involved a process of cross-case analysis, where the cases were compared with one another. The data generated in this phase is discussed according to central themes identified during the coding process. These findings are then interpreted in terms of existing literature to answer the research questions, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model to organise the discussion. The microsystems in proximal vicinity of the participant, which were discussed in Chapter 2, included the school, peers and family. It is important to remember that the participants interacted with these microsystems within the mesosystem. In Table 4.1 the biographical information of the participant units is presented.

Table 4.1: An Exposition of the Biographical Information of the Participants

Participant	1	2	3	4
Pseudonym	Ken & Jane	Anne	Gail & Mike	Jessica
Parental Unit	Both parents	Mother	Both parents	Mother
Pseudonym of Child	Elise	Liam	Zane	Nina
Age of Child	13 years	16 years	13 years	15 years
Home language	English	English	English	English
Language of Instruction	English	English	English	English
Learning Difficulty	Asperger's Syndrome Concentration problems	AD/HD Literacy and numeracy difficulties	Language deficit Concentration problems	Comprehension deficits Maturity Epilepsy

4.2 EXPOSITION OF THE DATA FROM THE WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS PHASE

The first phase presents the data from the within-case analysis of each case. The findings derived from the within-case analysis are presented in the form of narratives, incorporating the story of the participants' perspectives on their children's progress as well as their own feelings about the process. All the participating parents were eager to share their experiences and perspectives of special education and the transition their child had made.

4.2.1 Case Study 1 – Jane and Ken

Jane and Ken are the parents of Elise, a 13 year-old girl in grade 7, who transferred to Willow Park School at the beginning of this year (2013). As Elise had transferred in the Senior Phase of her academic career from a mainstream school in the nearby

Southern Suburbs of Cape Town, this parental unit falls within the criteria for selection for this study. The parents were interviewed together about their only child and their story follows below.

According to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, the place of work and financial status of Jane and Ken would have influenced their decisions made about Elise's schooling. It is therefore important to include information about their respective careers and financial status when discussing their case. As a lecturer in engineering and construction at an FET college in Cape Town, Ken was able to be very involved with Elise's education and academic achievement while she attended a local mainstream school. Jane worked a 9-hour day as an administrator in the Environmental Resource Management office of the City of Cape Town. She also had a long commute, so homework and studying was completed by the time she reached home. She described her role as that of the financial provider rather than being involved in the day-to-day schooling processes of Elise. She also discussed the financial implications of sending Elise to a private special school where the fees are much higher than those of the government-funded school that Elise was previously attending. Even though this put strain on the family finances, Jane and Ken wanted the best for their daughter.

Jane and Ken first realised that Elise had some learning difficulties while she was at preschool; however, these difficulties were related to socialisation issues rather than actual learning difficulties. The preschool teachers told them that Elise was finding it difficult to change tasks during school and demonstrated maladaptive behaviour that was considered rude and inappropriate for her developmental phase. Elise was also particularly noise sensitive and was consequently first seen by an auditory specialist and then a physiotherapist, a paediatric neurologist and an educational psychologist.

The auditory specialist, a family member, had a couple of sessions with Elise to assist her with her noise sensitivity issues and these were deemed successful. However, the preschool still felt that Elise needed to develop her social skills, so she attended a few sessions with a play therapist. She was then assessed by the local paediatric neurologist who identified signs of Asperger's Syndrome. An assessment by an educational psychologist, who is also a specialist in Autistic Spectrum Disorders, agreed with this diagnosis. Elise had a series of monthly sessions with the

educational psychologist. With this input and specialist support, Elise made strides in her social development. The parents reported as follows:

> At Busy Bees Montessori School [pseudonym], she didn't like being interrupted if she had to change an activity and would shove and push her way back into the group. She showed some socialisation issues. At this stage we didn't have the diagnosis of a high functioning Asperger as yet, and we didn't understand; we knew she had also been noise sensitive but that was all.
> (Jane)

> The most negative thing that has come out of the report is the social skills and Elise attended play therapy and we saw a significant improvement.
> (Ken)

Her parents then tried to get her into a school in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town that was known to offer specialised support and also had a specialised support unit where learners were given an IEP and received constant individual support. However, Elise was not offered a place at this particular school as the classes were full and the special unit was considered not a good fit for Elise, as she was judged more capable than the other learners attending the unit.

The macrosystem represents the system that is the furthest from the individual, yet still affects their environment. It combines the dominant social and economic structures within the community. The change in education policies in this country has had an impact on school management and the type of special education needs offered at schools. This meant that Elise was sent to the local mainstream primary school near her home, and for the most part she coped and achieved well. In grade 2 the teacher noted that Elise was struggling to concentrate and follow instructions in class. This teacher had Elise in her class for two years, as the teacher had moved from grade 2 to grade 3. This maintained a level of normality for Elise. Grade 4 was a difficult year. The parents felt that the teacher disliked their daughter. The teacher suggested that Elise was a vindictive and mean little girl; the parents found this year particularly difficult, and even with the concentration difficulties, her parents did not want to medicate Elise; this continues to be the case. Jane indicated that she does

not *"want her medicated at all, unless it is absolutely necessary*." It was evident that the principles of collaboration such as respect, effective communication and trust were absent in the grade 4 teacher's relationship with Jane and Ken. Swart and Phasha (2011) referred to Epstein's model to discuss the importance of forging a good relationship between teachers and parents; a reciprocal relationship based on shared trust and vested interest.

For grade 5 and 6 it was reported that Elise had wonderful, interested and caring teachers who took a special interest in ensuring that Elise made it through those grades. In grade 6, however, it was suggested that Elise would need the help of a facilitator in the classroom. Elise asked her parents to be given a chance to see how she could cope on her own. After six weeks of schooling in the beginning of grade 6 the teacher suggested that Elise would be able to cope without additional help and she managed to complete grade 6 independently. Even though the parents were very happy with Elise's achievements thus far and with the excellent job by the teachers in understanding and guiding her, much was required of her father to provide extra tuition at home. This was quite stressful for the parents. Jane explained how her husband took the responsibility of ensuring that Elise was coping with her school work and this put a strain on their relationship with their daughter. Jane reported that Ken *"would teach for a full day and come home and sit with her and create tests with her, and work through all the homework with her, very, very hands on."*

Again mid-way through grade 6 it was suggested that Elise would face difficulties in coping independently in grade 7. The parents acknowledged that Elise had poor organisational skills and a low level of executive functioning. The school felt that a smaller class with individual attention would suit Elise better. Ken agreed with this assessment, saying "t*he changing of classes would be difficult for her, the organisation is not there and her executive skills are not great."* Jane went on to say: "*If we had stayed at (previous school) we would have had to get her a full-time facilitator."* In addition, by transferring Elise to the special school, Ken was able to relinquish his supporting role at home and thus improve their relationship. Jane voiced her relief: "*this was one of the reasons I decided it might be a good idea to*

send her to (Willow Park School), and frankly when (the school) said 'no, Papa is not allowed to help', we breathed a sigh of relief'."

Based on recommendations from the local mainstream school that Elise was attending and the educational psychologist who had originally assessed her, the parents identified Willow Park School as an appropriate alternative for her. They noted however that there are not many conveniently located special schools in Cape Town.

Elise was not happy with the move to Willow Park School, as she felt that she did not need a special school and did not want to miss her final year in a school where she had spent so many years. Jane and Ken admitted during the interview that Elise still did not enjoy her new school but they could not determine the exact cause of her unhappiness. She had developed better socialising skills and had formed a group of friends. She was also learning to take responsibility for her actions; something her parents had been particularly concerned about.

Jane and Ken indicated that they were happy with their decision to move their daughter to a special school in her Senior Phase of schooling. Their opinions differed as to whether Elise could return to a mainstream school and reach matric level but both were satisfied that she was passing her grades. Their ultimate goal is for Elise to get into a college where she can focus on the subjects that interest her.

4.2.2 Case Study 2 - Anne

Anne is the mother of 16- and 23-year old boys. She is a trained nursing sister and her husband, John, is a paramedic who works for an ambulance service. Their younger son, Liam, is currently in grade 9 at Willow Park School after moving in the middle of grade 7 from a Southern Suburbs Cape Town school. As the learner transferred in the Senior Phase of his academic career and came from a mainstream school in the nearby Southern Suburbs of Cape Town, this parent falls within the criteria for selection for this study. Anne was interviewed without the presence of John and her story follows below.

As indicated before, Anne has an older boy who is now 23 years old. He was also diagnosed with AD/HD and attended a special school for the whole of his primary

school career. Anne stated that she felt that being in a special school really helped her older son and stood him in good stead for high school when he returned to a mainstream school. When Liam was starting school, her older son was in grade 6 and she had been through the process of having her older son assessed and diagnosed with AD/HD and placed in a special school. This past experience helped her to understand the situation when Liam was diagnosed with AD/HD at five and half years and put on Ritalin; she felt she knew what to expect and would be able to advocate for and support her son in a mainstream school.

Liam was a late November baby and was very young when he first enrolled in the grade R class in a school in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town. He was already on Ritalin. Towards the end of his first year in the grade R class, the occupational therapist he was seeing recommended that the school allow him to repeat grade R. Anne understood the challenges that Liam experienced and she and John were happy to have him to stay in grade R for another year. She explained: "*We had a whole panel meeting with the teachers and the occupational therapist and I asked the principal to allow Liam to repeat the year in grade R. I asked the principal, if he had ever had a parent plead that their child be kept back, because it is normally the other way around, but even that did not work.*" The school believed that Liam would cope and put him in grade 1 against the wishes of the parents.

After six months in grade 1 the school informed Anne that Liam was not coping and suggested that she put extra support and interventions in place. Anne felt the school should have listened to her and to the professional advice and was disappointed in their decisions. It was a difficult time for her as she believed that the school system had failed Liam and she was not doing enough for her child. She noted that it was the only time he refused to go to school: "*I was examining him every morning to check that he didn't really have a stomach ache and taking his temperature all the time.*" After the second term he was placed in a special school where he continued in grade 1. Even though he repeated the grade the following year, the move to the special school resulted in immediate relief. Liam settled in and coped very well with the new teaching style offered at the special school.

Unfortunately the school closed after his second year in grade 1 and the parents had to decide where to send him bearing in mind his AD/HD symptoms as well as the

cost of a private special school. They chose to send him to a government school in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town that kept their classes down to 15 learners. Anne thought that Liam would have more support in a classroom of fewer learners. The financial burden of paying private school fees was also an important factor in their decision as is often the case for parents with a child experiencing barriers to learning. Liam settled in well at this new mainstream school. He made friends, played many team sports and his academic achievement was acceptable as he continued to pass the grades. It was only in grade 7 that Anne and John began to question whether Liam was working to his full potential. Grade 7 at this particular school was placed in the high school and the expectations on the learners had changed. It was clear that Liam was not coping and after he failed the first semester, Anne did not want to wait till the end of the year to move schools. Liam seemed to be lost in the classroom and was not motivated to complete his homework. The teachers suggested that he was not going to pass grade 7 and would not cope in a grade 8 mainstream classroom. It was recommended that he undergoes a full educational psychology assessment. The results were surprising to the parents, as it showed that Liam was at least three years behind in literacy and numeracy levels, based on his chronological age. His parents felt it was necessary to look at special schools even though it was the middle of the year. Anne voiced their confusion as follows:

> [The report] showed that Liam was two to three years behind in maths and literacy; and there it was that it was finally catching up with him. It was quite strange that even in the small classes the teachers did not pick it up, but again they could tick the boxes and he was passing on 40%. As parents, we look to the teacher for guidance, and when we asked the questions about extra lessons we were told 'no there is no problem'. (Anne)

The parents' situation highlighted the importance of effective home-school communication. Parents and teachers need to work in collaboration with one another to ensure the learner is achieving to the best of his/her ability at school. As Anne indicated during the interview, parents look to teachers for advice and guidance, and

will often follow rather than question what they say (Deslandes, 2001; Swart & Phasha, 2011).

Anne said that the decision to move Liam to Willow Park School in the middle of the year was not easy. He was keen to finish the year at his current school, even though he was not enjoying his classes. It was difficult to take him away from his friends, but he settled into his new school and, right from the start, Anne found he experienced significantly less anxiety with school work. He still insisted, however, that he would have been able do the work in his previous school and that it was not necessary for him to be at Willow Park School. Liam also felt that most of the learners in his previous school achieved the same level as him and yet he was the one who was singled out to be moved. He kept in contact with his old friends and made some new ones at his current school. According to Anne he is a sensitive child and even though he held back his emotions; she knew he continued to struggle with the feeling that it had been an unfair decision to move him. He took the initiative to see a psychologist about this. He terminated on his own accord after a few sessions, but Anne saw a significant difference in his attitude about moving to Willow Park School. Her only regret was that she should have put therapy in place from the beginning.

Anne has no regrets about moving Liam in the Senior Phase of his school career. She suggested that she should have done it sooner, but without guidance and advice from the previous school, she had not been aware that Liam was not achieving his full potential. Anne has had only good reports from Willow Park School, and felt that the school offered her child a better education. She stated that she had "*no regrets whatsoever. I should probably have put him in [Willow Park] the minute the wheels fell off. He got the help a little too late, but it is never too late, he managed to catch up after he had fallen behind two to three years.*"

4.2.3 Case Study 3 – Mike and Gail

Mike and Gail are parents of Zane, a 14-year old boy who is the focus in this case, and a 9-year old girl. Zane is currently in grade 8, having transferred to Willow Park School at the beginning of the previous year. As he had been transferred in the Senior Phase of his academic career and came from a mainstream school in the nearby Southern Suburbs of Cape Town, this parental unit falls within the criteria for

selection for this study. The parents were interviewed together, and their story follows below.

Mike works in IT and Gail, who has a degree in linguistics, works as a health centre manager. Gail experienced a difficult labour with the birth of Zane and suggested that this had a direct impact on his learning ability. He was still not speaking at 2 and then, rather than going through the traditional milestones of single words to short sentences, he suddenly started talking in full sentences. In addition, although his physical milestones were all reached at the accepted stages, it was noted that he had low muscle tone when he went to preschool at 3. This was the beginning of many visits to therapists. Gail explains the situation as follows:

> When he was 2 years old he didn't speak, he never spoke, and then already I started to say something is wrong with this child, and he didn't say one word sentences or your two word, he didn't say blah, blah… he just started to talk, so he got in everything and he just started to talk… all his other milestones were right, but it was just his language.
> (Gail)

> We were fortunate that when he was 3 years old he went to a crèche and there the teacher said he has low muscle tone because he sits in an M (the "M" describes the shape a child's legs make when he is sitting with the insides of his legs on the ground and his bottom between his heels). When he was 4 or 5 he started grade R and we asked the teacher to watch and see if she feels the need for OT intervention, and early in the year she said we take him to the OT (occupational therapist). So we went, and he was 5 years old but his muscle tone was that of the 3 year old. His maths capability was assessed to be that of a 14 year old, but his language was that of a 4 year old, like one year behind his age and his maths was way in advance, so he had that imbalance then already.
> (Gail)

While in grade R it was recommended that Zane be sent to a school that was able to offer smaller classes. The occupational therapist assisting Zane felt that this would be beneficial to his learning. His parents decided to send him to an ex-model C

mainstream school in the Southern Suburbs. It should be noted here that the family are Muslim and part of a close-knit community where children by preference are sent to schools very close to home. Sending Zane to a school away from the home was therefore a difficult decision made in the hope that a better education would help him in the future.

Zane did well at school in the beginning; he made each grade and progressed fairly easily to the next. He had speech and occupational therapy at different times throughout his school career. His language continued to be a problem, most noticeable by the fact that he continued to struggle to learn to read and speak Arabic. He struggled to remember the phrases used at prayers even though he enjoyed learning about religion. He also received a lot of support from the school; he was referred to the special unit and given one-on-one support. Gail stated in her questionnaire that at the mainstream school "*the teachers with more years' experience assisted us quite a lot, whereas the younger teachers labelled him easily and ignored the fact that he does have a learning problem.*"

Gail described his early schooling as follows:

> He was fine in the beginning, but he got a lot of support from us. We had a speech therapist and he went for OT. She discharged him and said come back when he is in grade 3. She said he was fine in grade 3 and within his sort of milestones, he is okay. He had speech therapy on recommendation from the school; he also went to the remedial class, one-on-one he did not have a problem.
> (Gail)

In grade 6, the work had become progressively harder and Zane had to spend a lot of time in the classroom at breaks trying to catch up or grasp the work. The school and teachers' approach to Zane was positive. They had his best interests at heart. Mike and Gail received help and guidance from the school and Zane received various therapies to help him reach his potential. The school also made arrangements for Zane to be assisted by attending lessons at the special unit and the teacher helping during breaks and sent extra work to help him catch up at home. However, his teacher felt that the extra work was creating unnecessary stress and

that Zane was missing an opportunity to spend time with friends. It was thus recommended that he be sent to a special school where they offered even smaller classes and specialised education.

Zane's move to Willow Park School was a positive one, and grade 7 was a positive year for him. The smaller classes helped and the manner in which the work was taught allowed Zane to access the concepts. He was also able to relax and the constant anxiety was relieved. However, grade 8 this year (2013) has been particularly difficult for Zane as the work level and pace increased significantly. Mike and Gail have had to do a lot more intensive work at home with him and even with the extra hours, he is not achieving the marks his parents feel he should.

Zane underwent a full educational psychology assessment and was seeing a psychiatrist on a regular basis, but there was no singular diagnosis for his learning difficulty. He struggles to concentrate but does not fit the criteria for AD/HD; his IQ measures average; he has a strong mathematics ability and can also read well. His inability to express himself on paper during exams and tests suggests that he perhaps has a language disorder.

As indicated before, Zane's Grade 8 year has been particularly difficult for him, as the work level and pace increased significantly through the year. This has shown in his report, and while he was able to complete classwork at a satisfactory level he continues to struggle during assessments, tests and exams. Gail explained how her son feels:

> He says: 'why can't I play outside, why do I have to study so hard,' and it's difficult for him and he studies all the time. And also with him being here, he wants to go to mainstream he hates it here, he doesn't like being here because it makes him feel different, he wants to go to the mainstream school, also what makes it difficult because he wants to play, he wants to run around and here you are limited with space.
> (Gail)

Despite Zane's unhappiness with Willow Park School, Gail and Mike did not regret the decision they made to transfer him, despite the fact that they had not seen the increase in marks they were expecting. There were also certain negatives for Zane

in attending the special school – the grounds are small, and there is no organised competitive team sport. Mike explained it in the following way:

> The negative part to the school is that there are no grounds for these children to play, to just run around and vent, the sports offered [at the previous school] were good for him. He accepts being here, he is a people pleaser, he wants to please you and in the beginning we did have to break it down for him, but then he accepts, and he likes to be rewarded for things and you will get quite a bit out from him, so in that a sense it is okay. In the beginning it was breakdown but the teacher praises him and he begins to feel proud and he accepts.
>
> (Mike)

4.2.4 Case Study 4 - Jessica

Jessica is the mother of Nina, a 14-year girl, and Isaak, a 12 year-old boy, who both attend Willow Park School. Nina is the focus of this study as she transferred to the school at the beginning of grade 7 and is now in grade 9. As Nina was transferred in the Senior Phase of her academic career and came from a mainstream school in the nearby Southern Suburbs of Cape Town, her mother falls within the criteria for selection for this study. Jessica was interviewed on her own, and her story follows below.

Jessica's husband, Oliver, works long hours running his own business to support his family. Jessica is a 'stay-at-home mom' and spends her time looking after her children. She describes herself as a hands-on mother, motivated to ensure they achieve to the best of their ability. The family is particularly close knit and benefits also from having an extended family that lives in the same suburb. The family is supportive of Nina and her brother and there is no stigma attached to them attending a special school.

Nina started school at 5 in grade R and other than her not being ready to leave her mother and showing signs of attachment difficulties, she seemed to adapt well. Once she had become accustomed to school routine, she settled down. There was no particular incident or situation that caused Nina to transfer to a special school but it was rather due to a gradual decline in her level of work. The previous school was

also concerned about her lack of maturity and ability to cope with high school which was only 18 months away at the time. Jessica admitted that she had been very protective of her children to their own detriment so Nina had led a very protected life and this affected her emotional development and independence. Jessica narrated as follows:

> I don't let them go outside on their own, the other children in the street are always playing but I am scared. There are bad people in this country; I want my children with me. Decided that maybe I must start letting Nina do things independently, maybe let her go buy milk at the SPAR on her own, I don't know.
> (Jessica)

Nina was attending a relatively small mainstream school with a low teacher/learner ratio, and yet she was not making the progress she should have been. She had difficulty in concentrating and was struggling particularly with mathematics. Jessica and her husband decided to make the change; they wanted something more and better for their child. They believed that smaller classes would suit Nina and, with advice from the school, they moved her at the beginning of her grade 7 year.

The transition to the special school was not difficult for Nina as she had not formed many attachments to friends; she preferred the company of her family. Jessica said: "*Nina settled in particularly well at her new school; she loved her new teacher and got on really well with her.*" On the advice from the special school, Nina was assessed by an educational psychologist and placed on Ritalin for her concentration difficulties. However, she suffered severe side effects from the medication, particularly with regard to an acute loss of appetite and she thus lost a lot of weight. This was of great concern to her parents. Jessica described this as a learning period for herself particularly as it was then discovered that Nina was suffering from *petit mal* seizures (absences). The seizures would occur mainly at night while she was sleeping, but they became more frequent in the classroom and were noticed by the teacher. The most concerning aspect of these seizures was that the doctors did not know if they could have affected Nina's learning ability and how severe the damage was.

According to Jessica: "*We had no idea at the time, Nina had always been apprehensive about sleeping in a room on her own. For most of her life she has shared a bedroom with her grandmother.*" Learning of the seizures seemed to affect Nina's sleeping habits even more and Jessica felt her confidence and her self-esteem was also affected. The family went through a long process of trying to establish what was wrong and as they went from doctor to doctor, Nina's sleeping became worse. The seizures were eventually diagnosed and at the time of the interview they were well controlled and Nina was taking the correct medication. Over the past two years she has grown in confidence, is able to sleep alone and is more confident in herself and her abilities.

Jessica described her daughter as a kind and helpful girl who enjoys attending Willow Park School. She said: "*A is a lovely child, you know, she is so helpful at home, and she loves her granny so much, she spends a lot of time with her.*''

Jessica described a feeling of relief to have both her children in a special school. She felt comfortable that they were receiving a good education in small classes where their individual needs could be met. Even though she had been very protective of her children up until this point, she felt that with the guidance from the school she was now able to allow them to develop independently. Nina's brother moved to Willow Park School at the beginning of grade 5 after experiencing difficulties with mathematics. Jessica felt the school had helped her daughter so much; it could also help her son. However, while Nina will probably not return to mainstream education to complete high school, Isaak will return to mainstream in grade 8 and by all accounts should be able to complete a matric certificate. Jessica described her feelings about the special school as follows: "*the best is that I know my children are getting a good education that helps them and they are safe and mostly happy.*"

4.3 PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS: A THEMATIC APPROACH

The second phase of data analysis, the cross-case analysis, revealed four main themes that reflected the perspectives shared by parents involved in this study. The data presented in the following section was taken from the two sources of data generated during the data collection process, namely the semi-structured interviews (including the life-line activity) and the open-ended questionnaire. The themes and sub-themes generated from the data are summarised in Table 4.2 and are discussed below.

Table 4.2: Themes Identified for the Cross-Case Analysis

Themes
Parents' perspectives of special education
Perspectives on moving from a mainstream to a special school
The Adjustment Process
The Advice and Regrets

4.3.1 Parents' Perspectives of Special Education

Landsberg (2011) described the comprehensive range of educational support available to learners with special educational needs in South Africa. This is important for this study as it has implications for the participating parents and their children's schooling within government schools before joining the private special school that served as research school from which the participants were drawn. According to Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), learners with a low level of required support should be educated in a mainstream school. Learners who require a high level of support will either be educated in a full-service school or a high intensive special

school. The role of the special school has been redefined to accommodate learners with intensive support needs, as well as act as a resource centre for the district. Mainstream schools offer a complete curriculum to all learners and are inclusive for learners who are diagnosed as having barriers to learning, but only with a very low level of intensity (DoE, 2001; Landsberg, 2011).

The participants' perspectives of special education were dependent on the frame of reference shared by the parents. Past experiences, current experiences, community culture, as well as social and family expectations all played a role in influencing the parents' perspectives of what special education was.

The data indicated that the perspectives of the participants regarding special education were varied and dependent on the parents' knowledge of the education system and how it works. Some of the parents were aware of their child's learning difficulties and indicated that they had requested that their child be allowed to stay an extra year in a grade, and that this request had been denied. Others were told their children were doing fine and that their marks were not a concern even though the children were only just passing the grade.

One family admitted that the community in which they lived was particularly ignorant about special education. The parents too were ignorant about the special education system in South Africa before their child had undergone the transition from a mainstream to a special school. They went as far as to mention the bus from another special school in the city, which would come to the neighbourhood to collect certain children, and the fact that people looked down on those children and their families; they had not wanted this for their child. Even in their own family their son had been described as 'slow' by the grandparents, a statement that upset and angered the parents. However, through the process of placing their child in a special school they began to understand the role a special school played in the education system and the community, and how it could help their child. One mother described her anger towards her mother-in-law as follows:

> I actually got angry with his mother (father's mother) because she told
> someone the child is behind, no she used the word slow, I was not there
> but I got so angry because he is not slow he just takes a bit longer to

grasp certain things. And you can't label a child and that's why we were struggling about putting him maybe in special school years back already.
(Gail)

Another mother described mainstream education as *'trying to force a square peg into a round hole'*, while in contrast special education allowed for round holes and square holes. She felt that the special school made allowances for different learning styles while the mainstream school taught in one way only. Special education was not just about smaller classes, but also about the way the work was taught. This mother explained her understanding of special education in the following way, and indicated that in hindsight she should have placed her son in the special school sooner than in his Senior Phase of schooling:

> I have always had this thing with a child within the mainstream education; the square peg is being forced into a round hole. In special education, each child whether you are a square or a round hole, will be accommodated. In mainstream my experience has been that certain learning style is what they are after and a certain teaching style, and if a child needs to be taught otherwise, he is left out. In special education the teacher takes the time to understand the learner.
> (Anne)

This seemed a fair perception and understanding of special education. Willow Park School is a private special school and limits its class size to ten learners per class; however, all teachers are specially trained in special education and the work is adapted for each learning style and specific needs of the learner. The work is also differentiated and the strengths and weakness of the learner are taken into account. The process of assessment and testing is also carefully monitored to ensure the learners are able to achieve their full potential. The school is also able to offer the services of a learning support specialist to assist learners on a daily basis.

Parents still require a lot of support, guidance and education regarding their child's learning barrier and the way a special school can help their child. In some of the cases in this research study the parents continued to focus exclusively on the size of the class as being the definition of special education. It was also found that if parents

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do not fully understand the learning needs of their child; they do not view special education as a necessity for their child. Thus the need for special education only becomes an option for them much later in their child's school career. Their perspectives on special education were also based on a lack of knowledge relating to the issue and changes that have taken place in the South African education system.

One parental unit incorrectly described special education in terms of supportive and remedial education. Supportive education is however not something that is defined by the education system of South Africa, and remedial education is an outdated term replaced with learning support. The father explained it like this, stating that his daughter is in supportive education:

> I see it in two terms, firstly children who are academically okay, but have certain challenges that make it difficult for them concentrate in certain classes and; secondly children who are struggling significantly and have special needs in certain subjects and is a grade or two behind, they need a remedial school.
> (Ken)

Additionally, the same parents explained that their daughter did not accept her diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome. In light of this they did not force the issue, nor did they force her to accept her difficulty with regard to certain aspects of learning; Jane explained how she informed her daughter she would need to attend a special school for grade seven as follows:

> I told her she needs a smaller class due to her concentration and she denies even having a concentration difficulty, and does not see it as a problem. I tried to explain that she has Asperger's Syndrome at one stage, but she does not acknowledge it all. I did not go into detail because I could see she was fighting it and I feel she is only slightly Asperger's and only has a few of the characteristics.
> (Jane)

The above comment indicates the need for continued parental education regarding special education and the fostering of positive collaboration for school and family

partnerships. This data was collected from a small sample and cannot be generalized; however, the parents need to be educated regarding their child's learning barriers, and only then can they understand how special education can help their child.

The findings indicate that there are huge discrepancies in what parents believe special education to be. As the parents interviewed have children with special education needs, it is interesting to note that even this fact does not automatically mean parents have a good and fair understanding of special needs, special education and the policy that governs the special education schools in the country. This would indicate that parent education on this particular topic is needed; perhaps a topic the special school should address through parent workshops or support meetings.

Tucker and Schwartz (2013) suggested using collaboration as strategy to improve parent knowledge on special education. The effective collaboration in the trans-disciplinary team and the involvement of the parents will help parents to understand the learning barrier their child is dealing with. The notion of collaboration in improving parents' understanding of special education is also described in Epstein's model of influence in family, school and community partnerships and the realisation of shared goals. Epstein (2002) described various strategies that could be used to ensure successful school-family-community partnerships. These strategies involve the following: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. This is discussed further in section 2.6.2.

4.3.2 Perspectives on Moving from a Mainstream to a Special School

Crockett, *et.al*, (1989) discussed the changes experienced by learners who move from one school to another. They describe it as a 'normative' process that all learners have to go through at some time in their life; whether it is simply to move from primary school to high school, or a move across the country to a new school. The researchers state that "the transition involves changes in both physical setting and social roles, and this discontinuity may require adaptive efforts from young people" (Crockett, *et al.,* 1989, p. 182).

The parents interviewed for this study had diverse opinions with regard to moving. It appears from the data collected that the decision was a difficult one to make, and the reasons behind the decision differed from case to case.

In one case the parents described how just making the decision to change school was difficult. They felt the uncertainty about whether it was the right decision and whether they would be able to remain financially solvent. Their daughter also voiced her opinion and had strong views about changing school in grade 7. They describe the decision-making process in their own words:

> It was not easy – quite a stressful actually – due to the uncertainty about whether this was the right decision for her and she was very unwilling to move. There was also the financial stress. We were also concerned about whether she would retain existing friends or be labelled. We also wondered if she would receive the same excellent teaching she got at her previous school, we were also concerned she may not be sufficiently stretched at the special school.
> (Jane)

Another mother described her experience of her son moving schools in grade 7; the decision to transition her son in the Senior Phase of his school career was not a difficult one, and she was able to help her son understand why he had to undergo this transition. These are her words:

> Changing school was difficult for him, because there was just a holiday of three weeks for him to get used to the idea; there wasn't really time to prepare him. He felt I was being hasty to move him, but thankfully we had done the assessment and I could say to him, 'based on your assessment these are the findings' and because he had been in (the previous school) for six years and it's a small school so he had developed very good friendships. It was more about leaving his friends behind than leaving the school behind because he knew he was not happy, he was miserable that term. I thought it was teenage moodiness but after he had settled in at [the special school] that WOW, I have my old child back, and it wasn't about leaving his previous school it was about leaving his friends and having to

come and make new friends, and when he got to the special school, Liam
felt he didn't really need to be here, he classed himself above the rest.
(Anne)

For one parental unit the decision to transition their son at this stage of his school career was one that they had six years to make, and so eventually it came quite easy for them. When their son first started school they were not prepared to put him in a special school because of the stigma attached to the notion of having a special needs child. By the time their son reached grade 6 they realised that he needed more help. In another case study, the mother agreed that the decision to transition to the special school was an easy one. The mother was willing to make the change for the benefit of her son. The mother explained it as follows:

It was an easy decision for us this time around as we could see he was struggling in the big class environment. We were very positive that the move would give him more free time to be a child
(Gail)

The transition from one school to another is a difficult process; the potential effect on the learner was discussed in section 2.6.6.

4.3.3 Adjusting to the Special School

The discourse regarding special education in South Africa suggests that learners' first school placement should be in a mainstream school. The mainstream school then has a responsibility to ensure the learners receive the support needed to achieve to the best of their ability. However, the question pertaining to this thesis and research study was why this process occurred so late in the learner's school career. The policy goes on to state that it is only after all options to support the learner have been explored that a special school should be considered a possibility. Given this fact, learners *should* only attend a special school later in their school career and comprehensive support measures should be put in place. The parents' perspectives explored in this research paper have indicated that in some cases their child had not received the level of support needed for them to achieve to the best of their ability. To ensure an uncomplicated transition for the child and the parents both good

communication and collaboration between the mainstream and special school and consistent support for the parents and their child are required.

From the data it was evident that it was often the previous school that finally suggested that a learner needed to attend a school that could provide better for his or her particular support needs. It is well known that learning support should occur in the earlier stages of the school career for it to have the necessary positive impact on the learning difficulties experienced by the learner (DoE, 2005; Early Intervention and Education for Children with Special Needs, 2013).

All the parents interviewed had been informed that their child may have a learning difficulty before they started school. The cases involved in this research paper included learners with AD/HD and concentration difficulties, Asperger's syndrome diagnosis, language deficits and comprehension difficulties. However, the parents were initially advised to place their child in a mainstream school or were not aware of other options available to them.

All the parents or parental units interviewed for this study indicated that their children definitely experienced a time of adjustment when moving to the special school and found the change in schools challenging. As the children had transitioned in the Senior Phase of schooling, they were teenagers learning to take responsibility for the self and practising to make independent decisions. The decision regarding the transition from one school to another was mostly made on their behalf by their parents and teachers, impeding their sense of independence. Children at this age have also formed strong friendship bonds, and the final year of primary school is often an exciting opportunity for leadership and privilege, and attending a new high school with all their friends was something to look forward to.

The development of the individual learner is discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.6.6. Smith, *et al.,* (2003) suggested that middle adolescence is a challenging time of risk-taking and emotional and behavioural instability. There are also significant cognitive changes that take place, affecting operational thought and the understanding of abstract and hypothetical situations. The additional stress of changing schools can be difficult for the individual and it is important for the parents and teachers at the special school to be aware of these factors.

One parent unit described the reaction they received when they told their daughter she would be changing school:

> She was the 'hell-in' when we told her she was leaving [her previous school]. She did not want to leave; grade 7 was a big end of school year for her and she did not want to leave her friends. She had a serious tantrum but anyway. She doesn't particularly enjoy [the special school] for whatever reason, but she has managed to keep in contact with her personal friends, and I think it is a matter of adapting. She found a couple of the kids at [the special school] to be disturbing in some of their behaviours but hopefully she is getting used to it. She was not keen on going to that school and it is difficult for us to know how she's doing. However, we are told by teachers that she is adapting and improving. The experience, according to Elise, has been 'weird'- with weird people and rules. She found some of the kids crazy and scary, and found the smaller classes lonely and boring, however she does acknowledge that she gets more help. Overall the experience has been more bad than good, but it has got better as she gets used to the school.
> (Ken & Jane)

In another case study the mother discussed how her son settled in at the special school with relative ease and made friends quickly, but he held on to the anger he felt towards his parents for making the decision to move him from his previous school. The child took a long time to come to terms with his transition to the special school, even though he was achieving better in school and had made many friends in the class. The mother felt that her son was a sensitive child who needed professional help to overcome his negative feelings towards the school. She explains the situation in the following way:

> I have always said that if Liam was ever to move schools he would need therapy and it came true, I knew that Liam was the kind of child who wherever he puts his roots down would be difficult to take them out and put them somewhere else; and in this case there was not time to prepare him. Liam is the kind of person who holds on to an emotion for much longer than your average kid so he just held that anger at us putting him

here and him feeling like he did not really belong, even though he made friends from the word go, it wasn't about friends and it was deeper than that, and I think maybe in a certain sense he saw himself as a failure. The fact that he was here meant that he was just not as good as he thought he was. No matter how much you talk to him and reassure him, in his time he will let it go, but I could see he was not going to let this go and that it was going to impact on his learning. Thankfully the school hired a new psychologist and I thought wow, she is young, this is just what Liam needs and we were considering therapy and (the new psychologist) was just perfect. Because other kids were seeing the psychologist this was normal, so there was no stigma attached to going [to the psychologist], and it was during school hours so wasn't another thing added to the school day and everybody went and it was okay and it was your space to go and speak. After five weeks he terminated his sessions, he felt that it was enough and stopped going, but I could see the change, I could see Liam becoming a little bit more chilled and little bit less angry, hindsight, which is such a great thing, we should have just put him in therapy as soon as he came to [the special school].

(Anne)

Another parent discussed how it was easy for her son to make friends with children that shared common interests with him, but he had still not properly settled at the special school as he was hoping to go back to mainstream as soon as possible.

His first teacher at [the special school] assisted in making the transition smoother, he understands that we are trying to help him coping with the work better, hence the [special school], but he misses his old friends and wants to go back to mainstream.

(Gail)

Another theme identified in the process of adjustment was the level of support received from the school during the transition process. It was interesting to note that there were differing views on the amount of support received.

One mother stated that:

> From the onset both schools (previous and special school) helped us as well as the educational psychologist and the psychiatrist. This smoothed the transition for us. At the special school he felt very welcomed.
> (Gail)

Another mother stated a differing opinion on the level of support they received regarding the transition process. She indicated that "*the support received was fine, no different from the run of the mill new school information.*"

The ability of the child to adjust to the special school was dependent on both the characteristics of the individual and the level of support received from the schools. Bronfenbrenner described person characteristics as the most important aspect within a social situation. These characteristics are divided into three types – demand, resource and force. These characteristics are immediately apparent and influence the interaction between individuals, as the expectations are instantly formed; they influence the individual's ability to interact effectively with the environment; and describe the individual's temperament, motivation and persistence. These characteristics are further explained in section 2.3.2 (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). This indicates that learners need support and guidance through this time of transition.

The dynamics of the special school used as the research school in this study were different in many ways from the learners' previous schools. First and foremost, the classes were significantly smaller which might affect learners in a number of ways. While smaller class size allows for individual attention, the focus of the teacher can be on the individual learner a lot more. This could be advantageous as well as unfavourable for the learner, as it was very likely that at the previous school he or she would have been able to go unnoticed in a class of twenty-five or thirty. However, in a class of ten learners the teacher would be able to pay more individual attention to the learner which could be helpful. The individual support would assist the learner in improving their academic achievement, but could also place quite a burden on the learner.

Another difference from the mainstream school was that the special school was significantly smaller in learner number, and size of the grounds and available

facilities. This caused difficulties in offering structured team sports and extra-mural activities, and it could be difficult for a learner who had always played a particular sport or who missed his or her friends from the previous school. In this situation, structures should be put in place to counter this. For example, the learners might be allowed to continue playing for their old teams, and parents could continue to organise play dates with friends from the previous school.

The following quotes support the above statements:

> The fact that the school does not have big grounds to run around makes it difficult.
> (Gail)

> She found the smaller classes lonely and boring – but acknowledges she does receive extra help.
> (Jane)

> Nina feels safe in the small class, she has always had a smaller-sized class, she feels she can ask the teacher questions and not get laughed at.
> (Jessica)

Smaller classes, smaller number of learners and smaller grounds had either a positive or a negative effect on the adjustment process of the learners. However, the parents did suggest that in the long run the positives of the special school outweighed the negatives.

4.3.4 The Regrets and Advice

The transition process had been difficult for most of the parents. In some cases it proved a shock to them that their child needed a special school and they were often indecisive about whether they were making the right decision. Eventually all parents however admitted that, in the long run, it was the right decision for their child and they would do it again.

One parent described how making the transition later in their child's academic career was difficult and challenging for the parents as well as the child.

> If you have to change, do it sooner rather than later. For a child with a low self-esteem and learning difficulty, being taken out of his known environment at an older age, can be daunting and difficult to adapt to his new surroundings.
>
> (Mike & Gail)

Another parent indicated that she was particularly content with the decision to transition her son to the special school. She learnt many lessons over the past three years and felt that her son had settled down well and improved his marks and level of school work significantly.

> Just having the child in the right environment makes all the difference, and the younger that we do that the better the outcome. No regrets whatsoever, if I had to do it all over again, the medication, the therapy I would do it again, I would probably have put him in (Willow Park School) the minute the wheels fell off … He got the help a little too late, but it is never too late, he managed to catch up after he has fallen behind two to three years. (Anne)

Even though there was a certain level of uncertainty shared by the parents concerning their participation in this research study, no parent interviewed suggested they regretted making the decision to transition their child. From the perspective of the parents, in hindsight, they would have made the transition earlier in their child's school career and they have learnt many lessons about their child and the education system through this process.

4.4 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.4.1 Introduction

In the previous section the shared findings from the collected data were presented. The following section introduces the discussion of the findings in relation to the literature and theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. It is these findings that

are used to advise the suggestions and recommendations that are presented in Chapter 5.

This study was grounded in the bio-ecological model and thus the discussion and interpretation of the findings are structured within this framework. The discussion of the findings should be done with the reminder of the problem statement that guided this study. This research study aimed to understand parent perspectives of transitioning their child from a mainstream to a special school in the hope of ensuring that their child would receive the required level of support to maximise learning.

Analysis of the data generated various themes relating to the parents' perspectives of the transition of their child and their experiences within the education system. A discussion of the main findings of the study correlated with findings in the relevant literature and the structure presented by the bio-ecological model follows. The discussion of the findings is structured according to the various systems and subsystems as indicated in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: The Systems and Embedded Subsystems of the Bio-ecological Model

Systems	Subsystems
Macrosystem	Societal perspectives of difference and disability Educational policy
Exosystem	The current school system and financial implications The local community
Microsystems and mesosystem	Communication and collaboration Parent involvement The learner

4.4.2 The Influence of the Macrosystem

The shared perspectives of the parents were influenced by different factors. The model postulated by Bronfenbrenner (2005) theorised about the external influences

that affect the individual, in this case the parents. The influencing factors in this theme include societal perspectives of difference and disability, and educational policy. These factors make up what is known as the macrosystem, which is most distant from the parent unit, but still influences their environment.

From the findings it was evident that the four cases identified held differing views on special education. In only one case was the mother able to describe special education as it is viewed in Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), i.e. that learners are taught in an inclusive manner, taking into account their potential barriers to learning. In the other cases the parents had previously experienced negative reactions to special education. The learning challenges, as experienced by their children, were seen to be a problem located within the child, and thus a negative or bad thing. For this reason they were apprehensive of sending their child to a special school. In this respect Naicker (2005) argued that the medical model with its belief that problems are located within learners is, unfortunately, still alive and well within education in South Africa and needs to be addressed. This finding indicates that more education is necessary within both schools and broader society about the rights model of education that currently prevails in education policy in the South African context. Educational policy moves away from a medical model of difference and disability towards creating possibilities in terms of ability, interest, intelligence and style.

The educational policy of South Africa aims to implement a more inclusive environment within the schools. This policy suggests various ways of achieving an inclusive school; the strategies are discussed in section 2.4.2. However, schools are often deeply rooted in the social structures in which they are based and therefore need the support of society to be fully inclusive.

4.4.3 The Influence of the Exosystem

Within the bio-ecological model the exosystem is made up of the subsystems that do not interact directly with the individual. For this research study the school system, which has certain financial implications for the parents, and the community in which the parent units live are all part of their exosystem (Donald, *et al.,* 2010; Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

In all but one of the cases the participants indicated that the financial implications of sending their child to a private special school was an influential factor in their decision-making process and initially affected the choice of school for their child. The redeployment of government subsidised special schools in accordance with Education White Paper 6 (2001) resulted in learners with low to moderate levels of learning difficulties being accommodated in the mainstream classroom. The policy of inclusive education is a requirement for schools in South Africa, which is necessary to ensure fair education for all; however, the inclusion of learners in mainstream classes without the necessary support does not represent responsible inclusion (Culham & Nind, 2003). Engelbrecht (2006) argued that the policy for inclusive education as laid out in Education White Paper 6 aims to increase the participation of all learners in schools and decrease the number of barriers to learning and learning difficulties by changing the attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula, school environments and the system as a whole. The negative side of this policy for the parents that participated in this study was that mainstream schools struggled to fulfil their obligations to their learners and that, due to the shortage of government-run special schools, the parents were forced to place their child in a private special school, where the school fees are significantly higher than those of a government school. The transition to a special school was also made later in their child's school career and the move proved to be a difficult process for the parents, but especially for the child.

Kepe (1999) differentiated between the terms 'community' and 'the community'. While 'the community' simply describes the people living a single location, 'community' describes the common ties shared by a particular community. Within this subsystem it should be highlighted that the decisions made by parents in this study were influenced by the opinion of the community in which they resided, whether positive or negative. In one case, the community had a negative effect on the decision and the child was sent to a mainstream school, while in another case the community was not affected by where the children went to school and did not think twice about it, resulting in a more positive effect on the parents.

4.4.3 The Influence of the Microsystems (Mesosystem)

The microsystem, as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1994), comprises complex reciprocal interactions between the participant (in this study a parental unit) and the immediate environment. In the case of this research study, the parents were directly in contact with their family and their child, and through their child with the school. Within the inclusive education discourse parents are viewed as important members of the inclusive school community (Carrington & Robinson, 2006; Zollers, *et al.,* 1999). The child, or learner, should also be seen as a microsystem, while the focus of this research is on the parents, the learner is directly affected by the parents, as well as being influential on the parents' experience of the transition of schools. The interactions between the microsystems (school, home and family) are seen as happening within the mesosystem,

4.4.3.1 Support, Collaboration and Parent Involvement

One of the findings generated by this study pointed to the level of support the parents and children received from the schools – both the mainstream and special schools. Pillay and Di Terlizzi (2009) discussed the experiences of a learner in both the mainstream and special school system of South Africa. Their research highlighted the differences in the policy for inclusive education and the implementation of this policy in schools, specifically with regard to the level of support received by learners. They suggested that the successful implementation of inclusive education requires a whole-school approach, however, while the policy and value of inclusive education is acknowledged by many within the system, the resources needed, both human and financial do not exist at this time. This can result in a low level of support received by learners from a mainstream school. The findings of this research study support Pillay and Di Terlizzi's (2009) findings of a gap between policy and policy implementation, and that the learners were not receiving adequate support in a mainstream school. However, it should also be noted that parents suggested that they could have received more support from the special school during the transition period. This is an indication that perhaps schools in general need to ensure they offer effective support for parents as well as their children.

The philosophy of collaboration allows for a team approach, shared responsibility and equal relationships. In collaboration the participants all have common goals, in this case the successful education of the learner (Henneman, *et al.,* 1995; Lawson, 2004). Effective collaboration leads to effective family, school and community partnerships as described in Epstein's model of overlapping systems (Swart & Phasha, 2011).

In some cases in this research study the mainstream schools were uncommonly supportive. In one instance the school gave the parents a much clearer idea of their son's difficulties. They also found ways of helping him by referring him for occupational therapy and speech therapy, as well as putting him in the special unit within the school. They offered him one-on-one sessions to catch up with the work and his teacher was very helpful in assisting during break times and sending extra work home.

In another case, the parents experienced the opposite with regard to communication and collaboration with the mainstream school. They were repeatedly told their child was making adequate progress and there was nothing to be concerned about. It was only when the learner reached grade 7 that the teachers admitted that he was not coping sufficiently. The parents also suggested that they did look to the teachers for advice and guidance and were prepared to accept what they were told.

One parental unit described their experience of a teacher who had not taken the time to understand their daughter's syndrome, and the learning and social difficulties she might be facing. The parents explained how this teacher described their daughter as 'mean and vindictive,' without taking the time to understand Asperger's Syndrome. In this example the parents and teacher had not worked together in partnership to ensure the best for the child. Duhaney and Salend (2000) stated that parents need to play a role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Parents should be perceived as experts on their children and able to provide insight regarding their children that teachers may never gain. Parents and teachers should work together, sharing insight into ways to include and understand the learner. Deslandes (2001) discussed the role of the parents and the role of positive reciprocity, and stated that creating a programme of partnerships within schools would assist open communication between the parents and the teachers. The proximal processes are a

significant aspect of the bio-ecological model postulated by Bronfenbrenner (1994). It is through direct engagement with others that individuals are able to make sense of the world. Continuous and effective interaction between the parents and the teachers will have a positive impact on their collaboration

4.4.3.2 The Learners' Experiences

Adolescence is a time of personal change and growth. The research study focused on parents with children in the early to middle stages of adolescence as participants. Their children only entered the special school in the Senior Phase of their schooling. In this research study the findings were related to the perspectives of the parents; however, the narratives were all about their experiences with their children. The learner was therefore still an important focus in this study.

In all but one of the cases the parents indicated that their children had found the adjustment to the special school difficult, which is in agreement with Macleod (2003), who described how adolescence is a phase of uncertainty. Early and middle adolescence as a period of heightened puberty and maturation, and significant improvements in reasoning, especially deductive reasoning, and processing of information as well as being vulnerable to risk-taking and finding the management of emotions and behaviour challenging (Macleod, 2003; Steinberg, 2005).

The changing of schools is a normative, if also difficult, experience for the individual. However, the process of moving to a special school during adolescence, in particular, is specifically challenging, as suggested by the cases in this research study. Individuals in this phase of their life and schooling leave established friendships and sports teams behind. This is not a 'normal' move they make with their peers from primary to high school; it is a move that has been forced upon them due to certain learning challenges. This experience can cause a feeling of failure and doubt about their own ability, and when the learners are taken out of an environment in which they were comfortable, they can feel uncertain and out of their depth. The parents interviewed indicated that their children always questioned why they had to attend a special school and leave their friends behind. Some of the children struggled to adjust to the special school, with one child having to attend therapy, only finding peace with the decisions his parents made a year after the fact.

At this stage of adolescence the individuals are developing formal-operational thought and their ability to understand and reflect on hypothetical and abstract situations is growing. It is also a time of hormonal changes, which can affect emotional stability and cause moodiness (Smith, *et al.,* 2003). These aspects of development are important to remember when a child experiences a transition to a new school, especially if the decision was not their own. It is in this phase of the child's life that they begin to have the ability to think for themselves and form their own opinions. With the development of hypothetical thinking they are better able to see different sides of a situation and reason how a transition to a special school would affect them. The hormonal development can make adolescents moody and emotionally irrational, which can be difficult for the parents to deal with (Steinberg, 2005).

Eccles, et al., (1993) discussed how the changes in this stage could be difficult to deal with; adding a school transition could add to the problems. This period of change could cause regression, which could result in low academic achievement. The move to a special school could have a negative impact on the individual's intrinsic motivation, self-concept and self-perception.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Analysis of the data collected from the interviews, life-line activities and the open-ended questionnaire indicated that from the parents' perspective, the transition of their child from a mainstream to a special school had been both a difficult and rewarding experience. While all admitted that their child was now coping better, the decision to change schools was not a simple one and the process of adjustment difficult. The current changes occurring within the education system and the subsequent effect on the learner highlights the relevance of this study.

Chapter 5 presents concluding remarks, recommendations and implications for future research. The strengths and weaknesses of this research inquiry are also discussed.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUDING REMARKS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This research study aimed to gain insight into the perspectives and experiences shared by parents who have transitioned their children from a mainstream to a special school. The study was conducted within an interpretive research paradigm and employed a collective case study design, focused on 'the perspectives of parents who have transitioned their children from a mainstream to a special school' as phenomenon as indicated above. A qualitative methodology was used with in-depth interviews (with a life-line activity) and open-ended questionnaires as methods of data generation. This research process provided the researcher with insight into the meaning-making processes of parents as participants, thereby allowing her to gain understanding regarding their perspectives of special education and their experiences of transitioning their child in the later stages of their school career. This research study provided the researcher, also as educational psychologist-in-training, insight into the transition and adjustment processes the learner experiences when making the transition to a special school in the Senior Phase of his/her schooling. The findings were enlightening with regard to the level and types of support parents and their children may need from the educational psychologist when making these challenging decisions and changes. The educational psychologist can make a valuable contribution in assisting parents and their children during this process of transition.

This chapter offers concluding remarks on the main research findings as well as presents recommendations for successful transition in the future. The discussion of the main findings is structured to answer the research questions as posed at the beginning of the study. The limitations and strengths of the study are also discussed.

5.2 INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.2.1 How Do Parents Experience Their Children's Transition from a Mainstream to a Special School?

Transition, as defined in Chapter 1, deals with the process of changing from one state or condition to another (OED, 2012). Crockett, *et al.,* (1989) stated that children's transition between schools such as the change from primary school to high school occurs for most learners. In the case of this research study the focus has been on the transition from a mainstream to a special school. The decision to transition a learner is often influenced by various factors, including financial implications, family expectations and the needs of the child.

All parents interviewed for this study found the transition of their child from a mainstream to a special school a difficult process. However, the reason for the perceived difficulty differed from parent to parent and from situation to situation. For some it was the decision to make the transition that they found difficult, while others found their child's integration into the school a difficult process. One parental unit was still undecided about whether they had made the right decision. The transition from a mainstream to a special school is difficult for both the parents and the child. In this study the implications of the developmental phase (adolescence) of the child seemed to have aggravated the effects of the transition. Most children at this age, between 13 and 16 years old, have established friendships and formed relationships with their peers at their previous school. They are also comfortable in the environment and experience a feeling of safety which is of paramount importance during this stage of development.

The adolescent child is more focused on the need for acceptance and 'fitting in' with those around them. Another factor that may influence the transition between schools is the ability to play sport; which, for both the parents and the special school, may seem trivial, but not for the child who participated in sport in his previous school. As explained before, the special school acting as research school does not offer competitive team sports. This is due to a few reasons, one being the lack of school grounds and available practise space; another is the size of the school and small number of children in each grade. In some instances a child may excel in sport in the

mainstream school and this is the one area where he/she may feel competent. Moving schools takes away this feeling of accomplishment without putting something in its place. In light of this the child could begin to lose self-confidence. These factors are influential in the transition of schools and the adjustment period that occurs.

Parents may be accepting of their child's special educational need; however, there is still a stigma attached to having your child attend a special school, as indicated by the research findings. Parents want the best for their child, however the 'best' is sometimes perceived to be the most well-known schools in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town. It is important for parents to find out what is 'best' for *their* child and ensure that that is what they receive from the particular school they consider for their child, whether it is a mainstream or a special school. The education policy of South Africa suggests that each child should begin their school career in a mainstream school, while continuing to receive the support they need to cope with the barrier to learning they are experiencing. This policy is in line with the perspective of some parents, who feel that their child deserves the opportunity to attend a mainstream school with their peers, where they are able to play sports, as well as receive the support they need for their learning difficulties. The researcher feels perhaps this is one of the reasons why parents have resisted placing their child in a special school earlier in their child's schooling.

However, it should be noted that the notion of an *independent* special school is not sustainable within the South African school system. Such a school is not a realistic option for all learners in South Africa as it maintains a level of elitism which does not engender the policy of inclusive education laid out in Education White Paper 6.

5.2.2 How do Parents Perceive the Role of Special Schools in South Africa?

From the information gathered in this research study it is clear that the parents interviewed have differing views on what special education is and the role it plays in the South African education system. The parents interviewed are, for the most part, not well informed about what special education is and how it can help their child. They are also not fully educated about the difficulty that their child is facing or perhaps are not willing to accept the learning difficulty their child is dealing with.

The school could be hugely influential in this area, as they have the ability to involve the parents in their child's education. There is also a strong argument that the educational professionals – the speech therapists, occupational therapists and educational psychologists – have a shared responsibility to help parents understand their child's learning difficulty better. Parents also need to take the time to educate themselves and not rely solely on the guidance of the teachers.

From the findings it is evident that parents believe special education to be simply about smaller classes. They are unaware of the style of teaching that occurs at a special school and the way in which they would be able to support their children at home. This research did not focus on the role of the teacher in the special school, but rather on collaboration and the interaction between the parent, teacher and learner. This researcher, as researcher and educational psychologist, believes that a responsibility rests on the teacher to help the parents understand what they do in the classroom to help the learner. Education and collaboration with regard to special education and special schools will help parents to understand the process better.

5.2.3 What are the Shared Reasons for the Transition from Mainstream to Special Schools?

In all cases examined in this research paper the reason for transition from a mainstream to a special school was the same. The learner, diagnosed with a specific learning difficulty and placed in a mainstream school, was not receiving sufficient support to overcome this difficulty and was thus struggling at school. All parents interviewed indicated that the previous school their children attended suggested that they would not be able to cope in a mainstream high school and needed more intensive support, which was not available at the current school.

The researcher in this study is also a qualified teacher who previously taught in the Senior Phase at the special school that served as the research school in this study and experienced learners transitioning into the special school for the first time. These experiences motivated the research on this topic. After researching the policy of inclusive education in this country as an educational psychologist-in-training, the researcher supports the notion and idea of inclusive education, but does not see the benefits of mainstream education for all learners. The fact that the parents are the

individuals who make the final decision about where their child will attend school informed the researcher's interest in understanding the parents' perspectives concerning the transition of their child to a special school. It was important to understand why the learners were only placed in the special school in the Senior Phase of their schooling and how the parents experienced this transition to be able to assist in ensuring an easier process for other parents and their children.

5.2.4 What Recommendations can be made to Special Schools to Ensure a Smooth Transition?

Parents, who have made the decision to transition their child into a special school, especially while their child is in the Senior Phase, need to be supported. This is evident from the narratives in the case studies in Chapter 4. The process of transitioning a child is difficult and requires strong resource characteristics within both the parents and the child. Resource characteristics are the innate abilities of the individuals; both mental and emotional, and include past experience, skills and intelligence (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). It can be difficult for a child with low self-esteem and barriers to learning to transition successfully between schools. If the child transitions into a special school, the responsibility falls mainly on the shoulders of the management, teachers and support staff of the special school to ensure a smooth transition. The special school needs to be aware of the various difficulties facing both the parents and the child during the transitional period.

The findings of this research paper show that some parents found the special school to be very welcoming and supportive, while others experienced an average level of support, which is always expected when starting at a new school. Each case should be considered on an individual basis by the special school, and the factors surrounding the move should be taken into account. The child's level of ability, self-esteem and previous school experience are all factors that will influence the process of adjustment. Various support groups can be offered to both the parents and child when they start at the special school, which will help parents to understand how special education works and the role they can play in the effective education of their child.

It should also be remembered by both the parents and the special school that learning does not only occur inside the classroom, and the child's self-esteem and confidence in their academic abilities should not be forgotten or overlooked. Playing for a sport team and being part a group is very important in the adolescent development phase, and children need to enjoy a sense of belonging. As far as possible, this should be maintained, or a way to substitute that feeling should be found – again, both the school and parents can play a role.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate that there are differences in the level of understanding of the parents about what special education is and what it means to them. It is not only the parents who need to be educated about special education, but also the greater community. South African culture is still deeply affected by the Apartheid regime and there is a focus on trying to avoid the idea of labelling or segregation, often at all costs, which resulted in the education system of South Africa doing away with the special schools system. Although levels of support are offered, as discussed in Chapter 1, there are gaps in the implementation of the policy. In some instances this leads to the mainstream schools not being able to offer good and quality education. The teachers are expected to teach overly large classes with learners dealing with various and significant barriers to learning and learning difficulties, and are not trained or supported by the school management or education department. This research paper has shown that in all cases, even though the parents were aware that their child may have a learning difficulty, they were not supported by the schools, or were told by the teachers that their child's low marks were not a concern at that point. The result is that children are required to change schools at a very late stage in their schooling and the expectation then falls to the special school at help the child. The argument in South Africa for inclusive and mainstream education being the first option for all learners is a positive and strong one for the future of education in South Africa. However, without the required monetary funding, appropriate teacher training and whole-school development, there is a gap between the policy and successful implementation.

The findings from this report suggest that parental education and guidance need to occur to ensure the best education for the child. From the reviewed literature and the subsequent findings it is possible to state that efficient collaboration between all subsystems involved – school, parents and learners – can improve the understanding both the teacher and the parents have of the child. Through collaboration, interested parties can also be included in the learner's education; the district-based support team, the educational psychologists, speech therapists, learner support teachers, teachers and parents should all be invited to be involved and seen as equal participants where no hierarchy is in place.

It can also be recommended that parent support groups are put in place in special schools to assist parents in understating the role special schools play in the education process. To educate an entire community of people is a complex and enormous task, which may not have the desired effect in the long run. However, education on a smaller scale may, in fact, influence a select number of people who may be able to change the opinions of others in their community. In this way the information is based in context and will have meaning to those who are involved in special education.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to the sample size of four used in this study, the scope of this research is somewhat narrow. The interpretive research design used in the study lends itself to the use of a small sample size; however, a larger sample size would allow for greater transferability of the research data. Only four parents or parental units participated in the study and this could have affected the quality of the data and therefore the ability to generalise using the findings of the research.

This research study focused on understanding the perspectives shared by parents who transition their children from a mainstream school to a special school. The research was thus based on semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire with the aim to elicit the insights needed to answer the research questions. It could be possible in the future to incorporate the use of a focus group to enhance the

research findings parents may be more open when sharing their perspectives when they are exposed to others with similar experiences.

It should also be noted that this research study focused on the perspectives of parents who have transitioned their children from a mainstream school to a special school in the senior school phase; research could be extended to parents who transition their children at any stage of their school career. This extension was, however, outside the scope and extent of the current study.

The role of the researcher within the school as a previous teacher and current intern educational psychologist could potentially have created a power differential during the interview process. This could have resulted in the participants not sharing their true feelings or omitting a part of their story during the interview. Swart and Oswald (2012) suggest the role of the researcher as a participator within the research process. The researchers also propose the notion of care. Creating a caring relationship where sound data can be collected is only possible within a safe environment where the there is no interference of a power relationship. This aspect of the research methodology was mitigated to a certain extent by asking the participants to answer the questionnaire on their own time. However, more time could have been taken to get to know the participants in the hope that feel safe in the environment during the interview.

A participant review was also not used in this study as the participants interviewed had all signed a comprehensive informed consent form and only the information shared by the participant was used in the study.

5.5 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

The interpretive nature of the research design used in this study allowed the researcher to gain a deep insight into the shared perspectives of the parents who have transitioned their children from a mainstream school to a special school. This qualitative method of research is advantageous in gathering rich descriptions and perspectives from the participants. It is due to the richness of the data that it was possible to gain an understanding of the perspectives of the participating parents or

parental unit. This insight can deliver valuable information that can be used by educational psychologists, teachers and other relevant practitioners to support other parents. While participating in this research study the parents were also able to reflect on the process and experiences they had been through and this allowed them to find meaning in the decisions they had made regarding their child's education.

5.6 FURTHER RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

This research study generated data from a relatively small, homogeneous sample of parents, and a research study involving a demographically more heterogeneous sample may generate richer data. This study was also focused on a private special school. It is possible that involving parents from various schools may enrich the data collected. This study was directed by time and resource constraints, but future studies could also involve the learners who have made the successful transition from mainstream to special school. This may yield a deeper understanding of the process of the transition and the factors affecting the success thereof.

The focus of the research was also narrow, since it was carried out at a single special school in the Southern Suburbs of the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The study does not investigate parents' perspectives or experience from other schools, areas of the city, the province or other provinces throughout the country. Due to the interpretive nature of the study it is not possible to simply generalise the results or recommendations; it may, however, in the future be possible to transfer the findings to different contexts by repeating the study in different settings.

The findings of the study highlighted the significance of parental and community education regarding special education. Further studies could be done to explore perspectives regarding special education in the wider community and perspectives held by other parents. In this research study, the individual teachers were not a focus of the study; rather than focusing on the teacher as an individual, the focus was on the school and the role of the multi-disciplinary team. Future research could be undertaken to understand the perspective of the teacher with a learner with special needs in their classroom.

While this study focused on the parents, it may be meaningful to explore experiences of the learners themselves. The knowledge gained form such a study could help understand the challenges facing the learner when they have to transition to a special school; the feelings of self-worth as well as perhaps relief would be of great importance here.

Lastly, research could be initiated in the mainstream schools, where support for learners is attempted and teachers are trying to implement various strategies to help the learners. There is policy in place that directs the level of support a mainstream school is supposed to offer a learner with various barriers to learning; however, there is often not enough support for the teachers in place.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The research study set out to understand the perspectives shared by parents who had transitioned their child from a mainstream to a particular special school in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town. The study was conducted within the interpretive paradigm, using a case study design approach. To understand the perspectives and experiences of the parents, semi-structured interviews were conducted. These interviews also included the use of a time line, and the parents were asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire. The data from these data-collection methods was triangulated to enhance its validity.

The notion of special education is misunderstood by and misrepresented to the community. There is an expectation that children will be labelled or identified as *'less than'*. The policies drawn up by the South African government confirm this, and the Education White Paper 6 speaks to an inclusive education system. However, the practical application of the policy document can be complicated and influenced by lack of funding, motivation and training in the schools.

By conducting a study on parents and their perspective of transitioning their child with a learning difficulty to a special school, it was possible to explore the parents' subjective experiences and uncover the meanings attached to these experiences. It appears that the reason why the transition between schools occurs late in the child's

school career varies from parent to parent; however, a constant factor was the lack of understanding with regard to special education. The findings from this research study acknowledge and support the existing literature on the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa, and create a better understanding about how to assist parents in making the decision to transition their child from a mainstream to a special school and ensure the required level of support is put in place. Future research studies in this area of education policy and implementation will be instrumental in assisting schools, both mainstream and special schools, in guiding parents through their child's school career.

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Addendum A

Letter granting ethical clearance for study from Stellenbosch University

UNIVERSITEIT·STELLENBOSCH·UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot · your knowledge partner

11 Sept 2012

Tel.: 021 - 808-9003
Enquiries: Mr. Winston A Beukes
Email: wabeukes@sun.ac.za

Reference No. DESC_HYM/2012

Ms C Hyman
Dept of Psychology

Dear Ms C Hyman

LETTER OF ETHICS CLEARANCE

With regard to your application, I would like to inform you that the project *'Parents' perspectives of their children's transition from a mainstream to a 'special school'* has been approved on the following proviso's:

1. The researcher will remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal, particularly in terms of any undertakings made in terms of the confidentiality of the information gathered.

2. The research will again be submitted for ethical clearance if there is any substantial departure from the existing proposal.

3. The researcher will remain within the parameters of any applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of research.

4. The researcher will consider and implement the foregoing suggestions to lower the ethical risk associated with the research.

5. This ethics clearance is valid for one year from **21/08/2012 until 20/08/2013**

We wish you success with your research activities.

Best regards
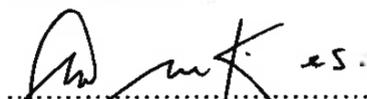
....
MR WA Beukes
REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humaniora)
Registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC): REC-050411-032

DIE UNIVERSITEIT VAN STELLENBOSCH
1 1 SEP 2012
THE UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH

Afdeling Navorsingsontwikkeling • Division for Research Development

Privaatsak/Private Bag XI • Matieland 7602 • Suid-Afrika/South Africa
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www.sun.ac.za/research

Addendum B

Permission to conduct study from the Private School in the Western Cape

<u>Request to conduct research study entitled:</u>

<u>PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR CHILDREN'S TRANSITION FROM A MAINSTREAM TO A SPECIAL SCHOOL.</u>

I am currently registered as a student in the programme Masters of Educational Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch. In order to complete my degree, I have to complete a research study on which a thesis needs to be written. Consequently, I have applied to the Western Cape Education Department for permission to conduct such research in schools. This permission has been granted and I have attached the supporting letter.

I have identified your school as meeting the selection criteria I have used in designing my study. I would therefore like to request permission to conduct research in your school. The aim of this study to gain anin-depth understanding of parents' perspectives of special schools and in particular how they experience the transition their children had to make from a mainstream to a special school. As this study is conducted from the perspective of a special school, it is also important to consider the parents' recommendations for ensuring a smooth transition from mainstream schools.

The research will be conducted during the month of August. The first stage involves the signing of the consent forms in which confidentiality and anonymity would be explained, the participants will first be asked to participate in a single one-on-one questionnaire that will take about 90 minutes to complete. Thereafter, they will be asked to complete an open ended questionnaire in their own time.

 It would be greatly appreciated if you would please grant me permission to involve your parents in my research study. I believe that their involvement in the study assist in understanding the perspectives of parents and their experience when transitioning their children a special school.

Yours sincerely

Ms Claire Hyman

I hereby consent to allow this study to be completed at (*special school*), I have been given a copy of this form.

_____   _____

Signature of Principal   **Date**

Addendum C

Informed consent form as provided to research participants

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Parents' perspectives of their children's transition from a mainstream to a special school.

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Claire Hyman, MEdPsych, from the Department of Educational Psychology, at Stellenbosch University. Information gathered in this research will contribute to a Masters thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your child made the transition from a mainstream to a special school during their senior phase of schooling.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study to gain anin-depth understanding of parents' perspectives of special schools and in particular how they experience the transition their children had to make from a mainstream to a special school. As this study is conducted from the perspective of a special school, it is also important to consider the parents' recommendations for ensuring a smooth transition from mainstream schools.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. You will first be asked to participate in a single one-on-one interview that will take about 90 minutes to complete.

2. Thereafter, you will be asked to complete an open ended questionnaire in your own time.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Participants will participate freely and voluntarily and will be fully informed as to the purpose, methods, intended use of the research, and what their participation in the research would entail. As participant you are guaranteed anonymity - for the purpose of the study, the participant's names will be omitted and your privacy protected by means of pseudonyms in the final report. The ethical issues will be discussed with the participants and written consent will be given by each of them.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

It is hoped the findings of the study will lead to the development of meaningful support strategies to assist learners with intensive learning needs in mainstream schools and help to ensure the transition between schools is made needs of the child kept as the utmost importance.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. No payment will be received for taking part in the study.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of omitting your name and by using pseudonyms in the final report. The information received from the participants will be kept safely in a cabinet to which only the researcher has access, and on a computer. The computer is protected by a password.

The interviews are to be recorded on a digital dictaphone. Immediately after the interviews, the information will be downloaded onto my laptop. You have the right to review/edit the recordings. No one else has access to the recordings. The information downloaded on my laptop will be erased once my thesis has been completed.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Ms Claire Hyman   Postgraduate Student

Department of Educational Psychology

Stellenbosch University

Telephone number: ……………………..

Claire.hyman@gmail.com

Dr Oswald   Senior Lecturer

Department of Educational Psychology

Stellenbosch University

Telephone number: ……………………..

mmoswald@sun.ac.za

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me by Claire Hyman in English and I in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to me. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Name of Participant

_____

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

_____   _____

Signature of Participant or Legal Representative   Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the participant*]. He/She was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   **Date**

Addendum D

General interview guide for semi-structured interview

UNIVERSITEIT·STELLENBOSCH·UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

<u>INTERVIEW SCHEDULE</u>

1. How do you perceive a special education?

2. What kind of challenges does your child experience at school
   a. When did you first become aware of the learning difficulties facing your child?
   b. How did you find this information out?

3. When did you decide to move your child to a special school?
   a. What happened to bring on this decision?
   b. What process did you follow when finding a new school?

4. Can you explain what special education means to you?

5. How has your child coped in school over the past few years?

6. How does your child cope in his new school?
   a. Academic changes
   b. Social changes
   c. Behaviour at home]

7. Do you think your own school experiences have influenced the way in which you have dealt with your child's education?

Addendum E

Open Ended Style Questionnaire

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jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How would describe the experience of moving your child from one school to another?

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2. Have you received any support from the two schools during the process?

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3. How has your child experienced settling in at their new school?

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4. Is this a change you would recommend to other parent in the same situation?

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Addendum F

Portion of the transcription from the individual interview – coding: themes and categories

Portion of an Individual Interview - Including Codes and Themes.

ANNE

Title: Parents' perspectives of their children's transition from a mainstream to a special school

Biographical Information

Name: Anne (pseudonym)

Choice of career: Nurse

Child: Liam   Age: 16 years old

Home Language: English

	Codes	Themes
Claire: Ok, so my first question is, "How do you perceive Special Education"? What does it mean to you? **Anne:** To me it means that… I've always had this thing about main stream education and		
the child with challenges is that the square peg is being forced into a round hole and in Special Ed, each child whether a square peg or a round hole, you will be accommodated and, I think in main stream, my experience has been that a certain learning style is what they're after and there is a certain teaching style. And the child who learns and needs to be treated	*Special education*	*Perspectives on special education*
otherwise are just left out. It's either that or not at all. My experience of Special Ed schools has been that the teachers take the	*Mainstream education*	
time to understand what each child's learning style is – is it one particular style or is	*Special education*	*Perspectives on special education*

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it a combination of three - and then adapt the lesson accordingly. And I've seen that with my eldest son and I've seen it with Liam as well, that they learn so much better because they are being taught in a manner that best suits their style. **Claire:** Where did Liam come from before he started here? **Anne:** Liam started out at Plumstead Preparatory in Grade R and the OT picked up that he was not emotionally ready to go to Grade 1. But, because they could tick all the blocks, he went to Grade 1 and three months into Grade 1, the wheels came off. So he, sort of, had a rocky start at main stream and he ended up not wanting to go to school – in Grade 1! And, what we did in the middle of his Grade 1 year is we took him out and we put him in a remedial school because his brother was at (special school). So, his brother was there as well and I just thought, you know what, you both have ADHD and we've been down this road with the other one; I can't deal with a child who doesn't want to go to school because... it's a challenge! And he wasn't ready for Grade 1 and then what they did was that, for the rest of that year they just let him be and the following year, he started Grade 1. **Claire:** Ok **Anne:** So, he spent a year and a half at a	*Learning difficulties*	*Reasons for moving school*
	Learning difficulty	*Reasons for moving school*

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remedial school. And, unfortunately, they closed their primary school at the end of his Grade 1 year and then we moved him to St Joseph's Marist. But the fact that he'd repeated Grade 1 already stood him in good stead because he was emotionally mature for Grade Two.		
Anne: And that was what she (the OT) was saying. But, once again, in the main stream system, if you can tick all the blocks, the child moves on to the next grade. And what was amazing is we had this panel meeting and I asked the principal have you ever had a parent beg you to keep a child behind? It's usually the other way around. But it didn't happen. So he repeated Grade 1 and then	*Support*	*Support and collaboration Moving schools*
he started at St Joseph's Marist so, from an emotional point of view he was up there with them. And then that's where he stayed and he did very well, up to Grade 7. The first term (March) didn't go too well but I thought Liam takes three months to adapt to a new year, a new teacher, a new routine, but June he failed. And I just thought, this is it, you know what, we are not going to wait to see what happens in the	*Learning difficulty*	*Reasons for moving school*
next three months. He started off between main stream and remedial and ja… so we had him assessed.	*Support*	*Support and collaboration with professionals*
Claire: So, you had the experience of the special needs, which is quite nice		

Anne: Yes, and this time around there was just no question, you know? We know - even though he was in a smaller class at St Joseph's, once again he was a square peg being put into a round hole. I mean, that just didn't work for him. And so we thought, there's no debate, it's the middle of the year, we're not waiting six months.	*Support* *Special education*	*Collaboration and communication* *Perspectives on special education*
Claire: And what did this assessment show?	*Learning difficulties*	*Reasons for moving school*
Anne: It showed that Liam was two to three years behind in Maths and Literacy. And there it was. It was just really catching up with him. And it was quite strange that in a school such as the mainstream school and in a smaller class, that the teachers did not pick it up, you know, because clearly he was lagging behind. And then again, they could tick all the blocks. And, whether he sort of just got through on 40%, it didn't really matter. He got through.	*Support*	*Support and collaboration* *Perspectives on special education*
Claire: So, even in Grade Five and Six he was getting through just on that 40%?	*Expectations*	*Adjustment Communication*
Anne: Ja. And they didn't feel there was a need for extra lessons or anything and you know, as parents, we look to the educator to give us that "Yes, it is needed." or "No, it's not needed." or "Maybe some extra time," or "some extra work to practice on". So we	*Support*	*Communication and collaboration*

asked the questions and they told me, "No". But I think, by their standards, possibly, he was doing okay. **Claire:** And something should have been done – especially if you're asking the question. **Anne:** Ja, and it was small classes. You know, in a big class of 44 kids you kind of expect the child to fall by the wayside. The teacher just doesn't have the time to get to everybody. But in a class of 15 kids, the teacher had the opportunity to get to know the kids and …	*Mainstream education*	*Perspectives on special education*
	Support	*Perceived level of support*
Anne: Ja. And, sort of, at the parent-teacher interview you look at this and say, you know, do we…? For me it was a question of "Is that all he's capable of? Is he capable of more and why are we not, sort of, encouraging and motivating him to? But what I've also learned (and this is from speaking to other parents) is, somewhere along the line this whole "40% to pass" came out and it stuck in the mainstream school kids' heads and that's all they aim for. And now, looking back I think that was it, you know? Somehow they knew they only had to get 40% to pass	*Expectations*	*Adjustment to special school*
which is terrible because, at that age, kids don't think about 10 years, or no, not even 10 years, 5 years down the line (when they will be) in Matric and varsity and all of that.	*Expectations*	*Adjustment to special school*

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Whereas if now they're not motivated to work hard, do they ever become motivated? I don't know how this 40% thing got out to the kids! You know? **Claire:** And how is the Numeracy, the Maths and the Literacy now? **Anne:** Much, much better!		
Claire: Do you think his motivation has improved with him being here? **Anne:** Ja**.** I think, for me, once again it boils down to his learning style. You know, the fact that that is being accommodated.	*Special education* *Support*	*Perspective of special education*
Claire: Ja. So I think it really boils down to understanding how Liam learns and then adapting the lesson to accommodate his learning style; and especially with Maths.	*Support*	*Levels of support*
Claire: How has he coped in school over the past couple of years? **Anne:** From an emotional point of view? It was difficult because there was hardly… I think there was just a holiday which was three weeks for him to get used to the idea and so there wasn't really time to prepare.	*Emotions*	*Adjusting to the new school*
And he felt that there were some kids who were sort of sitting on the same line as he and why were their parents not moving them? Why was I being so hasty in moving him? But, thankfully, we had the assessment and I could say, you know, based on your assessment, these are the findings and hence we would need to move you.	*Support*	*Professional support*

Because he had been at the mainstream school for what, six years; it's a small school, so he developed some very good friendships and it was more about leaving my friends behind…than leaving my school behind. You know, because he knew he was not happy. He was miserable that term. So already that, I just thought that it was just being (normal) teenage moodiness but after he had settled in at Special School I could see that wow, I had my old child back! So, it wasn't really about leaving the school, it was about leaving my friends and coming and having to come and make new friends. And, once he got to Special School, he didn't quite feel that he really needed to be here because he compared himself to the other kids. But some of them have other challenges over and above the numeracy and the literacy. So he just, sort of, classed himself in a class above everybody else and felt that he didn't really need to be here. So, I think, that was difficult. But I've always said, over the years, if Liam ever needed to move schools, he would need therapy. I just knew… What we agreed to was to take him to the mainstream school as often as he wanted to go just to chill with his friends in the afternoon for an hour and he also played soccer at the time and the soccer club is behind the mainstream school. But	*Change* *Emotions*	*Adjusting to a new school*
	Support	*Professional support*
	Emotions *Change*	*Adjusting to a new school*
	Support	*Professional support*
	Change *Emotions*	*Adjusting to a new school*

Liam is the kind of child who would hold on to an emotion for just much longer than your average kid. So he just held on to that bit of anger at us putting him here and him not really belonging here but we're insisting that he stay. Although he had made friends from the very word go. So it wasn't about friends. I think it was just something deep down. And I think, maybe, in a certain sense he saw himself as a failure. He thought he was just not as good as he thought he was. But I've always known Liam as the kind of child who'll hold on to that emotion and I could see he wasn't going to let it go and that it was going to impact on learning.	*Emotions* *Emotions*	*Adjusting to a new school* *Professional support*
An educational psychologist was introduced to us and I thought, wow, she's young and this is just what we need… because we were contemplating therapy. And I think, because other kids were also seeing the psychologist, this was like "normal", so there was no stigma attached. I sat down and I said to him you may tell the educational psychologist anything and everything, even about your mom and your dad and she will not share it with us. Because,	*Support*	*Professional support*
if he was holding some anger against us because of the move then that's your space to tell it all and get it off your chest and I think that was very important. And he terminated his sessions, which I thought, you know, wow!	*Emotions* *Change*	*Adjusting to a new school*

After 5 weeks he felt this is it, I've had enough now. But I could see the change. Each week I could see Liam becoming a little more chilled and a little less angry, which was good. So, for me that was... if we, maybe, you know, in hindsight (hindsight is such a great thing!) we actually should have just, as he came to Special School, started with that as well. **Claire:** And do you think he's made peace with being here now?		
Anne: His has found his place because now he is the senior, you know, and the younger kids look up to him. And I think, last year, he sort of dissed them somewhat because, you know, he was in with the bigger crowd and this year he has more of a heart for them, in terms of explaining and being patient and chatting to them and, ja, and coming to terms with their quirks, you know? **Claire** So you didn't find there was much support at the main stream school?	*Changes*	*Adjusting to a new girl*
Anne: No. Right from the very word go, when we had a professional saying this child Is not emotionally ready. He did have his assessments and we had the whole panel, the school was just adamant that they can tick all the blocks But, unfortunately, you know, the Department of Education has	*Support*	*Professional support*

their criteria and emotional maturity had nothing to do with it. **Anne:** And I have seen that so many times, especially with boys who has this very late birthday. Liam was diagnosed and started on Ritalin at the age of 5½ and I just felt that that had to count for something, because you never really look at this in isolation. I mean, he needed speech therapy because he had a stutter; he needed OT because of his poor muscle tone. So you know, this boy had all the odds stacked against him and all we were asking was allow him one year to mature emotionally. So, I just felt from that point of view there was no support. He just had to do what somebody up there said he needed to do and it was very clear that it wasn't going to happen and then, even though, when the wheels came off in Grade 1, they wanted to put extra support in place for him, I just said, "No, you don't! He is not ready for any of this. No amount of support that we put in place and extra lessons is going to help him. We told you this six months ago and you wouldn't listen". So now what do we do? He was just a square peg in a round hole. And, like I said, at the first special school all the kids here were having challenges and I took him to school that morning and I went to fetch him at 1 to take him out for a milkshake and I looked	*Learning difficulties*	*Reasons for moving school*
	Support	*Communication and collaboration*
	Support	*Communication and collaboration*

and he was "Hi, mom" and he carried on. He just took to that environment immediately and, ja, he just felt that he was understood.. So, just for me, just having the child in the right environment makes all the difference. And, I think, the younger they are when we do that, the better the outcome.	*Support* *Special school*	*Perspectives on special school*
Claire: Do you think that it would've been perhaps better if you had moved him say, in Grade 4 or Grade 5 to somewhere like Special School?		
Anne: I think he shouldn't have moved to the mainstream school, you know. If the first special school had not closed its junior school, I would not have moved him. I would have left him there for his entire primary school time because that certainly would have stood him in good stead and prepared him for high school.. **Claire:** And what made you choose the mainstream school? **Anne:** Small classes.	*Special education*	*Regrets and advice*
Claire: So, you chose it based on support? **Anne:** I knew it wasn't a remedial school but they had small classes and I just thought ok, let's go with it being small classes…	*Support*	*Levels of support*
I think, also from a financial point of view, because I did explore, what was the other school's name?	*Finances*	*Reasons for moving school*

Claire: Pro-Ed? **Anne:** Pro-Ed! And they were just more expensive than the mainstream class **Anne:** Ja. So we thought, maybe the next best thing just having him in a smaller class would work. I suppose, it's not a remedial school so, you know, the teachers have their way of teaching. And he was in a school with small classes so it wasn't as if one could almost say the educators couldn't manage as if it was the size of a class of 44 and still trying to be inclusive. I also thought there was just no excuse for them to not be inclusive.		
	Support	
	Mainstream education	*Perspectives on special education*

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Addendum G

Portion of the transcription from the open-ended questionnaire – coding:
themes and categories

Portion of an Open-Ended Questionnaire - Including Codes and Themes.

ANNE

Title: Parents' perspectives of their children's transition from a mainstream to a special school

Biographical Information

Name: Anne (pseudonym)

Choice of career: Nurse

Child: Liam   Age: 16 years old

Home Language: English

	Codes	Themes
How would describe the experience of moving your child from one school to another? When Liam's report indicated that his academic achievement, or rather lack thereof, for the 2nd term was poorer than at the end of the 1st term we knew that we had to enrol dance at a remedial school immediately. This was a no brainier for us as parents as we had been through a similar experience with Liam's older brother who was also diagnosed with ADHD.	Learning difficulty	*Reasons for moving school*
For Liam the move was traumatic as he had only 3 weeks of school holidays to adapt to the idea that he would not be attending the same schools as his friends any longer	Learning difficulty	
	Changes	*Adjusting to a new school*

Have you received any support from the two schools during the process? A tremendous amount of support was received from the staff at the special school. This helped Liam's transition and his peers immediately included him in their activities. By the end of his 2nd week at the special school he was invited to movies as well as birthday party.	*Support*	*Communication and collaboration*
No support was received from the previous school; as a matter of fact we were seen as being very hasty with our decision to move Liam in such short notice.	*Support*	
How has your child experienced settling in at their new school? Liam said it was both easy and difficult. The difficult part was not being with his friends of 5-6 years and only seeing them for a short time when going to soccer practice.	*Changes*	*Adjusting to a new school*
The other kids and the teachers made it easy for him to settles I as they were very friendly and made him feel welcome	*Changes*	
Is this a change you would recommend to other parent in the same situation? Absolutely		

Addendum H

An example of a Life-line activity

EXAMPLE OF A LIFE-LINE ACTIVITY

1998   Born November 15

2003   Begins gr R

         Diagnosed with AD/HD and put on Ritalin

2004   Begins gr 1 in mainstream school

        Against the advice of the Occupation therapists and request
        from the parents to repeat him

        6 months into the year – school refusal, school asks for
        additional support

        Moves to Special School in July of that year

2005   Repeat gr 1 in the Special School

2006   Special School closes down

        Parents decide on small mainstream government school

2008
            Received speech therapy for a stutter and
            physiotherapy for low muscle tone

            Passing through the grades, no problems
            reported by the school

            Made good friends and played sports

2010   Continued to take Ritalin

2011   Begins gr 7

        Struggles to cope in mainstream

        Has educational assessment done

        Moves to Special School in July of that year

2013   Completes gr 9 at Special School