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University of the Witwatersrand

Faculty of Humanities

School of Education

An Investigation into the Pedagogy of Bridging Class Teachers within a Mainstream School

by

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A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Education University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTERS OF EDUCATION.

Author Declaration:

I declare that this Research is my own, unaided work and that it is submitted in part fulfilment for the Master of Education Degree. What is contained herein has been done entirely by myself, with no outside help, except where interviews have been used to support the findings within the Report.

Ruth Clare Isaacson

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Abstract

This qualitative research aims to explore the constructs of Bridging Classes within a mainstream environment. The investigation focuses primarily on how the teacher works with what Bernstein (1973) considers key aspects to education relay, namely *curriculum, pedagogy* and *assessment.* Bridging Classes are provided for learners with moderate learning disabilities that may be caused by an attention deficit disorder or emotional upheaval due to chaotic home circumstances. The deconstruction process is conducted through the lens of Productive Pedagogy which Lingard, Hayes & Mills (2003) developed with four key components, namely, Intellectual Quality, Supportive Classroom Environment, Engagement with Difference, and Connectedness to the World. Productive Pedagogies support sociologists, Bernstein's (2004) and Bourdieu's (1999) belief that a universal pedagogy could ensure that learners from *all* backgrounds can access knowledge. The pedagogy applied in Bridging Class supports this notion by using a high quality curriculum but working at a slower pace, providing opportunities to consolidate concepts and integrating learners back into the mainstream when they are ready.

Three teachers from Grade 1, 2, and 3 respectively were asked to participate in this research. The investigation comprised of interviews and observations of Maths and English lessons. The teachers were asked, during interviews, to reflect on their perceptions, experiences and pedagogy as Bridging Class teachers. The research applied a thematic analysis to identify patterns within the data set

After coding, themes which emerged were the Cognitive and Academic Challenges Bridging Class learners experience. There are also suggested Strategies for Support to create a learning environment to enhance the academic and social outcomes for Bridging Class learners in a mainstream school.

Key Words: Bridging Class, Mainstream, Productive Pedagogy, learning disabilities, perceptions, experience, support, strategies, learning environment.

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1 CHAPTER 1 – CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This study explores the pedagogical role of the teacher in providing an environment which meets the social, emotional and intellectual needs of the challenged learner within a mainstream school. In the South African context, this is of particular importance as teachers are expected to teach learners with diverse and extensive needs. This demands a focus on Inclusion and Differentiation. Engelbrecht, Oswald & Forlin (2006:122) put it this way, “The focus in transforming South African schools into inclusive school communities should, therefore, be on the development of individual schools as a whole, encouraging all role players to share and build on their existing knowledge in order to increase learning and participation in all aspects of their school (Dyson & Forlin,1999), as well as a commitment to change by the persons who will serve as the change agents.”

Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie, (2003:3) claim that, “evidence would suggest that the most significant educational factor in the achievement of student learning is teacher practices, rather than principal leadership. “This study aims to explore the idea that if we invest in professional development for teachers and respect the work they do, they, in turn, may be empowered to assume leadership, and implement pedagogic practices that enable *all* learners to access knowledge. This chapter will outline the background to the study, introduce the problem and purpose statement and the research questions posed.

1.2 Background

Many pupils may not thrive in a mainstream class due to barriers to learning they may experience, and there are typically only two options available to these children. The first is, failing in a mainstream class, or the second is, attending remedial school.

The Gauteng Department of Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001:5) on inclusive education acknowledges that, “most learners with disability have either fallen outside of the system or been mainstreamed by default. “It is stated in the Executive Summary (2001:5) 4.4 in the above mentioned document that the, “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."

The guiding principles and values in the Report of National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and National Committee on Education Support, Department of Education, (1997) accept that it is the constitutional right of all learners to have access to the curriculum. The report suggested that key strategies to achieve their vision included, "developing a flexible curriculum to ensure access to all learners."(DoE, 2001:6)

Christie (2008) cites the well- known reproduction theorist Bourdieu, who claimed that people succeed, or fail to succeed because of what he termed their "cultural capital". Middle class children come to school with the advantage of values, attitudes and facilities that support education. Christie (2008:173) claims that, "Students are able to turn their social advantage into educational advantage." When working class pupils don't succeed, it is often interpreted that they lack the ability, rather than the privileges of the middle class.

Bourdieu believes that schools can help to make up the shortfall if they are prepared to make the effort (Christie 2008:174). Bourdieu's advice was to create a, "really universal pedagogy," which took nothing for granted and was structured in a way that gave *all* pupils access to what only some pupils had. (Christie 2008:180). Christie (2008:174) says we should be alert to Bourdieu's point that, "inequalities are most easily perpetuated when they are not recognized to exist."

To meet the needs of a pupil with any form of learning disadvantage, it is necessary to explore the culture of inclusion and integration. Corbett (1999) quotes the model in the Warnock Report (1978) which divided the integration of pupils with special needs into 3 categories; locational (sharing a base); social (mixing for recreation) and functional (full curricula inclusion). Corbett (1999) acknowledges that the issues of inclusion are disputatious and contested. It seems that society needs to rethink and review former attitudes towards inclusive education. It is not about the challenged pupil, "fitting into the status quo" or dominant culture (Corbett 1999:128). It is about us, says Corbett (1999) creating a school that welcomes, celebrates and supports difference.

Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2003) conducted research on pedagogical practices that could improve student performance and social development. They developed a model of Productive Pedagogies/Productive Assessment which supports and values the work of teachers but recognizes that the quality of the pedagogy is also an important equity issue for all pupils.

Lingard, et al. (2003) drew their data from a large research study titled the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) in 2001. One of the ideas which contributed to the concept of Productive Pedagogy/Assessment was the need to align curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. This concept was derived from Bernstein (1973) who claimed that formal education is realized through the three message systems: *curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation*. Bernstein in Lingard et al. (2003:4) stated that, "curriculum defines what counts as a valid transmission of knowledge, and assessment defines what counts as a valid realization of this knowledge on the part of the taught." Lingard, et al., (2003:4) suggests Productive Pedagogies/Productive Assessment seek to provide a means of reconceptualising teaching practices to increase the academic and social outcomes for *all* students.

Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie (2003) do not want to overstate what Productive Pedagogy/Productive Assessment can achieve against the disadvantages of poverty and inequality. Their claim is that it is *teachers and their practices* within the school context that can have the most impact on student learning.

1.3 Problem statement

Bridging Classes at Foundation Phase level run parallel to mainstream classes to provide support for pupils who may not thrive as well in a mainstream class, but may not necessarily need to attend a remedial school. As the pupil enters Grade One, information from a psychological/educational assessment as well as reports and interviews with teachers from pre-school, are used to differentiate between the pupil who needs remedial school and a pupil who needs educational support. The barriers to learning may compromise of moderate learning difficulties, emotional or cognitive immaturity or lack of focus due to personal or home circumstances. Many schools offer support in the form of individual sessions to remediate the knowledge gaps, but very few schools offer Bridging Classes within a mainstream school. There is a great

deal of literature which recommends *inclusion* and *differentiation* as a socially just form of education for children who find a mainstream class challenging.

Cowley in Westwood (2001:6) writes that successful programmes for pupils who are challenged need teachers to, “select and adapt curricula and instructional methods according to the needs of individual students and classroom environment, and have the confidence and motivation to do so.” Westwood adds that what Cowley does not say is that making these adaptations is easy if you get well away from the realities of a full-size class. This is where a Bridging Class can potentially play a role.

A Bridging Class offers the support of inclusion practices in a community of pupils who experience similar learning challenges. Teachers use the mainstream curriculum but adapt it to suit the needs of the class to enable every pupil to access knowledge. The teacher aims to integrate pupils into a mainstream class as soon as and when they are ready. In most middle class school contexts there are usually only two options; mainstream with possibly some remedial and/ or inclusion support or remedial school.

The Bridging Class provides a third option as a compromise between the two. It also provides a supportive and caring environment for pupils who have attended remedial school and need to integrate back into a mainstream school. The problem is that there is little understanding of pedagogical and assessment strategies that are best suited to provide a supportive environment.

1.4 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research project is to explore the practices, reflections and experiences of Foundation Phase Bridging Class teachers. Productive Pedagogies will provide a framework to make explicit the constructs and characteristics of a Bridging Class.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of participant Bridging Class teachers regarding the nature of the Bridging Class?
2. What are the perceptions and experiences of participant Bridging Class teachers regarding their role as Bridging Class teachers?

3. What pedagogical and assessment strategies are observed in the Bridging Class that support the intellectual and social outcomes of learners?

1.6 Rationale

My interest in exploring the structure of the Bridging Class emanates from my own experience as a teacher of these classes for 5 years. I was always delighted when a pupil who had started out underperforming was ready to integrate into a mainstream class. I felt sure as the teacher, that what I had done had impacted this progress but I lacked a conceptual or academic framework to understand the process of supporting an under-performing pupil or what constructs had helped to close the knowledge gaps.

Whilst engaging with the M.Ed. course and reading the work of educational theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Bourdieu and Bernstein, pedagogic practices in the Bridging Class started to link to a more conceptual understanding. The work of Hayes, Mills, Christie and Lingard (2006:17) provide the key question which underpins this research, "Which pedagogies will contribute to the enhancement of the academic and social performance of *all* students?" The framework of Productive Pedagogy also provides a metalanguage to critically reflect and comment on pedagogic practice.

Thomson in Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie (2003:12) points out that professional literature and systematic policies place the role of a principal as a manager rather than an educator, which neglects considerations of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment as central to their work.

In the Bridging Classes, there are elements of inclusion and effective teaching practices that have developed incidentally rather than through targeted professional development. As a member of the management team embarking on this research project, I am interested in supporting professional development and a starting point is gaining insights into their perceptions of their roles as well as strategies applied to pupils who experience barriers to learning.

1.7 Conclusion

Inclusion and differentiation continue to be debated and contested. On the one hand, providing these strategies as a means of support does seem to address issues

of social justice. On the other hand, we need teachers to be explore the options of inclusion and differentiation, and feel sufficiently skilled to be able to apply these strategies *if* and *when* appropriate. In order to explore pedagogical practice, it could be argued that we need authentic conversations to give teachers a voice to express how they feel about the work they do and the challenges they face, when working with children who are at-risk learners. It could be argued that the teachers are best positioned to tell us what kind of teaching practices are effective for children at risk.

It is hoped that by observing pedagogical practices through a Productive Pedagogy lens, I will be able to evaluate to what extent the pedagogical practices meet the requirements of Productive Pedagogy.

Chapter Two will present the literature review related to this study.

2 CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The discussion in the Literature Review primarily focuses on Productive Pedagogy as a means of supporting the intellectual, social and emotional outcomes for learners in the Bridging Class. If we are to use this lens as a means of ensuring *all* pupils can access the curriculum, we need to deeply understand what the constructs of a curriculum of *high intellectual quality* comprise of; one which pupils develop what the Queensland Department of Education Policy describes as tools for "critically examining texts, ideas and knowledge" (DoE, 2002:6).

The Literature Review is organised to discuss ideas related to the four dimensions of Productive Pedagogy and the theoretical foundations of these dimensions.

2.2 Social Justice and Inclusion

Bourdieu, reproduction and structuralist theorist, in Lingard & Mills (2007:234) observed, "If *all* pupils were given the technology of intellectual enquiry, and if in general they are given rational ways of working (such as the art of choosing between compulsory tasks and spreading them over time), then an important way of reducing inequalities based on culture, and inheritance would have been achieved."

Lingard & Mills (2007:234) cite Bernstein's (2004) concept of 'cultural relays' which are a central issue and concerned with social justice and inclusion in schooling. Cultural relays is the term used to capture the notion that social inequalities are reproduced and seen to be legitimate through the practices of schools and pedagogies. It seems that the way a curriculum is structured with particular reference to Bernstein's concepts of *horizontal* and *vertical discourse* has an impact on pedagogies. Bernstein (2000:157) describes *horizontal discourse* as 'everyday' or common sense knowledge. It is likely to be, "oral, context dependent and specific, tacit, multi-layered and contradictory across but not within texts." *Vertical discourse,* on the other hand, takes the form of, "coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure, hierarchically organized as in the sciences or it takes the form of a series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and specialised criteria for the production and circulation of texts as in the social sciences and humanities." Tension emanates from attempts to recontextualize segments of knowledge from vertical discourse to horizontal discourse to make the knowledge

more accessible to pupils who are usually the 'less able' (Bernstein, 1999). We are told that, "pedagogy and assessment account for more of the variance in student performance than any other in-school factor" (Lingard & Mills, 2007:234).

Assessment, one of the components of Bernstein's message systems is of concern to Delpit in Lingard & Mills (2007:237) because it can drive practice. Delpit believes assessment has been, "caught in the vice" of a text book-driven curricula that is, "teacher-proof". Schools in the USA are experiencing more standardized testing than the country has ever seen. The strict timetables ignore what Delpit refers to as the natural cycles of pedagogy and learning.

Lingard & Mills (2007:237) make the point that if teachers are well educated, they won't need a 'teacher-proof' curriculum. They will know the research literature and interpret and adapt it to the, "demands and specifications of their students, classes, locale, and place and space of nation and globe." What is required is a trust of the professionalism of the teachers. However, that trust can only exist if teachers are perceived to be experts in their field, and this implies continuous professional development.

There is also a need, stresses Lingard & Mill (2007:236) to ensure that schools offer high quality pedagogies as this will, "ensure a more equal access to and distribution of intellectual capital and related dispositional capacities."

Oswald & Forlin (2006) draw our attention to the situation in South Africa where we are still trying to correct the inequalities of the past which result in barriers to learning. A number of factors prevent our pupils from full participation. They include negative attitudes; stereotyping of difference; an inflexible curriculum; and inappropriately trained leaders in education (DoE, 2001).

2.3 Productive Pedagogies/ Assessment

The concept of Productive Pedagogies/ Assessment was developed by Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2003:403) after considering a, "broad range of relevant and cognate literatures, including sociology of education, sociolinguistic ethnographies of classrooms, school effectiveness, school improvement literatures, socio-cultural and constructivist research on pedagogies, as well as work on direct instruction, critical literacy and the whole panoply of critical pedagogies (feminist, Indigenous, etc.)."

Productive Pedagogies seeks to provide a means of reconceptualising teaching practices to increase the academic and social outcomes for *all* students. Christie (2008:196) describes the 4 dimensions:

1. *Intellectual Quality.* Lessons engage pupils, "activity and critically with knowledge." Pupils are provided with opportunities to learn about concepts and processes in depth rather than superficially i.e. by rote or recitation.
2. *Engagement with Difference.* Pedagogy that acknowledges and respects cultural and ability differences and attempts to build an inclusive environment.
3. *Connectedness to the World Beyond the Classroom.* Pedagogies link to students' background knowledge to the world beyond the classroom. Knowledge learnt is required to connect to real-life contexts but moves beyond the "level of the everyday."
4. *Supportive Classroom Environment.* The ethos of the classroom environment is respectful and pupils feel safe to take "intellectual risks." Pupils learn to self-regulate their behaviour and stay on task.

There are 20 items contained in the 4 components of Productive Pedagogies which can be potentially observable within any classroom irrespective of subject area or age level. These consist of *higher order thinking; deep knowledge; deep understanding; substantive conversation; knowledge problematic; meta-language; knowledge integration; background knowledge; connectedness to the world; problem based curriculum; student control; engagement; explicit criteria; self-regulation; narrative; group identity; and citizenship.*

The above are quintessential characteristics which can be applied in an integrated and holistic way to all 4 dimensions of Productive Pedagogy. For example, in a classroom, unless there is *student control,* i.e. learners are required to stay on-task, they are unlikely to benefit from a curriculum of high Intellectual Quality, Engage with Difference, make connections to the world beyond the classroom or feel supported in the classroom environment. Similarly, with reference to *explicit criteria;* for each of the Productive Pedagogy components to be effective, learners need explicit criteria to meet the requirements of a curriculum of Intellectual Quality.

Unpacking specific requirements as in the above list creates a language for talking about the 'technologies' which may help to construct and/or review curricula to meet the learning needs of *all* pupils.

Lingard, Hayes & Mills (2003:415) explain that whilst, "all four productive pedagogies may be necessary for some pupils, only one, two or three would be necessary for other pupils." The example they provide is the high achieving student may not need the component of *valuing differences,* for improving performance, but they argue that knowledge of this component may improve this pupil's *social outcomes.*

This research project aims to explore the pedagogical practice of Bridging Class teachers to improve the social, emotional and intellectual outcomes for learners in the Bridging Class and explores the four dimensions of Productive Pedagogy/ Assessment. Lingard, Hayes & Mills (2003:409) puts it this way, "the cognitive work of learning involves disciplined inquiry which entails building on prior knowledge, striving for in-depth understanding, and expressing ideas through elaborated communication."

It could be said that the cognitive work as defined by Lingard et al., (2003) can be applied to all 4 dimensions of Productive Pedagogy. The characteristics of learning described above, suggest an integrated, systematic and holistic approach to learning.

2.4 Intellectual Quality

According to Rist (1970) quoted in the QSRLS Supplementary Material, early self-fulfilling prophesy studies show that if pupils are not expected to produce high quality work, they will perform accordingly. Research conducted by Newmann & Associates (1996) cited in (DoE, 2002:3) shows the converse that, "when students from *all* backgrounds are expected to perform work of high intellectual quality, overall student academic performance increases and equity gaps decrease." The school in which the research was conducted did appear to apply this principle. Learners, regardless of the reasons why they were in the Bridging Class were expected to engage with a high quality curriculum. The accommodations which supported their success are discussed further in this report.

Intellectual Quality with its focus on higher order thinking results in deep understanding and deep knowledge. Pedagogic strategies that support this kind of learning involve social interaction which is described in the Queensland Education Policy (DoE, 2003:4) as *substantive conversation*, comprising of four elements; i) *intellectual substance*; which is talk about the subject matter using appropriate language to encourage critical reasoning; ii) *dialogue*; pupils share ideas with one another. Group work would facilitate this process well; iii*) logical extension and synthesis*; pupils and teachers may make explicit references to previous comments; iv) *a sustained exchange;* exchanges extend beyond routine IRE (initiate/respond/evaluate).

'*Knowledge as Problematic'* asks the question, "Are the students critically examining texts, ideas and knowledge?" (DoE, 2002:6). The two elements of this component of developing deep understanding are; i)*knowledge as problematic* which is knowledge that is constructed and could potentially be challenged; ii) *knowledge as given* represents subject matter as facts such as tables, charts, texts and comprehension activities.

Knowledge as Problematic gives recognition to the need for both components. *Knowledge as problematic* involves the building skills of analysis, synthesis, and critical thinking. *Knowledge as given* provides the tools to support higher-order thinking. For example, a Foundation Phase learner who is learning comprehension skills would need to work at a basic question/answer level, before being able to critically examine an idea. Productive Pedagogy requires learners to move towards *knowledge problematic* which engages with higher-order thinking.

Another aspect to 'Intellectual Quality' involves *metalanguage* which requires grammar and technical vocabulary being given prominence (DoE, 2002:7). *High-metalanguage* analyses speech and writing (syntax/grammar/text structures). *Low-metalanguage* does not involve discussions about speech and writing, but rather puts an emphasis on text-based activities. The term *metalanguage* could be defined as language used to discuss and develop an understanding of language usage. A teacher who is aware of the role language plays in the construction of knowledge will foreground language rules as part of a lesson.

A *deep understanding* and *deep knowledge* as described in Productive Pedagogies develops from the challenge of solving a problem by forming relationships between concepts. Pupils need to make those links in a, "systematic, integrated or holistic way" (DoE, 2002:3).

2.4 Intellectual Quality: Implications for Teaching and Learning

For a high quality curriculum to be developed, and one which is rigorous and robust enough to adapt to the needs of the pupils, we need to explore the relationship between teaching and learning appropriate to the pupil's age and stage of development, social interaction, and how language development plays a key role in the construction of knowledge.

Vygotsky (1978:84) informs us that pupils start the learning process in their pre-school years. The example, with regard to learning arithmetic – pupils deal with the operations of division, addition, subtraction, multiplication and determination of size long before they enter formal schooling. Naming objects is learning. Imitating adults is learning. Asking questions and receiving answers is the process of teaching and learning.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 1.6, I am interested in supporting professional development and the principles of Productive Pedagogy appear to support developmental theorists such as Vygotsky and Koffka. In Vygotsky (1978:83) it is asserted that, "learning can never be reduced to the formation of skills, but embodies an intellectual order that makes it possible to transfer general principles discovered in solving one task to a variety of other tasks."

Brown, Metz & Campione (1996:147) says we have turned to Vygotsky to, "to inform our design of socially supportive climates for learning." The interaction with an adult or more capable peer who asks leading questions which encourages the child to substantiate, or defend a claim develops a more mature solution and a deeper knowledge construct than the child could achieve on her own. This dynamic between teacher and learner is known as the *zone of proximal development*. Brown, Metz & Campione (1996:46) inform us of different kinds of development, "actual development level as determined by independent problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers

The work of Piaget is particularly significant in developing a curriculum which supports the notion that *all* learners should be able to access knowledge. Pupils in Foundation Phase are working with what Piaget called 'concrete operational thought' which can be, "either physically present or mentally represented" (Brown, et al., 1996:148). It can be argued that 'concrete' does not need to be restricted to the literal, but what can be touched and manipulated does have learning advantages for children and adults. *Observation, measuring, ordering and categorizing* are regarded by Piaget as core intellectual strengths of the 'concrete operational child'.

Hugo (2013:4) describes education as a, "space between the everyday and the specialised." The learning process works with what happens, "inside a specialisation which is the process of moving from 'everyday knowledge' to possible formalisations or where, "a principle is abstracted from everyday experiences." Hugo (2013) uses a ladder as a metaphor to describe the climb away from the everyday to specialised knowledge. Each step is clear, graded, solid, higher up (more abstract) and dependent on the one below.

2.5 Intellectual Quality: Implications for Assessment

Vygotsky provided the key elements to what it means to facilitate learning to meet the individual needs of the child, and in particular, the pupil at risk. Brown et al. (1996) points out that in traditional assessment practice, the pupil passes or fails. If the paradigm could change and instead of the teacher merely assuming the role of assessor, she demonstrates how a problem is solved or she initiates the solution of the problem and helps the pupil progress towards this higher level, then assessment could form part of the learning process. Brown, et al., (1996:147) informs us that Vygotsky believed that learning can best take place in a socially supportive environment which eliminates the element of judgement and puts the focus on the child's independent developmental achievement.

Vygotsky and Piaget introduced interviewing techniques as a developmental tool in what they termed 'dynamic assessment'. It is the interaction between teacher and pupil to establish the level of learning. Pupils are presented with a problem one step up from their current level of competence and then provided with the help they need to master the concept. Brown, et al., (1996:162) suggests, "Competence is fostered in *social interaction* before individual mastery is expected." If and when the child is

able to apply principles they have learnt, this transfer will indicate an authentic construct of knowledge and the learning can proceed.

Vygotsky (1978) cautioned us against the incorrect conclusions drawn from diagnostic tests. Test results can cap the potential learning ability of 'retarded' pupils. Although the term 'retarded' is not used today, it was used at the time of Vygotsky's work which revolutionized the thinking about pupils who experienced barriers to learning. I am using the extreme example of a learning disability to illustrate the importance of not making assumptions or placing limits on the capabilities of children with barriers to learning.

Brown, et al., (1996:163) opine that the, "degree of aid needed, both to learn new principles and to apply them, is carefully calibrated and measured." They believe the level of support required by the pupil will probably not be found in static tests. It could be argued that the litmus test of real learning is how well pupils are able to apply the principles to other learning situations.

Assessment is a critical issue and impacts on all the components of Productive Pedagogy. The issues are discussed in more detail further on in this Chapter.

2.6 Engagement with Difference

'Recognition of difference' is perhaps the most theoretically and practically significant dimension for explaining how to systematically improve the achievement of students from scholastically disadvantaged backgrounds (DoE, 2002:22).

'Recognition of difference' also involves ensuring that non-dominant cultures are valued. This means that the characteristics of these cultures such as gender, ethnicity, race and religious practices are included and given recognition in the curriculum.

An *Engagement with Difference* has implications of inclusion which take into account the individual, his/her, "background, experience and abilities" (DoE, 2002:16). Mills Goos, Keddie, Honan, Pendergast, Gilbert, Nichols, Renshaw & Wright (2009) believe there is a need for explicit criteria and that pupils who are familiar with the mores and nuances of what defines the "good student" are at an advantage over those with less privileged backgrounds. Teachers have a responsibility to ensure *all* pupils understand the requirements of the "good student". The "good student", say

Mills, et al., (2009) is one who is not just concerned about academic requirements but is also working towards becoming a member of a democratic community.

'Engagement with Difference' questions whether the style of teaching is principally *narrative* or *expository.* Applying *narrative* as part of the teaching and learning process can be an effective way of giving recognition to non-dominant cultures. Productive Pedagogies recommend that personal stories, biographies, historical accounts and texts that engage with different cultures be included in the curriculum.

An *expository* style of teaching is required, but the focus is academic or scientific and involves explanations, descriptions, reports and documentaries (DoE, 2002:17). This form of teaching is justified by Productive Pedagogy as a form of aid to the construction of knowledge.

Another element of 'Engagement with Difference' is building a strong sense of community which can be achieved if difference is celebrated and group identities are respected and valued. This is particularly important in a classroom situation where there is a dominant group who are not willing to listen to alternative points of view. If this group is allowed too much control, the non-dominant groups are at risk of being subjected to isolation and bullying (DoE, 2000:18).

It could be argued that these situations are less likely to occur if a culture of *active citizenship,* another element of Engagement with Difference, is applied. 'Active Citizenship' teaches that all individual and groups have rights and responsibilities.

What will make the difference to the pupil with barriers to learning is, well educated teachers who have a competent knowledge of the requirements of the curriculum as well as knowledge of inclusion practices. These teachers are committed to ensuring *all* their pupils learn skills and knowledge. They are willing to make the necessary adaptations to accommodate the differences in learning abilities that exist within the classroom.

The Classroom Reflection Manual (DoE, 2002) states that a great deal of work has been invested in trying to understand why pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do not do as well as the more advantaged pupils, given the same opportunity. A study known as (QSRLS) was commissioned and funded by the Queensland Educations Department from 1998 – 2000.

The study was conducted by Newmann and colleagues and it identified 20 classroom practices which according to Lingard et al., (2003:400) enhance both academic and social outcomes for all learners. QSRLS infers that lack of achievement may be linked to the issue of whether non-dominant cultures are valued and this may have implications for self-esteem and self-worth. Cultures of learners in a classroom environment are valued when beliefs, customs, traditions and language are represented. It could be argued that in South Africa, although we have made progress in our young democracy, our curriculum needs to continue teaching respect for other cultures and their value in society.

There are different ways learners can be excluded. One of the ways is by lack of representation of cultural practices, another is, when learners are not provided with adequate or appropriate support to keep up or engage with curriculum requirements.

Whilst most of the pupils in the Bridging Classes are not disadvantaged in a socio-cultural context, as pupils from the working class may be, many of the pupils experience moderate learning difficulties for a variety of reasons and require a supportive environment.

2.8 Recognition of Difference: Inclusion

Productive Pedagogies include *cognition of difference* which implies a culture of inclusion. Inclusive classroom practice acknowledges and supports the, "diversity of students' diverse backgrounds, experiences and abilities" (DoE, 2002:16). Lack of inclusivity is evident when all students are treated as one homogeneous group.

Lingard & Mills (2007:235) believe that, "issues of pedagogies, social justice and inclusion cannot be considered in isolation from those of curricula and assessment." Assessment practices impact on teaching and learning and even though school systems are trying to tighten the 'pedagogical and assessment nooses around teacher professional practice'. Lingard, et al., (2007:237) are of the opinion this will not result in socially just outcomes or practices. There is a belief that pedagogies make a difference but need to be, "intellectually demanding, connected to place, real and virtual, supportive yet demanding, and working with and valuing difference" (Lingard et al., 2003; Hayes et al., 2006; Rose, 1995; Alexander, 2000).

In the context of a Bridging Class, learners could benefit from assessment practices that take into account their learning disabilities, even though they are required to engage with the same curriculum as learners in the main stream.

Smith in Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013:248) suggests Giangreco's definition of inclusion is a powerful one, "because it speaks about *all* students, not just those with disabilities; it describes special education as a process, not as a place; it speaks of the rights of students; it describes students, both with and without disability, as being a shared responsibility for all schools and educators; and finally, it describes school as a place of community; and a place from which community can be created."

In this research, one of the objectives is to explore the pedagogic practices of the Bridging Class teachers to record to what extent the school meets the above standards. In areas where we lack, the aim is to support professional development.

It could be argued that Giangreco's articulate definition provided by Smith in Van de Putte & De Schuwer (2013:248) is the essence of *active citizenship* which supports the concept Recognition of Difference, one of the Productive Pedagogies dimensions. In a democratic society, it could be claimed that all individuals have the right to full participation without any form of discrimination. Regardless of the grades pupils obtain, so highly valued by our society, if pupils are not exposed to values of caring, and required to demonstrate *active citizenship,* their education could be flawed; and society could be impoverished by the lack of social conscious.

Empirical work of Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013) records some of the experiences of teachers who have been involved in inclusive education. Teachers said that it was important to create moments of communication (reflection-in dialogue) around the pupil's individual curriculum. The information created a different paradigm. Instead of the focus being to address deficits, the question is rather*, "what is necessary to allow the pupil to participate in the learning?"* This approach is supported by Vygotsky, quoted by Rodina (2006:18) who believed that when dealing with children with barriers to learning, the focus should not be on the weakness and disorders, "but on the strengthening and empowerment of individual skills." Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013:245) note that, "This shift in understanding opens up new insights and new ways of teaching resulting in teachers becoming different teachers than before."

Van de Putte & Schauwer (2013:249) point out that the, “practice of *exclusion* to a more specialized context is embedded in the educational system and represents a common way of thinking.” The disabled pupil is seen as different to the ‘average’ pupil. Teachers, when asked to teach a disabled pupil, often ask how the deficits present, to establish how wide the gap will be between this child and the group. Davies in Van de Putte & Schauwer (2013:249) ascribe this response to the, “way our society thinks and acts with a focus on achievement and (prescribed) outcome.”

Corbett (1999:129) claims that real change will only be achieved when we address, “the hidden curriculum of fundamental value systems, rituals, and routines, initiations, and acceptance which form the fabric of daily life.” As educators, we have a responsibility to change this mind-set of achievement being measured by grades. Education should be used as a tool to develop the potential of each pupil.

It seems that there is still a great deal of work to be done for teachers to feel positive, competent and confident about the responsibilities related to inclusion practices.

2.9 Recognition of Difference: Differentiation

Westwood (2001:6) notes that as far back as 1985, the Department of Education and Science in Britain called for a, “broad, balanced *differentiated* and relevant school curriculum” (DES, 1985, p.88). The DES said, “What is taught and how it is taught needs to be matched with pupil’s abilities and aptitudes” (p.15).

Westwood (2001) discusses the three components of differentiation as *content, processes and products,* and the challenges of applying these strategies.

Adapting the content usually means that pupils with learning difficulties are required to cover less material whilst more able pupils would do more and in greater depth and work independently. The resource materials for pupils with barriers to learning may be made simpler using simpler vocabulary, shorter sentences, requiring less writing and more illustrations.

Westwood (2001:6) comments that reducing or watering down the curriculum sounds correct in theory, but the reality is that this kind of adaptation, “has the long term effect of increasing the learning gap between the students with learning difficulties and other students.”

Much of the teaching and learning *processes* involve the social interaction between teacher and pupils. The teacher is required to give more or less assistance according to pupil's individual needs. Extra time for practice and completion of tasks would be allowed. Co-operative learning and peer assistance are part of the learning process in an inclusive classroom. Inclusion employs a more student-centred and activity based approach to teaching and learning.

Westwood (2001) states that these modifications around social interactions are easier to make than changes to the curriculum. Westwood (2001:7) observed that, "skilled teachers will naturally provide additional help to students when necessary, use differentiated questioning, and make greater use of praise, encouragement and rewards during lessons." Westwood (2001:7) says these strategies can be applied relatively easily and provide an easy starting point for a teacher who wants to move from a, "whole-class method of instruction to a more personalized approach." He does, however, warn us to be careful that a student-centred approach may result in the difficulties pupils experience not being addressed directly.

Westwood (2001:8) claims that a substantial amount of research supports the view that pupils with academic difficulties, "produce the best achievement when exposed to direct teaching, a carefully sequenced curriculum, high levels of successful responding, frequent feedback from the teacher, abundant practice in application of new skills and knowledge, explicit teaching of strategies for learning, and curriculum-based assessment."

Westwood (2001:9) suggests the *product* or assessment component of inclusion requires a flexible approach towards simplifying the task; shortening the task; allowing longer time; dictating to a scribe; allowing a different format (i.e. illustrations/scrapbook rather than an essay; enlarging the print; using more variety in question types; providing prompts; oral questioning; no penalty for poor spelling or writing; allowing a laptop; ensuring all students understand the requirements before the test begins; allowing an anxious pupil to write in another environment (e.g. social worker's office).

Westwood (2001:10) raises the difficult issue of how to grade students with learning disabilities in a mainstream class. Questions are posed around the fairness of grading. For example, should the same 'norm' be applied to the child who is hearing

impaired as against her peers who are not hearing impaired. Is the teacher expected to award marks for 'trying hard'? Is that fair to the rest of the class? If the assessment standards are not modified, will a report card reflecting 'D's" and 'Fails' demotivate pupils who are disadvantaged?

Westwood (2001) quotes Wood (1998) who suggests a descriptive report indicating areas of strength and weakness might be more useful than a grading system, or a rubric which assigns a portion of the total mark for effort, for assignments completed; for neatness and presentation; for participation and for homework.

What is significant about the issues raised by Westwood (2001:10) is that whilst the principles of inclusion are socially just, we need to be aware of the challenges differentiation presents to a teacher who is trying to meet the needs of individual learners in a *large class environment.* He suggests that instead of trying to give different work to different students, which runs the risk of, "perpetuating inequalities and fragments the curriculum," we should rather develop skills to teach, "the same material effectively to *all* students," but with differentiated amounts of assistance.

A Bridging Class addresses the large class issue by limiting the number of pupils to 15. They teach the same curriculum as mainstream classes, except, with fewer pupils, with the result that the teacher has more time to assist individual pupils. This means knowledge gaps could start closing in a shorter period of time and the pupil can join a mainstream class when he/she is ready.

2.10 Connectedness to World Beyond

One of the concerns expressed by the Australian schools is how relevant or connected the curriculum is with the 'real world'. Lessons with '*low connectedness'* tend to be abstract or hypothetical. This may be context specific and serve only as a proof of compliance with the routines of formal schooling (DoE, 2002). Christie (2008) posits that learners need to be able to bring their background knowledge, language and daily life experiences into the classroom. If this is their reality, learners are more likely to be able to integrate and connect different knowledge areas.

The dimension of 'Connectedness' in Productive Pedagogy addresses the issue of whether subject areas are integrated across lessons. 'Integrated *school knowledge'* can be seen when there is a connection between two or more sets of subject area

knowledge. When bodies of knowledge are segregated, there are strong boundaries between subjects.

'Connectedness' also takes into account knowledge of the pupils' backgrounds and their world views. This knowledge may be derived from personal experiences within their communities as well as their linguistic and cultural heritage (DoE, 2000:22).

A *problem-based curriculum* is another component of 'Connectedness'. Pupils are presented with practical, real or hypothetical problems. There are no absolute or set 'correct' solutions and pupils are required to construct their own knowledge by applying problem-solving strategies (DoE, 2000:24). This process involves recognizing the connections between classroom knowledge and situations outside the classroom, "in ways that create personal meaning and significance for knowledge." If the knowledge becomes integrated and functional, the pupils may make the effort to affect or influence a wider audience beyond the classroom (DoE, 2002:23).

'Connectedness' pertains to whether the learning can be transferred to real-world situations. It could be argued that learning will be far more meaningful if it can be applied practically.

2.11 Connectedness: Everyday versus School Knowledge

Hugo (2013) points out that this issue of 'everyday' and 'specialized' knowledge is debated and contested and educators seem to be split three ways. The first opinion agrees with the concept of 'Connectedness'. Hugo (2013) provides the example using 'everyday maths' as opposed to 'specialised maths'. This school of thought agrees with the Australian model and, "berates the failure of school mathematics to integrate everyday content and context into its specialized methods at the cost of meaning, understanding and confidence. They urge that everyday content and context be combined with specialised mathematical operations." (Hugo, 2013:17).

Hugo (2013:17) presents the opposing and second point of view. He quotes Dienes to illustrate this model, "If the requirements of everyday life determined the contents of our Maths syllabuses, there would be little Mathematics in them." This argument supports formalisations and specialised concepts, otherwise as Hugo (2013:17)

points out, “you will always be trapped in the everyday and never get to Mathematics proper.”

Then there are those who believe that both ‘Street Mathematics’ and ‘School Mathematics’ should be combined and the pedagogy needs to shift from the one to the other. Teachers and pupils need to learn how to shift from the everyday to the formalised or in other words, from the concrete to the abstract, from simple combinations to more complex combinations (Hugo, 2013).

‘Connectedness’ requires pupils to identify and solve intellectual and real-world problems. The problem is set up in such a way that there is no ‘one’ correct solution. Pupils are expected to work through a problem and construct knowledge in the process.

Lingard, Hayes & Mills (2003:414) concede this dimension makes a relatively weak contribution to Productive Pedagogy and is approximately half that of the other variables. This suggests that this dimension, whilst significant, is not prioritized.

2.12 Supportive Classroom Environment

Vulnerable pupils not only need a high quality curriculum, which is and of itself a support, they also need an emotionally supportive environment.

Productive Pedagogy suggests that pupils should influence student-centred activities and/or how to undertake them. The kind of social support requires an atmosphere of mutual respect between teacher and pupils, and between pupils themselves. Mutual respect fosters an environment which encourages pupils who are challenged to persevere with the knowledge that they and their efforts are valued.

The teacher needs to convey her high expectations of pupils. The prevailing ethos should convey that mastery requires hard work and that, “*all* members of the class can learn important knowledge and skills” (DoE, 2002:10).The teacher needs to monitor contributions made during class. This would entail asking questions, peer teaching, and participating in group activities.

A classroom environment is supportive when the *performance criteria* are explicit. Pupils receive feedback about their performance. Tasks/assignments can be designed in an open-end way where some criteria are *explicit and others implicit* and

this may be part of a constructivist approach where pupils discover or construct their own knowledge.

According to Christie (2008:197), there are 5 observable characteristics in a Supportive Classroom Environment. They could be categorized into 3 *explicit* and 2 *implicit* behaviours. The 3 *explicit* behaviours are:

Engagement: Are the learners on task, doing assigned work, contributing to discussions and asking questions?

Student Direction of Activities: Do learners have any control over the pace, direction or outcome of the lesson?

Explicit Criteria: Are the criteria for assessing student performance explicit?

The *implicit* behaviours are:

Student Self-Regulation – Do learners regulate their own behaviour or does the teacher need to continuously issue instructions and sanction learners for disruptive behaviour?

Social Support – Is there mutual respect between the teacher and learners and between learners themselves? Does the teacher encourage learners to take risks in a mutually respectful social environment?

2.13 Supportive Classroom Environment: Creating a Culture of Care

I would argue that developing a culture of care at a deep level is fundamental to the learning of *all* children, but especially to those pupils who are emotional or academically vulnerable. It could be argued that the one feeds into the other.

A culture of care will support all pupils and underpins the values of inclusive education. It is that ability to see each child an individual with different needs, and it requires the emotional and professional desire to meet those needs in the most appropriate way. Noddings in Nias (1999:67), “vigorously argued that caring in this affective sense is not simply an adjunct or aid to the achievement of cognitive goals. Rather, it is central to teaching and should be consciously adopted as a moral basis for practice in classrooms and schools.”

For some pupils, Nias (1999) points out, school is the only place where they experience consistent care and feel valued by adults whose lives are not chaotic and/or fraught with problems.

Both Noddings (1984) and Nias (1999) acknowledge that women focus on affectivity and connected relationships. Nias (1999:67) quotes Noddings who observes, “Ethical behaviour arises (in women) out of psychological deep structures that are partly dispositional and partly the result of nurturance.”

Nias (1999) informs us that for a century or more, there have been more women than men teachers in primary schools. She also points out that feminist thinking has contributed greatly to the concept of a ‘culture of care’, but of course, caring is not the sole domain of women.

Whilst it seems that creating a caring environment within a school is a moral imperative, and this notion is supported by Nias (1999:68), who believes, “that children who feel secure in an adult’s affection can concentrate on learning.” She also believes it is necessary for teachers to create professional boundaries. In a teacher’s efforts to create a safe and caring environment, there is a risk that this becomes an end itself.

This suggests that teachers in a Bridging Class need to be cognizant of their professional responsibility towards these learners. There are often a number of learners in a Bridging Class who are emotionally vulnerable and could distract a teacher who feels a learner needs to be emotionally stable to be able to focus on academic tasks. Urbach, Moore, Klinger, Galman, Haager, Brownwell and Dingle (2015:332) put it this way, “Although certainly no one would argue that any teacher should forego relationship building with students, this seemingly limited focus on relationship building without also emphasizing academics is problematic.”

Nias (1999:68) shares her experience of classrooms she has visited in which, “teachers and children shared so much personal conversation, laughter and fun, that little time was left for any forms of learning other than affective.”

Having said this though, Nias (1999) feels that it is very important to preserve the balance between the affective and a task-centred approach because she points out

that with the relentless pressures teachers are encountering to improve academic standards, the culture of care is seriously at risk.

Nias (1999) is concerned about the toll this culture of care of care may have on the teachers themselves. On the one hand, nurturance is one of the main sources of job satisfaction but on the other, because their care for their pupils defines so much of whom they are, they are vulnerable and self-esteem may be impacted if the relationship goes wrong.

There is also the fatigue which is as a result of what Hochschild in Nias (1999) calls 'emotional labour'. Steinberg (2008:51) defines 'emotional labour' as, "the process of self-regulation that teachers need to perform so as to embody and express the emotions that are appropriate to the situation and institutional discourse." It seems that if this process of self-regulation is inadequate, this can have an adverse effect on teachers' own families. It would appear that teachers need to create appropriate boundaries to protect themselves.

Noddings (1984:702) observes that, "we are never free to abandon our preparedness to care," but if we are taking care of those within our own inner circles, we limit our obligations naturally. It could be argued that for self-preservation, we need to make conscious decisions about who should be included in that inner circle, and to what extent our caring should extend.

We are not obliged to expend energy on care-taking when there will be no possibility of improvement or change. She illustrates this point with the following example, "I am not obliged to care for starving children in Africa because there is no way for this caring to be completed unless I abandon the caring to which I am obligated" (Noddings, 1984:703). This example of self-reflection provides the key for creating appropriate boundaries to differentiate between the individual's moral, ethical and professional responsibilities. There should be a difference between the caring of one's own family, and the caring in a professional or work context.

There is also the question of whether a culture of caring promotes *active citizenship,* one of the items mentioned in support of Productive Pedagogy. Nias (1999:72) quotes Skinner who claims that the National Curriculum (in the USA) does not, "give sufficient weight to values." Noddings in Nias (1999:72) argues that the aim of

education, “should be to produce citizens who ‘care’ in the relational sense about one another, intellectual ideas and the environment which they share with other species.”

It could be argued that when pupils have an awareness of, and exercise their rights and responsibilities, as well as respect for the rights of others, this democratic behaviour could produce the kind of deep ethical caring described by Noddings (1984) and Nias (1999).

Productive Pedagogies suggests that a teacher creates an environment of social support by conveying her high expectations of all her pupils. This means that she can never engage in any form of humiliation of her pupils in the social interaction between herself and her pupils and between peers. The teacher and pupils can provide constructive feedback with suggestions on how to improve work. It is in this climate that pupils may feel safe enough to take risks and put forth their best efforts (DoE: 2000: 10).

The ideal in terms of creating a culture of care is when the parents, teacher and child are working as a team. The child is likely to feel safe and supported when parents, irrespective of their backgrounds, feel respected. The teacher and parents communicate regularly and agree on strategies of support. Mills, et al., (2009:73) quote Lingard, et al., (2001) and Hargreaves (2003) who believe that, “Care must become more than charity or control: it must become a relationship in which those who are cared for (pupils or parents) have agency, dignity and a voice” (p147).

2.14 Productive Leadership – Leadership for Learning

Lingard, et al., (2003) are concerned with school leadership. They argue that learning is influenced by teachers who are good leaders. They use the term ‘productive leadership’ to describe the standards teachers set in their own classrooms but which can also influence classroom practice of colleagues. The principal also has a responsibility to create, “a school community where there are many leaders” Lingard (2003:20).

A community of learners, teachers and parents should be engaged in debate about educational practices. ‘Productive leadership’ works at ameliorating inequities in a school community.

Lingard, et al., (2003:14) believe that schools should develop a culture of leadership. This means leadership is demonstrated throughout the schools by teachers, pupils, parents, principals, deputies, and heads of departments.

This vision of school leadership is supported by Mahony & Hextall (2000) in their work on teacher professionalism. They believe schools need teacher leaders who are trained to interpret school policies so that they become effective practice. Mahony & Hextall (2000:85) believe that in schools, "It is necessary to know who within a school is responsible for which aspects of the policy and what their responsibilities entail."

Changing the role of the teacher requires "edifying conversations" and continuous on-going teacher education and teacher development. Policy changes also need to be made to support the role of the teacher who, according to Ball (1997:241), quoted by Lingard, et al., (2003:403), "is increasingly an absent presence in the discourse of education policy, an object rather than subject of discourse."

Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013:245) conducted empirical research whose study aimed to explore, "what we can learn from teachers that have already invested in (several) processes of inclusive education with children with significant disabilities." This approach is a far cry from a theory of inclusive education imposed upon teachers without consultation about the conceptual and practical challenges involved in this process. Some of the responses from the teachers interviewed will be discussed further on. Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013) believe that these teachers can offer insights which would be valuable in the training and support of teachers who apply inclusion practices.

Lingard, et al., (2003) believes that teachers need to be in a partnership with school administrators and local communities. Teachers should be regarded as "public intellectuals" who are entrusted with the responsibility of developing pedagogic practices that best serve the social and intellectual development of their pupils. Delpit in Lingard & Mills (2007:236) observes that, "when teachers are committed to teaching *all* students, and when they understand that through their teaching change *can* occur, then the chance for transformation is great."

This research will apply the lens of Productive Pedagogies to explore the pedagogy and personal experiences of teachers in Bridging Classes. It is the hope that an analysis of the data will produce insights that support the academic, social and emotional well-being of pupils who experience barriers to learning.

According to Rodina (2006:3) teachers need support to change the paradigm from a focus of 'disability' to a mind-set of inclusion based on "positive differentiation", (Gindis, 2003). In accordance with Vygotsky, Russian scholars were in favour of teaching the same curriculum to challenged learners but ensure that inclusive pedagogical practices are applied.

Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013:246) comment that a critical factor for the success of inclusion is the, "competence of teachers and their attitude towards inclusion." Their experience is that the concept of inclusion is met with a lot of resistance. Teachers who were interviewed expressed their "disillusionment, doubt, fear and frustration."

Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013:249) are concerned that the teacher is held responsible to ensure all children attain the same standard goals and if this is not the case, students are, "excluded or withdrawn from mainstream classes." Research done by Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013) revealed that teachers felt it was important to be given a choice as to whether they wanted to teach children with learning disabilities because in the end it is teachers who must take responsibility for the children's learning. They remarked that many decisions are made by the school authorities without consultation or involvement of teachers. They also felt that if the teacher was given a choice, this may prevent resistance. Resentment around being imposed upon, could negatively impact the pupil and his/her classmates. Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013) are of the opinion teachers should be consulted and given a choice.

At the start of the new school year, the teacher should be given as much co-lateral information as possible from other team members such as parents, colleagues and therapists. In this way she can provide an, "inclusive psycho-social learning environment with a flexible curriculum to ensure access to *all* learners," as recommended by the Gauteng Department of Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001:6).

Teachers in the Bridging Classes at the selected school are given a choice as to whether they want to teach this class. The school is cognizant of the level of commitment this work requires. Teachers are required to be in continuous contact with the relevant parties and to meticulously record all communication. There is an expectation that Bridging Class teachers will prepare their pupils to integrate into a mainstream class. It will be interesting to hear how they perceive their roles when they are interviewed and if they feel adequately equipped and supported to do their work.

Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013:257) believe that, "shared responsibility is the key word in working together." The teachers who were interviewed admitted they want additional training or coaching. It could be argued that it may not be sufficient just to be committed to teaching all students, to bring about transformation as mentioned earlier by Lingard & Mills (2007). The teacher dealing with children at risk needs specialist skills, continuous support and professional development.

Productive Pedagogies can provide a framework and a language for teachers to develop authentic pedagogical practices that consider the academic, emotional and social outcomes for pupils.

Lingard, Hayes & Mills (2003:401) appear to express similar sentiments to Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013) when they write that the work and opinions of teachers should be valued and, "Pedagogy should be re-centred and that responsibility for its quality and alignment with agreed goals for schooling must be shared by teachers, school administrators, education systems and local communities."

2.15 Conclusion

In order for educators to be able to develop authentic professional development, which aims to make knowledge assessable to *all* learners, there is a need to explore the pedagogical practices of teachers, but in particular, Bridging Class teachers. This thinking appears to be supported by Corbett (1999) who believes that society's attitude towards the challenged learner needs to be reviewed. Instead of the challenged learner being expected to fit into the dominant culture; we need to accommodate and support differences.

The model of Productive Pedagogies was developed by Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie (2003) to reconceptualise teaching practices so that *all* learners are given the opportunity to access knowledge. Productive Pedagogies provides a structure and metalanguage to examine whether a curriculum includes methodology to embed deep knowledge.

The fieldwork in this research aims to unpack and make explicit the pedagogical practices of three participant Bridging Class teachers. Interviews with Bridging Class teachers will explore their perceptions and experiences.

This chapter has discussed Productive Pedagogy which provides the framework for critical analysis of pedagogical practices in the classroom for this study. Chapter Three presents the research design and methodology for the study.

3 CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The intention of this study is to explore the pedagogical practices of Bridging Class teachers. Chapter Three presents and discusses the research design and methodology that have been selected to support the realisation of this intention. This includes a discussion of qualitative research as well as the manner in which data will be collected and analysed. The ethics and trustworthiness of the study are also discussed. The research methodology also addresses the issue of validity and reliability.

3.2 Research Design

This research is a qualitative study and explores the pedagogy of Bridging Class teachers within a main stream school. This study will employ an *exploratory* and *explanatory* approach to examine phenomena that is not well understood.

The purpose of exploring the pedagogy of Bridging Class teachers is to support professional development. The explanatory work was informed by observations of teacher's lessons and interviews with participant teachers.

Exploratory descriptions, explain McMillan & Schumacher (2014:348), "develop in detail a concept, model, or hypothesis for future research", whilst *explanatory* descriptions describe the, "patterns related to the phenomena, and identify relationships influencing the phenomena."

Creswell in McMillan & Schumacher (2014:344) opines that qualitative research starts with assumptions, a world view and the, "possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem."

McMillan & Schumacher (2014) tell us that qualitative research has a *process* orientation. Researchers don't just want to know outcomes or products as is the case with quantitative research. Qualitative research looks to *how* teacher's practices affect pupil's achievement and behaviour.

Maxwell (2005:215) quotes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.24) who believes that in a qualitative study, "research design should be a reflexive process operating

through every stage of a project; the activities of collecting and analysing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, and identifying and dealing with validity threats are usually going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others."

One of the sources of data for this qualitative study were interviews with Bridging Class participant teachers and the Initial Interview questions were designed to provide an opportunity to reflect and differentiate between mainstream and Bridging Class teaching. The Final Interview questions were constructed with the main focus being Productive Pedagogy, i.e. "What kinds of activities support higher-order thinking? (Intellectual Quality) What kind of environment supports a child with barriers to learning? (Supportive Classroom Environment).

Maxwell (2005) suggests five components of a research design model which raise important considerations when collecting and analysing data are:

1. *Goals* – we need to consider why the research is worth doing. What practices and policies do we want it to influence?
2. *Conceptual framework* – a framework can be constructed by drawing on theories, beliefs and prior research findings of the issues being explored.
3. *Research questions* – research questions need to be constructed carefully. What do we know already and what do we not know that we want to learn? Are the questions related to one another? The research questions should drive the project and connect all the other components of the design.
4. *Methods* – what approaches and techniques will be used to collect and analyse data and how will these be integrated with the other components?
5. *Validity* – how will results or conclusions that may be wrong be dealt with? What are possible validity threats? How will data be handled if it challenges predictions and assumptions about teacher practice?

A case study, according to McMillan & Schumacher (2014) includes describing events as they unfold, analysing, and summarizing the findings. The majority of a case study (can be up to 70%) will include description, rather than analysis and interpretation. The aim of a case study is to promote better understanding of practice which will facilitate decision making that is well informed.

Yin (1984:12) quotes (Schramme, 1971) who describes a case study this way:

"The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result."

Yin (1984) discusses the use of a case study in research. He posits that if the researcher needs to know "how" and "why" a programme had worked (or not), one could probably be justify using a case study or field experiment.

Yin (1984:8) also suggests that a case study is preferred whilst examining contemporary events when the relevant behaviours cannot be manipulated. He says that the case study relies on "direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events."

Yin (1984) suggests the case study method could be used to cover "contextual conditions," especially if you believe they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study. What is also necessary when using the case study method, according to Yin (184), is that multiple sources of evidence are used and the data gathered needs to converge in a 'triangulating fashion' to form another result.

This research project has employed three sources of evidence mentioned by Yin (1984), to explore and explain Bridging Classes, namely interviews, direct observation and participant-observation. The aim of using these different sources was to reduce possible validity threats raised by Maxwell (2005).

There appears to be a need for this research and it could be considered a case study because of the uniqueness of a learning environment which is able to offer challenged pupils the benefits of inclusion practices within smaller classes in a mainstream school. Typically, pupils with barriers to learning are either referred to a remedial school or they join a mainstream class in the hope of educational support from teachers and therapists.

3.3 Participant Selection and Site for Study

A mainstream school which houses bridging classes in the Foundation Phase was chosen for purposeful sampling because this is a unique facility that accommodates learners with barriers. Pupils receive the benefit of inclusion practices within a small

class. Teachers assess and collaborate to decide when to reintegrate pupils into mainstream classes. The participants were teachers who teach the Bridging Classes. There were three teacher participants, one from each grade in the Foundation Phase.

3.4 Research Methodology: Data Collection

This research uses the work of Lingard, Hayes & Mills (2003) termed Productive Pedagogies/Assessment as a theoretical lens to make explicit pedagogic strategies applied in a Bridging Class. Given that many of the strategies for assisting pupils with barriers to learning do require inclusion practices, Productive Pedagogies holds the potential to support learning and teaching pupils with diverse needs. The aim of this research, as a case study, is to understand the pedagogical practices used by participants to support the intellectual, social and emotional development for pupils in a Bridging Class.

The data in this research was collected using:

- Notes made during observations and interviews.
- I spent 3 half hour periods observing each teacher teach different subjects.
- Interviews of approximately 40 minutes were conducted prior to the observations. Interviews of about 60 minutes were conducted after lesson observations and used to discuss teacher's pedagogical practices. These interviews were recorded.

The fieldwork in this study involved ***observations and interviews*** with three teachers, one from grade one, one from grade two and one from grade three.

Observations: Harrison in Cohen, Manion & Harrison (2000) discusses the difference between a highly structured observation and a semi-structured observation. A highly structured observation has the observation categories worked out in advance. A semi-structured observation will have agenda issues but will gather data to support these issues in a far less pre-determined or systematic way. A semi-structured observation will be hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis testing. This research used semi-structured observations.

McMillan & Schumacher (2014:378) believe participant observation enables the researcher to, “obtain people’s perceptions of events and processes expressed in their actions, feelings, thoughts, and beliefs.”

The teachers were observed in their classrooms which are their natural settings for teaching and learning. Cohen, et al., (2000:305) notes that observations enable a researcher to gather information from four settings, namely, i) *physical setting; ii) human setting* (characteristics and make- up of the group); iii) *interactional setting* (formal/informal, verbal/non-verbal) and their) *programme setting* (pedagogic style, curriculum and their organization. A structured observation is concerned with *incidence, presence,* and *frequency* of the four settings.

Table 3.1. shows an example of the Observation Schedule developed for the study. The complete Observation Schedule is available in Appendix D.

Table 3-1 Example of Participant Observation Schedule

Participant Observation Schedule **Lesson:** **Grade:** **Information:**			
Areas of Focus for Observation		**Observation Notes**	**Observable Interactions/Activities of Interest that provide insight beyond the categories listed**
1	Description of Physical Classroom environment. • *Physical setting* • *Grouping of learners.* • *Theme tables* • *Lesson relevant displays.*		
2	Description of Lesson content and learner activities		

Interviews: Kvale in Cohen, et al., (2000:267) claims the value of interviews in qualitative research is they provide the forum for the participants, namely, the interviewers and the interviewees to share their interpretations and to, “express how they regard situations from their point of view.”

Cohen, et al., (2000) suggests that conducting interviews may have a direct bearing on the research objectives. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in a more systematic way to facilitate thematic analysis which is discussed in more detail.

In the questions which asked teachers for their perceptions and experiences in the Bridging Classes, as well as how they perceive their roles, their insights were crucial in making informed decisions on how to support the intellectual, social and emotional outcomes for these pupils. Research questions posed to teacher participants were open-ended. Examples of the types of questions included in the **Initial Interview** are shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3-2 Example of Initial Interview Questions

- How would you describe the nature of a Bridging Class?
- What do you see as being core differences in the way you teach a Bridging Class to a mainstream class?
- What do you see as your role as a Bridging Class teacher?

After the observations the following are the types of questions that were asked to elicit information and analyse pedagogical practice. The actual questions were formulated after having observed the lesson. These examples of guiding questions as it is a semi-structured interview, are shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3-3 Example of Final Interview Questions

- Please describe the typical challenges experienced by learners in your class? What do you find personally helpful in dealing with these challenges?
- How do you know your pupils are engaged in learning? (*Intellectual Quality)*
- What kinds of activities support higher order thinking? (*Intellectual Quality)*

3.5 Research Methodology: Data Analysis

The aim of the fieldwork suggests McMillan & Schumacher (2014:355) is to provide, “interim data analysis, preliminary comparisons, and corroboration to refine ideas and to ensure that match between evidence-based categories and participant reality.”

Data analysis employed an inductive and deductive approach. Inductive, in the sense of applying the Productive Pedagogic lens to view teaching practice. The deductive process employed a *thematic content analysis* which implies organizing the material into categories and identifying patterns and relationships between categories. The final stage was to provide explanations for observed phenomenon.

Brown & Clarke (2006:6) describe a thematic analysis as a flexible method for, “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes within data).” Themes emerge from the interviews, and there is the concept of giving a voice to participants through reporting their reality and experiences. Thematic analysis involves checking that the theoretical framework matches what the researcher wants to know.

Brown & Clarke (2006) see thematic analysis as a way of ‘unpicking’ the surface of reality. A theme identifies something about the data in relation to the research questions and traces a patterned response within the data set. Thematic analysis requires searching across the data set. Coding starts when the researcher looks for potential areas of interest and patterns start to emerge.

McMillan & Schumacher (2014:395) inform us that in qualitative studies there are no standard procedures for data analysis. It is primarily an inductive process, and making sense of the data is dependent on the researcher’s, “intellectual rigor and tolerance for tentativeness of interpretation until the analysis is completed.”

In preparation for the Interviews and observation with the actual participants, I conducted a trial with a non-participant Bridging Class teacher.

I found the Research Questions in the Initial Interview generated insightful and honest discussion. The information provided by this teacher as to the differences between Bridging Class teaching and Mainstream class teaching were verified during the observation.

After observing the teacher in the classroom, the Final Interview questions enabled us to analyse specific teaching strategies used in the Bridging Class.

There were 2 questions added to the Final Interview after the trial. I was interested in knowing to what extent the individual pupil or groups of pupils are catered for in this class. This deals with the concept of differentiation. The question added was:

- How do you understand differentiation?
- Can you provide examples of how you are able to apply differentiation in your class?

3.6 Research Methodology: Ethical Considerations

McMillan & Schumacher (2014) caution us that qualitative research has the potential to be more intrusive than quantitative research, and therefore obtaining informed consent, assuring confidentiality and anonymity and assuring there is no loss of trust were issues which were given careful consideration in this research.

Written, informed consent was obtained from teachers who were participants as well as pupil's parents in the classes in which observations were scheduled. As the researcher, I am also part of the management team and because there was a possibility that teachers may have felt coerced into participating in this project, I assigned the social worker to be the co-ordinator of data collection. If any teachers felt unsafe or vulnerable in any way, the social worker would have informed me and I would have been compelled to terminate the fieldwork with immediate effect. The identity of such a teacher would have been protected and remained anonymous.

3.7 Research Methodology: Validity and Reliability

McMillan & Schumacher (2014:354) define validity as the, "degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world." Validity addresses the question of whether researchers actually observe what they think they see, and hear the meanings of what they think they hear. Validity refers to what extent the researcher and the participants share "*mutual meanings."*

There are strategies which McMillan & Schumacher (2014) suggest to ensure mutual understanding. These include, transcribing literally from recorded descriptions of people and situations over a period of time; checking with participants for accuracy and corroboration during the data collection process.

McMillan & Schumacher (2014:407) believe that although establishing data trustworthiness is done while doing the fieldwork, and in the reflex records, it should also be done during pattern seeking. The researcher should also be aware and take into account the influences within the setting and exercise discretion. For example, the researcher would rather explore the opinions of a thoughtful, mature person rather than an emotional or biased person. The researcher also needs to be aware of her own, “assumptions, predispositions and influence on the social situation.”

If one of aims of this research is to support professional development, data gathering through interviewing needs to be conducted in a non-threatening, open-ended way. If participant teachers feel safe and respected and their work valued, they are more likely to be honest and engage in authentic discussion. Data collected when teachers feel safe and their work valued is more likely to be a true reflection of their pedagogic practice. This data, in my opinion, is as valid a description of pedagogic practice.

To ensure this study is conducted in the most professional manner possible, I heeded the advice of McMillan & Schumacher who says, “The researcher needs to suspend or “bracket” any preconceived ideas about the phenomenon to elicit and better understand the meaning given by the participants.” It is about making conscious effort to understand the participants’ voice (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:372).

3.8 Conclusion

The intention of the research design and methodology selected for this study was to signal to teacher participants that their work and insights were worth recording. Interaction with teacher participants through interviews and observations provided an opportunity to investigate the pedagogical practices of Bridging Class teachers. Chapter Four that follows, describes the process of data collection and analysis.

4 CHAPTER 4 – DATA ANALYSIS UTILIZING PRODUCTIVE PEDAGOGY

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the pedagogical role of the teacher in providing an environment which meets the social, emotional and intellectual needs of the challenged learner within a mainstream school. In order to realise this aim, use was made of the Productive Pedagogy framework to support investigation into the teaching and learning in Bridging Classes. Productive Pedagogy was selected because its elements of Intellectual Quality, Supportive Classroom Environment, Engagement with Difference and Connectedness to the World, appear to cater for *all* learners regardless of ability or background. The elements of Productive Pedagogy attempted to address the intellectual, cultural and social implications of education.

Learners in the Bridging Class are at risk and therefore have specific educational needs, many of which could be supported by elements of Productive Pedagogy. Hugo (2013:18) believes that, “Learning happens by making sense and meaning of things, and meaning comes from placing something in a larger framework and context that hold elements together in a coherent whole. You need a syntax as well as a semantics.” Productive Pedagogy offers a language and a conceptual framework to construct components of a curriculum that will promote deep and sustained learning. Productive Pedagogy provides 20 classroom practices (listed in Chapter 2) that support and enhance academic and social outcomes for learners. With regard to professional development, Productive Pedagogy offers teachers a language to apply to teaching and learning. Lingard et al., (2003:405) puts it this way, “We conceptualise the language of pedagogy as linking teachers’ work and student learning, while mediating the curriculum and assessment and thereby placing pedagogy at the centre of educational discourses.”

I chose Productive Pedagogies as a means of investigating the pedagogy of Bridging Class teachers because it seems to hold an authentic framework that fits well with what Bridging Classes aim to achieve. Hayes, et al., (2006:9) make the point that, “The quality of teaching and learning experienced by students is a critically important social justice issue for schools today…” Community and societal pressures tend to label learners who do not meet the required standards within a specific time frame.

This puts these learners at risk for being excluded unnecessarily from school communities.

This chapter presents an analysis of data collected for each of the three participants and presents the findings for the study. Data collected includes interviews and lesson observations of three teachers from the Bridging Classes. The first level of analysis utilises the Productive Pedagogy framework and data is thus coded and interpreted utilising this lens and is dealt with in this Chapter. The second stage of analysis moves beyond the Productive Pedagogy framework to identify overarching themes that emerge and is dealt with in Chapter 5 from the data sets. The two stages of analysis are then brought together to present overall findings for the study.

4.2 Utilising Productive Pedagogy

The components of Productive Pedagogy divide the teaching and learning process into four sections, and provide a language to unpack what constitutes a quality curriculum or one that meets standards of Intellectual Quality, one of the components of Productive Pedagogies. Bridging Class teachers are required to make adaptations for learners, maintaining a quality curriculum, but bear in mind the challenges these learners experience. Shulman (2004:228) states that a teacher is a member of a scholarly community and, "he or she must understand the structures of subject matter, the principles of conceptual organization, and the principles of inquiry that help answer two kinds of questions in each field, " What are the important ideas and skills in this domain?" And, "How are new ideas added and deficient ones dropped by those who produce knowledge in this area?" Teachers need to be cognizant of the challenges Bridging Class learners face, and select appropriate curriculum content, sequence tasks appropriately, and then pace them so that learners can access key concepts in the curriculum.

The Productive Pedagogy framework was utilised in this section to analyse data for each of the teacher participants. Data was collected from both interviews and lesson observations. Interviews were transcribed and then coded for each of the productive pedagogy domains and components in each domain. Lesson observation schedules were completed and once again, coded for the components of each domain of Productive Pedagogy. Refer to Appendices to see the codes.

What follows is a discussion that integrates analysis of each of these data sources across participants for each of the four domains of Productive Pedagogy. Throughout the discussion, claims are supported by making use of the words of participants or examples from observations. When quoting directly from interview transcripts, use is made of the legend e.g. (Final Interview: Lines 57-60) to denote interview and line number from interview script. Reference is also made to relevant literature to comment or substantiate comments or observations about participant teachers' pedagogical practice.

4.2.1 Intellectual Quality

Hayes, et al., (2006:42) write that when observing Intellectual Quality, researchers concurred that the elements of the following were present:

- *Higher order Thinking* – higher order thinking and critical analysis is occurring
- *Deep Knowledge* – lessons cover operational fields in depth
- *Deep Understanding* – work and responses provide evidence of depth of understand of concepts and ideas
- *Knowledge Problematic* – students are second-guessing and critiquing ideas and knowledge
- *Substantive Conversation* – conversations depart from IRE (Initiate/respond/evaluate) and lead to sustained dialogue between learners and between teachers and learners
- *Metalanguage* – aspects of language, grammar and technical vocabulary are foregrounded

The above elements of Intellectual Quality are concerned about transferring concrete understanding to more complex and abstract concepts.

Whilst conducting interviews and observations, I was observing to see what elements of Productive Pedagogy were present or absent. I was also observing to see what other teaching and learning methodology occurred to ensure these learners could access the curriculum. The final interviews and observations from each of the participant teachers revealed the complex nature of pedagogic practices in Bridging Classes as well as a profile of what teachers in the Bridging class can realistically expect of learners. There were some common reoccurring responses to

questions and teaching methodology, but there were also some interesting and unexpected interactions that emerged from this field work.

Teacher participants from Grade 1, 2 and 3 were asked questions to draw on their expertise and identify best pedagogic practices. A question was asked, *"What are the constructs of a good lesson?"* The purpose of this question was to see whether any of the pedagogical practices aligned to the categories or descriptions of what constitutes 'Intellectual Quality' were present. None of the participant teachers expressed the idea that the constructs of a good lesson should extend learners with higher-order thinking or that lessons should result in deep knowledge or critical thinking skills. In general, learners were taught as a whole group in an expository manner.

Ms A (Grade One) emphasized the need for learners to work extensively with concrete materials/apparatus. She also said that, *"lots of discussion*" was necessary followed by learners answering questions (Final Interview: Lines 79-80). This supports the element of *substantive conversation.* Hayes, et al., (2006:44) opine that in classes where substantive conversation is present, there are lots of exchanges between students and teachers and between the learners themselves. They believe that this facilitates coherent shared understanding. It was interesting to note that although Ms A expressed the idea that discussions were the corner-stone of a good lesson, her teaching style was principally expository. My observation of the English lesson she taught was, that learning is very teacher directed and teacher controlled. For example, during a writing task, learners were required to write words beginning with 'Y' in colour. The teacher said, "*If I use pink to write the word, then so do you."*

When asked how the Grade 2 Bridging Class teacher defined the constructs of a good lesson, Ms B (Grade 2) is of the opinion that the lesson should be able to hold the attention of every learner, so the level of the lesson needs to be pitched correctly. The implication here is that she feels if it is too high or too low, learners opt out and will remain passive. In selecting material, Shulman (2004:238) tells us that the teacher needs to ask, "What are the relevant aspects of student ability, gender, language, culture, motivations, or prior knowledge and skills that will affect their responses to different forms of representation and presentation?" Ms B also felt

it was important that the lesson be worthwhile, *"otherwise it is a waste and we are so limited for time and I think the children have to enjoy the lesson. I think they* really *have to have fun doing it"* (Final Interview: Lines 79-81). It is interesting to note that Shulman (2004) lists humour as part of what he deems as important in the process of instruction.

Ms C (Grade 3) responded by saying, *"I think, as I know I have mentioned this already, to start off with the concrete, to start off with a game, something that is going to grab their attention straight away, and then to move onto the more abstract"* (Final Interview: Lines 53-55). I asked her if she needed to apply this format more often in the Bridging Class, as opposed to mainstream. Her response was, *"Yes, definitely, you know, even stuff you know they have done in Grade 2, and you are re-doing it. Under normal circumstances, you probably find you wouldn't use as much concrete because they have already done it, but here, you don't know how much they have retained, so you have to basically start at the beginning"* (Final Interview: Lines 57-60)

The next question posed to the participant teachers was, "*How do you know your pupils are engaged in learning?"* This question was posed to explore whether teachers experienced learners' participation in what Christie (2008:196) describes as, "actively and critically engaging with knowledge, including disciplinary knowledge and problem-solving approaches." Christie (2008) believes teachers need to provide opportunities for learners to engage in concepts and processes in depth which should transform thinking, rather than reciting them as a form of response. Christie (2008:196) believes teachers should be checking that students are using facts to, "synthesise, generalise, explain, hypothesise or arrive at some conclusion or interpretation." Contrasting perspectives should be presented and learners and teachers should engage in substantive conversations which should include concepts of metalanguage.

Ms A (Grade 1) implied that the expressions on the faces of the learners revealed whether they were understanding or absorbing the content of the lesson. *"You can actually see when you are talking and nobody is getting it"* (Final Interview: Lines 22-23). She went on to say that in a mainstream class, you would have a sense that most learners are grasping the concepts, whilst a few may need to be re-taught. In

Productive Pedagogies, the component of a Supportive Classroom Environment requires the teacher to be explicit about what is expected of them, especially those learners who struggle and teachers need to, "scaffold in ways that enable them (learners) to achieve." Hayes, et al., (2006:61). Ms A said when she experiences that the majority of learners do not understand, she changes the activity, or the type of lesson.

It could be argued that a variety of activities and teaching in different ways is of benefit to learners and could support Intellectual Quality. Hayes (2006:147) quoting (Chappell 2003:6) informs us that, "Today, thinking about knowledge emphasises knowledge constructed as practical, interdisciplinary, informal, applied and contextual over knowledge constructed as theoretical, disciplinary, formal, foundational and generalizable." When Ms B (Grade 2) was asked how she knew her learners were engaged in learning, she also responded that their body language communicated their engagement. She knows if children are staring out of the window, she needs to question them to check as to whether they are listening. She said that sometimes it appears that they are not listening, but this may not always be the case. She said, *"Some children don't participate at all, not because they don't know the answers, but because they are shy, so you have to encourage those children to participate"* (Final Interview: Lines 40-42). Ms B emphasized the importance of written tasks, "you have to get them to write down that learning" (Final Interview: Lines 42-43). To develop *deep understanding,* a component of Intellectual Quality, learners need to, "develop relatively systematic, integrated or holistic understandings of concepts" (Hayes et al., 2006:43). Teachers need to evaluate this learning through discussions which require *substantive conversations,* another element supporting Intellectual Quality, as well as written tasks.

Ms C (Grade 3) responded to the question on how she knew learners were engaged in learning by saying that she can read their body language. If they have *"blank looks"* (Final Interview: Lines 19-20) on their faces or they are staring out of the window and don't make eye-contact, she knows she has not managed to engage them. To keep learners focused, she often makes them read the content or use some kind of marker, like a ruler, to actively participate in the learning. A component of a Supportive Classroom Environment is *Engagement* and Hayes, et al. (2006:65) tell us that a high level of engagement is present when, "most students, most of the

time are on-task, pursuing the substance of the lesson; most students seem to be taking the work seriously and trying hard." During the Maths lesson, learners were asked to read the problem with the teacher to ensure the language and the requirements were understood. She also questioned her pupils to elicit their understanding of the problem. The teacher opened the lesson with, *"What do we know?"* She encouraged learners to articulate their understanding of the problem. Learners responded, "*We know there are 230 boys and 324 girls."* Teacher probes further, *"What don't we know yet?"* Hayes, et al., (2006:91) writes that *knowledge problematic* acknowledges the, "importance of expecting students to demonstrate an understanding of how knowledge is constructed." This Maths lesson required learners to produce a 'model' (a horizontal bar graph) as well as a vertical sum and a number sentence. The problem required calculating the number of boys and girls attending camp. The task asked for the number of boys and girls to be represented in a bar graph with accurate number sentences. Task requirements in this lesson contained *problematic knowledge* or elements of the unknown. The task required learners to "consider alternative solutions, strategies, perspectives, or points of view as they address a concept, problem or issue" (Hayes et al. 2006:91).

The following question, "*What kinds of activities support higher order thinking?"* was asked to establish whether teachers in the Bridging Class apply encourage learners to apply their knowledge in an integrated and/or creative way. Hayes, et al., (2006:90) describes this as, "Manipulating information and ideas through these processes allows students to solve problems and discover new (for them) meanings and understandings." Ms A (Grade 1) responded to this question by saying, "*So, this is very hard for the Bridging Class, the higher order thinking"* (Final Interview: Line 44). Ms A believes the best way to introduce higher order concepts is through a game, in a concrete way. She said with a lot of encouragement, learners are able to think in a more abstract way. She implied that if questions are posed that are too complex, they are likely to panic and, *"almost freeze"* (Final Interview: Line 48). It is perhaps because of this low expectation of these learners that I noted that there was no creative work displayed in this classroom. During an English lesson in which learners were being introduced to the letter 'Y', the teacher asked about the meanings of words beginning with 'Y'. There were pictures of 'Y' words on the board. Most of the words on the board were known to them, i.e. 'yolk; 'yawn'; 'yo-

yo'. There was a picture of a small animal on a tree with the word 'yearling' underneath, but the meaning of this word was not discussed. Some elements of *Metalanguage*, a component of Intellectual Quality, were applied when pupils were about to write the word 'two'. The teacher asked which 'to' was correct in the sentence if it is 'two' yolks.

Ms B (Grade 2), when asked what kinds of activities support higher order thinking, she said, *"Honestly, not many because most of the time is spent consolidating basic concepts, and if we do something that involves higher order thinking, it will come through a discussion at the end of a lesson, for a short amount of time"* (Final Interview: Lines 47-49). It is interesting to note that this teacher, although not aware of it, did in fact deal with concepts of higher-order thinking in her lessons. During the English lesson on adjectives/life skills, she asked learners to describe the qualities of a 'mensch' (a Yiddish term for a kind, caring, responsible citizen). One learner suggests the word '*caring'*, and another provides an example, "*playing with someone who doesn't have a friend."* Providing opportunities for learner to describe and define concepts in one word (adjectives) could be classified as higher-order thinking. Hayes, et al., (2006:90) write of higher-order thinking as, "this transformation occurs when students combine facts and ideas in order to synthesise, generalise, explain, hypothesise or arrive at some conclusion or interpretation."

Ms C (Grade 3) believes that concrete activities support higher-order thinking. She believes*, "they have to be able to visually see things, to actually enable them to comprehend better"* (Final Interview: Lines 25-26). Ms C's Maths lesson in which learners were required to produce a bar graph illustrates this point well. Reproducing a visual image of the difference in the numbers 230 and 324 before producing number sentences, may help these learners arrive at the solution more easily and prepare them to solve more complex problems.

A follow up question was posed to each participant teacher which asked how they knew they could move to higher-order questions. Ms A (Grade 1) implied this could happen when a lot of concrete work had been done and when the basics had been covered. Initially, she was not convinced that all learners would cope with higher-order thinking. In her experience Ms A (Grade 1) said*, "If higher order questions were asked and if they presented as challenging for these learners, the minute they*

hear those types of questions, they almost freeze" (Final Interviews: Lines 47-48). Ms A did concede though that with time and encouragement, they can do it. She said, *"They are actually very creative thinkers but because of the initial anxiety, they just panic, because it is something that they are just not used to"* (Final Interview: Lines 51-52).

Ms B (Grade 2) felt that a teacher can only move to higher-order thinking when learners have grasped the concepts well and were able to recall concepts learnt previously. Ms B said, *"They have to be able to store it in their long-term memory, and when they have sufficiently completed written tasks, then I am able to go to that higher-order*." (Final Interview: Lines 52-54). To describe how learning occurs, Hugo (2013:37) uses the metaphor of a ten-story building with ten rooms on each floor, and each room is divided into ten cubicles. The learner needs to move from one level to the next, but have experience on each floor, in each cubicle before moving to the next level. Perhaps this is what Ms B (Grade 2) is referring to when she says the learners have to have, *"grasped the concepts well and were able to recall concepts previously learnt"* (Final Interview: Lines 51-52). Hugo's metaphor tells us we need to be, "systematic and careful that you have the state of each cubicle and room clearly defined. There is not much room for error. You also know there are another eight levels above and each time you move up a level, you are going to depend on the levels below and learn new things about the new level, but that if you stay with the programme and are able to master level after level, you will get to the top." Hugo's description of how learning occurs at a deeper level supports Ms A's (Grade 1) experience that with time, encouragement and reducing anxiety, learners in the Bridging Class can think creatively and move beyond simple reproduction or IRE (Initiate/Respond/Evaluate).

Ms C (Grade 3) said she would assess the learners before moving onto more abstract concepts. Ms C added that in her experience, learners were often not ready to continue, even after a lot of consolidation and repetition, but the question she asks herself at times is, *"will they ever be ready?"* (Final Interview: Line 30). The first question that needs to be addressed is, what constitutes 'consolidation' and what value repetition has in the learning process, especially if learners have not grasped the concepts. Surely, another way of instruction needs to be tried? The teacher needs to reflect on why learning has not occurred, and experiment with different

ways to teach a particular concept. Returning to Vygotsky, perhaps the teacher could work with the theory of *zone of proximal development,* as mentioned in 2.5, which refers to, "the distance between the child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential developed as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Brown, Metz, Campione,1996:146). Working at this basic level, could inform the teacher of the deficits present, and then the teacher could adapt the pedagogy to suit the needs of the learner.

The next question posed to the participants was, "*What value do repetitive routines have (Drill routines)?* This question was asked to establish whether repetitive routines are used and to what extent they add value to the teaching and learning process. Lingard, Hayes & Mills (2003:413) write about utilising Productive Pedagogies and say, "In helping students become producers of knowledge, the teachers' main task was therefore to create activities or environments that provided them with opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking." The contrast obviously, is lower-order thinking, where learners are asked to "recite factual information or to employ rules and algorithms in repetitive routines" (Lingard et al., 2003:413). Rote fashion routines involving recitation or reproduction of simple facts or pre-specified knowledge are considered by Lingard et al., (2003), as lower order-thinking.

Ms A (Grade 1) responded by saying *"I find with the Bridging Class, it is brilliant, they need it"* (Final Interview Line 65). One of the advantages, she believes, is that the structure and predictability of familiar content provides support. *"They need structure, and even the repetitive, it just helps them know how to cope with that activity"* (Final Interview: Lines 67-68). My observation of this teacher in the classroom was that although the teaching style was somewhat didactic in nature, it did seem to provide support for those learners who are at risk in this first year of formal schooling. It could be argued that when learners are still at the stage of acquiring factual knowledge, "The use of repetition, mnemonic devices, acronyms and songs are also effective ways of helping students remember factual knowledge" (Anderson, 2005:109).

Ms B (Grade 2) also felt that repetitive routines have great value. She said that when learners move onto more difficult tasks, for example, in Maths, they need to be

able to recall number bonds and multiplication tables quickly. *"They shouldn't spend time on having to work out the small part of the sum"* (Final Interview: Line 63). In Ms B's Maths lesson, a game had been set up which required learners to use the 2X tables in conjunction with addition sums. The game prepared learners for the more complex task of 'balancing sums' i.e. (6 X 2) + 3 = ____ +10. This game provided a high level of student engagement. The game was challenging and fun, but learners would have needed to be proficient in their 2X tables to be able to participate effectively.

Ms C (Grade 3) believes that repetitive routines are very important for these learners because she said that they find it so difficult to retain anything and therefore repetition is necessary. From a practical learning point of view, it is easy to see why teachers who are working with learners who may have working memory deficits, fall back on memorizing as a pedagogic mode. Gathercole & Alloway (2007:37) opine that it is important for teachers who work with learners who may have working memory deficits, to encourage learners to develop strategies for overcoming memory problems. These would include:

- Use of rehearsal to maintain important information
- Use of memory aids
- Organization strategies – breaking tasks down into component parts where possible
- Asking for help when important information has been forgotten.

Kirschner et al., (2006:76) believe that, "the relationship between working and long-term memory in conjunction with the cognitive processes that support learning, are of critical importance to the argument." Kirschner, et al., (2006:76) inform us that, "long-term memory is no longer seen as a passive repository of discrete, isolated fragments of information that permit us to repeat what we have learned. Long- term memory is now viewed as the central, dominant structure of human cognition." It seems that teachers should first ascertain what the needs of these learners are. Perhaps learners who are not as challenged will cope better with the minimal guidance that Kirschner, et al., (2006) are suggesting forms part of problem-based or inquiry- based learning. Lingard & Mills (2007:236) make it clear that whilst

research-based models like Productive Pedagogies can provide a frame for teachers, they are not prescriptive about order or instruction.

Ms C provided strategies for remembering process steps to create a horizontal bar graph. She spoke her class through the process by repeating the steps with statements like, *"Always read through your story, so you know what to do; Which is the smaller part? Does it matter which side they go?"* This dialogue of questions not only helped to scaffold shared understanding, but also created *substantive conversation,* an element of Intellectual Quality as evidenced by the discussion of content.

It was interesting to note that all three participant teachers considered repetitive routines as necessary to the instruction of Bridging Class learners. There is a strong argument brought against a constructivist approach to education by Kirschner, Sweller & Clark (2006:79). They quote a qualitative study conducted by Aulls (2002) that have established, "Controlled experiments almost uniformly indicate that when dealing with novel information, learners should be explicitly shown what to do and how to do it." Kirschner, et al., (2006:79) argue further by saying that because learners end up learning so little from a constructivist approach, teachers have to spend a great deal of time scaffolding relevant procedures, modelling procedures, showing students how to paraphrase information, "having students use notes to construct collaborations and routines, promoting collaborative dialogue within problems" (p 533).

The teacher participants were asked "*What skills, abilities, competencies or behaviours are you trying to develop in learners to equip them to successfully mainstream."* Ms A (Grade 1) said, for grade one learners, she wants them to be able to follow instructions, stay on task, and work independently. She said she tries to foster this behaviour in her classroom, working with their anxiety, but conveying the message that "*they have to know that at some point, the teacher has to stop helping you. You have to fend for yourself, you have to listen*, *try go and do it on your own"* (Final Interview (Lines 176-177). It was interesting to note that although Ms A advocates that learners develop the confidence and skills to work independently, her pedagogical style was very teacher-directed and teacher-controlled. When learners were required to write a short story using words beginning

with ‘Y’, learners were required to copy down the teacher’s sentences to ‘construct’ the story. A description of *deep understanding* (a component of Intellectual Quality) provided by Hayes, et al. (2007:42) asks the question, “Do the work and response of students provide evidence of depth of understand of concepts or ideas?” Perhaps if Ms A had given the learners the opportunity to construct their own sentences, however tentative, this lesson may have been of more value to the learners.

Ms B (Grade 2) seemed to be more concerned with social behaviour rather than academic skills, although she did say that a learner must be able to score an average mark in mainstream. She said to successfully mainstream learners have to be able to operate independently and ‘self-monitor’. “*They need to be able to interact with their peers. “They should be able to express themselves as well as listen to what their peers are saying to them”* (Final Interview: Lines 170-172). It was interesting to note during the observations of both the Maths and English lessons, lessons promoted co-operative learning and social interaction. In the Maths lesson, the dice game was student-centred with groups and it involved peer monitoring. In the English lesson, learners used adjectives to identify and describe the positive social traits of their peers, such as respect, loyalty, kindness, courage and caring.

Ms C (Grade 3) felt that it was important to address the anxiety these learners experience and build their self-image and self-confidence. She believes these two factors are ‘huge stumbling blocks’. Lack of belief in their own abilities appears to be one of the challenges many of these learners experience whilst engaging with work of an academic nature. Ms C (Grade 3) substantiated this perception when she said, “*I think they perceive themselves as not being able to cope and so whatever instructions are given to them, immediately that anxiety is raised because straight away, they think, “will I be able to do it?”* (Final Interview: Lines 11-13). If learners experienced this almost every time they are required to engage with an academic task, it is likely they would feel undermined and incompetent, resulting in a poor self-image and low self-confidence. The second important aspect was reading and comprehension skills because she says being able to cope with the curriculum in higher standards, is dependent on reading and comprehension skills. At the outset of the Maths lesson, Ms C asked learners to read the problem with her to ensure language and task requirements were understood. Hayes, et al., (2006:10) cite the work of (Bourdieu & Passernon 1977; Freebody 1993; Cope & Kalantzis 1995;

Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn 1995) who believed that *explicit criteria* should be a component in a Supportive Classroom Environment when they wrote "The need for students who struggle with schooling to be provided with *explicit criteria* has been well documented".

During the English lesson, however, the examples in the worksheet (the assessment tool), required explaining to support comprehension, but the teacher wanted learners to work independently. When one learner asked for clarification, she appeared not to hear the question and said, "*Read the worksheet and try it yourselves. I am going to start calling up the reading groups."* She did not read or discuss the written task requirements to help them understand the content. Hayes, et al., (2006:102) in discussing assessment tasks believe, "The main focus of this item is on explicit statements about what constitutes high-quality student performances. Criteria, requirements or benchmarks that simply lay out expectations of what constitutes completed work do not make explicit, in themselves, what constitutes high-quality performance."

It seems that Bridging Class pedagogy needs to employ a delicate balance to support the development of critical thinking skills. The challenge for the Bridging Class teacher is to create an environment which encourages learners to question, apply ideas and participate in discussions, to work independently, and form generalisations, whilst simultaneously, providing support which takes into account the challenges these learners may experience. Hayes, et al., (2006:45) quote Newman & Associates (1996) who found that, "when students from *all* backgrounds are expected to perform work of high intellectual quality, overall student academic performance increases and equity gaps diminish."

The risk is always placing too much emphasis on the disabilities, and not expecting high quality performance which can result in the self-fulfilling prophesy. An example of this emerged during the interview with Ms A (Grade 1) with the response to the question about what activities support higher order thinking. She first said, *"So this is very hard for the Bridging Class"* (Final Interview: Line 44), but then conceded later in the interview, that the learners in her class, "*can do it, and they are actually very creative thinkers"* (Final Interview: Lines 50-51) and that their tentative responses to higher-order thinking were as a result of their anxiety, rather than their limited

abilities. There is no question that learners in the Bridging Class should be exposed to a curriculum of high quality, however, the teacher cannot ignore the academic and/or emotional challenges that impact on performance. Productive Pedagogy provides an appropriate frame for the teaching and learning in a Bridging Class. The elements of a Supportive Classroom Environment offer learners both academic and emotional support. The aspects of a Supportive Classroom Environment will be discussed in the next section.

4.2.2 Supportive Classroom Environment

It could be said that a Supportive Classroom Environment adopts two key approaches. The first one is academic support and the other is social support. Hayes, et al. (2006:61) write, "The opportunity to learn in a socially supportive environment is critical to all students, but we would stress that this support must be intellectually demanding." It seems that if either element is not present, the notion of a supportive classroom environment could be compromised.

The way in which the Bridging Classes are constructed, i.e. smaller in number with learners grouped together applying structure, good classroom management, explicit criteria and emotional support, resonates well with the Productive Pedagogy component, Supportive Classroom Environment. The components of the Supportive Classroom Environment as defined by Hayes, et al., (2006:61) comprise of:

- *Engagement* – are learners engaged and on-task?
- *Student Self-Regulation* – Is the direction of student behaviour implicit and self-regulatory?
- *Student direction of activities* – Do students have any say in the pace, direction or outcomes of the lesson?
- *Explicit criteria* – are the criteria for judging student performance made explicit?

Some of the more nuanced dynamics that support learners in a Bridging Class require a structured environment to ensure learners stay on task for sustained periods, and whilst learners in Foundation Phase may have less of a say in the pace, direction or outcome of the lessons, the Bridging Class teacher is sensitive to the needs of the learners. She scaffolds intellectually challenging tasks. She does all

she can to provide an environment which is 'safe' and devoid of any form of ridicule. Hayes, et al. (2006:63) put it this way, "all members of the class can learn important knowledge and skills, and that a climate of mutual respect among all members of the class contributes to achievement by all." In all the lessons I observed in the classrooms of participant teachers, I did not encounter one incident in which a learner was undermined by another. The teachers modelled respectful behaviour and validated all learner responses.

These elements of a supportive classroom environment will be discussed in this section with reference to interviews and observations of the three participant teachers. Teachers were asked, "*What do you find personally helpful in dealing with the typical challenges (of learners in a Bridging Class)?"* Ms A (Grade 1) said it was hard for the learners to process information. They are very anxious especially in a test situation. They were very easily distracted by peers, outside noise and their own thoughts. Gathercole & Alloway (2007:31) suggest that there are a number of situations that can lead to the loss of the contents of working memory. They define *distraction* as, "an unrelated thought springing to mind, or an interruption by someone else, is often sufficient to erase the contents of working memory." Hayes, et al., (2006) propose that a supportive classroom environment requires serious psychological investment to ensure attentiveness. Disengagement was characterized by boredom, disruption and lack of commitment to tasks. Ms A's response to the question of what she found helpful in dealing with these challenges was, *"I think the Bridging Class teacher needs a lot of patience. She really needs to be patient with the children, almost cater to their needs, possibly change your teaching strategies and techniques"* (Final Interview: Lines 16-18). She also consults with remedial therapists regularly for their input on how to teach a particular skill. When there is lack of engagement on behalf of students, teacher should probably reflect on the kinds of activities that stimulate and motivate learners in her class. There are questions that could perhaps counter lack of engagement that Hayes, et al (2006:61) ask, "Do students have any say in the pace, direction or outcomes of the lesson? and, "To what extent do learners influence activities and task requirements?" It could be argued that when tasks are heavily teacher-directed, learners in any classroom context can lose focus.

Ms A's patience was demonstrated whilst she was teaching a Maths lesson and the noise level started rising. She did not raise her voice but said, *"I am looking to see who the* '*Student of the Week' will be. Thank you John* (not his real name) *for your good manners."* Another example*, "I am going to choose a child who is sitting quietly to answer the next question."* This form of interaction between teacher and learners fulfils the element of *Student Self-Regulation* which is part of the Supportive Classroom Environment. Instead of the teacher issuing corrective instructions, she reinforces the required behaviour in the classroom. The teacher is also role-modelling appropriate inter-personal skills/social behaviour. Nias (1999:70) tells us that teachers have a moral responsibility for children's learning that exceeds the technical skills of teaching. She quotes Iris Murdoch (1985, p.31) who writes, "We cannot help children to learn if we do not pay close attention to them, in the sense in which Weil (1986) used the word. Weil suggests that 'attention' conveys the act of putting 'oneself' in someone else's place, listening for justice and virtue, being alive to truth and to affliction." (Drummond, 1995. p10)

Another example of Ms A's strategy of accommodating learners who find processing and concentration difficult was evident when issuing instructions. She issued very clear and specific instructions, one or two at a time and then checked to see they were being carried out correctly. A Supportive Classroom Environment requires the teacher to provide learners with *explicit criteria;* Ms A (Grade 1) used the same format to introduce each new letter of the alphabet. The lesson starts with a discussion about the words beginning with that letter, a short story which includes a lot of words starting with that letter. They practise forming the letter and then copy sentences from the board. Ms A reminded learners to start sentences with a capital letter. Ms A then moved from one learner to the next, checking that task requirements were being carried out. This form of pedagogy is referred to by educationalist Ndebele (2005) quoted by Christie (2008) as *structured instruction,* as opposed to 'open-ended teaching' associated with 'constructivism'. 'Structured instruction' entails 'explicit teaching' and this means the teacher presents the content in sequenced steps and gives corrective feedback. She also repeated instructions patiently, if and when necessary. She checked work and praised learners for their efforts continuously, "*You trying really hard, Dorrie"* (not her real name). *" This work is good." Productive Assessment* is a component of the Supportive Classroom

Environment and requires learners to complete tasks at high levels. Pedagogies in this component, "provide multiple opportunities for students to practice, demonstrate and receive feedback on their performance, relative to explicit criteria on tasks over which they feel a sense of ownership" (Hayes, et al., 2006:102).

Ms B (Grade 2) said most of the learners have academic weaknesses either in Maths or English. Many have a low level of concentration and suffer from anxiety. When asked what strategies helped her in dealing with these challenges, she said she finds the advice the remedial therapists offer as well as outside therapists very helpful. Ms B also expressed that she, at times experienced frustration and demotivation especially when you, as the teacher, put in so much effort and results are often not commensurate. In her words, "*I find it quite difficult because as a Bridging Class teacher, you continuously looking at yourself and thinking you haven't done a good enough job, but it's actually the children who are limited and it is quite frustrating at times"* (Final Interview: Lines 20-24). Ms B also mentioned that she had attended a course the previous day and she realized the value of consulting experts in this area. Her comment on the conference for remedial teachers was, *"I found the speakers were so inspirational and it just made me understand, from the child's perspective, sometimes you teaching and you just not getting anywhere and you really become despondent, but by listening to these experts, you really feel more motivated"* (Final Interview : Lines 32-35). Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013:257) quote Deleuze who believes that the role of the teacher in an inclusive classroom, is not necessarily to fix the learner's deficits, but rather to open up to the child, open up to difference and accepting that differences in children are as normal. They believe that this perspective can help teachers focus on *abilities* of children rather than their problems. Hayes, et al., (2006:47) believe that teachers need time for professional dialogue and opportunities to access collegial support structures. They are also of the opinion that improving teachers' professional knowledge will improve students' academic performance.

Ms C (Grade 3) responded to this question saying that learners found processing and comprehension difficult. She believes that their failure to process instructions accurately causes learners to experience tremendous anxiety. She said, *"So they already trying to process things they haven't actually even heard, OK, so they don't listen, umm, so that's why they don't process or comprehend, so they are very*

anxious about it, so they are trying to *jump ahead all the time because of the anxiety"* (Final Interview: Lines 6-8). Perhaps information provided by Kirshner, Sweller & Clark on the working memory could shed light on why these learners find processing of instructions so challenging and why they experience such anxiety. Kirshner et al., (2006:77) tell us that, "Working memory has two well-known characteristics: When processing novel information, it is very limited in duration and capacity. We have known at least since Peterson and Peterson (1959) that almost all information stored in working memory and not rehearsed is lost within 30 seconds and have known at least since Miller (1956) that the capacity of working memory is limited to only a very small number of elements." Ms C said that the strategy she found helpful to counter lack of focus was to ensure learners made eye-contact with her because this would indicate if there was real engagement. She finds if she has learners reading using a marker, such as a ruler to keep the place, this helps keep learners on task.

Participant teachers were asked, "*What kind of environment supports a child who experiences barriers to learning?"* A learner who is challenged could experience internal and external pressures. Ms B (Grade 2) mentioned the anxiety experienced by these learners. It has emerged throughout this research that parents and pupils experience a high level of anxiety. A way to counteract some of these pressures and support learners is suggested by Leroy, Bressoux, Sarrazin & Trouilloud (2007) who propose the theory of self-determination which could in fact be adopted by both teachers and parents. The practice of this theory manifests in the learner volunteering to do an activity for its own sake, and not for external incentives or rewards and is best suited to, "scholastic learning because it pushes students to seek out challenging situations, stretch their abilities and persevere in the face of difficulty" (Leroy et al., 2007:530). In a classroom environment, this intrinsic motivation can be developed through a relationship with their teacher and the atmosphere created in the classroom. Ms B (Grade 2) describes a climate that supports this theory when she says, *"Learners need to feel comfortable making mistakes"* (Final Interview: Lines 87-89). Motivational climates, "pay more attention to what students say, and allot ample time for students to solve problems by themselves. Also, they provide more information feed-back to students concerning their personal progress and task mastery" (Leroy et al., 2007:530). The theories of Leroy et al., (2007) are certainly aligned to Productive Pedagogies. Problematic

knowledge which is the construction of knowledge, supports the idea that pupils learn best when they are presented with challenging tasks in a supportive environment. The ideal is that tasks should be regulated by learners in terms of pace and direction in a socially supportive environment.

Ms A (Grade 1) felt that it was important for these learners to be in an environment in which they felt safe and nurtured. Ms A added that in the Bridging Class children don't experience the same competitive pressures as they would in the mainstream class. In Ms A's words, *"It's just smaller, it's quieter, and they don't have that competitiveness"* (Final Interview: Lines 85-86).

Ms B (Grade 2) responded to this question saying that the environment should be calm, with no pressures. She mentioned the issue of anxiety experienced by these learners. Ms B said the learners need to feel comfortable making mistakes. She added, *"I try not to make a big deal of it. I'll call them aside and help them understand, let them redo it, just so that they feel comfortable enough to try"* (Final Interview: Lines 87-89). It is easy, especially in a private school where parents are paying so much more for their children's education to feel the pressure to compete as a teacher and compare the performance of learners. The pressures Ms B (Grade 2) might be referring to could be external, from parents, or from teachers who themselves are anxious about learners achieving the required results for them to mainstream. Nias (1999:70) offers us insight as to the role of a teacher in a learner's life, "Although teachers moral responsibility for children sometimes focuses upon their physical, social, emotional, or moral welfare, they are primarily concerned with their pupils' learning. Throughout the age ranges and in all types of school, teachers judge their success by and draw their main job satisfaction from knowing that they have helped individuals build knowledge and develop skills. Their aspiration is to be effective as practitioners. *Pupils progress is at the heart of answerability."* (my italics).

Ms B also said that structure was vital in this environment and the children really respond well. It could be argued that learners who experience barriers to learning need very structured, unambiguous lessons with clear instructions and goals. Kirschner, Sweller & Clark (2006:75) posit that, "The goal (of instruction) is to give learners specific guidance about how to cognitively manipulate information in ways

that are consistent with a learning goal, and store the result in long-term memory." I also observed in Ms B's class that in the Maths lesson which included a game, the criteria were explicit, which is an element of the Supportive Classroom Environment, with the teacher introducing the game and demonstrating to learners how to participate. The purpose of the game was to prepare the learners to handle 'balancing sums', i.e. (5 X 2) + 1 = ___ +7; (6 X 2) – 2 = 20 - ____ Ms B revised vertical and horizontal sums in preparation for the written tasks involving balancing sums. The lesson was very structured and learners coped well and appeared to enjoy the lesson. The structure of this classroom environment also provided opportunities for *student self-regulation.* Children were totally engaged in the learning activities and the teacher did not have to correct behaviour.

Ms C (Grade 3) believes that a nurturing, safe environment supports a pupil with barriers to learning. She was emphatic about the teacher building the learner's confidence. She put it this way, *"You have to try and make them feel like they can do things; you have to make them feel they have got something; that they can do it, because in their heads, they can't."* (Final Interview: Lines 62-64). Ms C felt it was a combination of nurturing, pushing, encouraging and loving them that provides optimum support. Ms C demonstrated this during the lesson, when at one point during the Maths lesson, she asked a learner to articulate her understanding of a maths concept by providing a number sentence. The answer the learner gave was correct, and Ms C, delighted at the learners' success, asked for a 'high-five'. This occurred on a number of occasions.

Teachers were asked the question, "*What factors discourage pupil progress?"* Progress is a general term and to understand its implications, it is useful to define what constitutes authentic pedagogical practice. Shulman (2004:225) believes that, "Critical features of teaching, such as the subject matter being taught, the classroom context, the physical and psychological characteristics of the students, or the accomplishment of purposes not readily assessed on standardized tests" are core measurables of effective teaching. Shulman (2004:225) says further, "Teaching ends with new comprehension by both the teacher and the student."

The question of what discourages pupil progress was asked to explore factors which might inhibit or interfere with this process. Ms A (Grade 1) responded to this question

by saying, *"I think not enough consolidation, and that is sort of happening on the homework level, not doing homework, the parents not being supportive, doing the homework, and not taking them for therapy, or stopping* therapy, and *some of the children being easily distracted"* (Final Interview: Lines 92-95). Ms A's concern raises an important issue which contributes to the success of the Bridging Class pupils and that is, the partnership between the school and family. A parent who stops therapy prematurely is probably not benefitting from a relationship of trust and collaboration with the teacher or the school. Epstein (1992:3) tells us that, "Productive connections may contribute to improving youngster's academic skills, self-esteem, positive attitudes towards learning, independence, other achievements, accomplishments, and other behaviours characteristic of successful individuals."

Ms B (Grade 2) said she felt that anxiety, low self-esteem and emotional stress coming from home were factors that impacted on learning. She also added that if learners were taking medication and the dosages were not correct, which she said was quite common, this would also inhibit progress. Incompetent external therapists also impact on progress. Ms B said, *"The child will go to therapy year after year and there is no improvement, as well as, I think the last one would be, if there is no help from home, no homework being done, I think that would impact it (pupil progress) as well"* (Final Interview: Lines 104-106). It is interesting to note that in a study conducted by Taylor, Muller, Vinjevold (2003) quoted by Christie (2008), one of the factors that support and improve school results is children reading at home and doing their homework. This finding is also supported by Epstein (1992) quoting Rich and Jones (1977) who presented early evidence that extra time at home produces gains in early, elementary student's reading scores equivalent to those made by students in more expensive pull-out programmes at school.

Ms C (Grade 3) felt if learners were not given enough time to consolidate, and she felt as it stands, with the current timetable, there isn't enough time for consolidation. Ms C also felt that the competition between learners created anxiety which was as she put it, "*a big stumbling block"* (Final Interview: Line 70). A learner who experiences barriers to learning is likely to experience a loss of self-esteem especially when comparing results with other learners. It could be argued that the nature of a classroom environment sets this up. Hayes (2006:63) suggests that a Supportive Classroom Environment can minimize this when the teacher conveys

high expectations of *all* learners and encourages them, “to try hard to master challenging academic work.” Nias (1999:77) believes that, “appropriate levels of self-esteem and security are necessary conditions for learning.” It could be said that the combination of the teacher’s attention and continuous encouragement and validation of learner’s efforts should help to sustain good self-esteem. The teacher should try to create a culture of ‘process orientation’ rather than a fixation on results.

Participant teachers were asked a question which deals with the possibility of adapting the curriculum to suit the needs of learners. Adaptations may support learners and bridge the gap between the teachers’ comprehension and learners’ understanding. It could be argued that both teachers and learners are more likely to succeed if they vary their strategies and adapt the material to the needs of the learners. Shulman (2004:238) describes the process this way, “Adaptation is the process of fitting the represented material to the characteristics of the students. What are the relevant aspects of student ability, gender, language, culture, motivations, or prior knowledge and skills that will affect their responses to different forms of representation and presentation? What student conceptions, misconceptions, expectations, motives, difficulties, or strategies might influence the ways in which they approach, interpret, understand, or misunderstand the material?” Shulman’s description of adaptation is at the core of what Bridging Class learners are likely to need the teacher to do for the best possible learning outcomes. After taking into account the above factors, the teacher needs to tailor the activities to suit the needs of learners. Shulman (2004:238) uses the metaphor of ‘a suit of clothing’ to describe the ‘tailoring’ process. The colour, the style, the size need to be selected carefully, and once the suit has been manufactured, “it must be tailored to fit perfectly.”

Ms A (Grade 1) said that although she found she could work with the curriculum without having to make many changes, she finds she often has to teach the lesson more than once. She may have to do more activities and/or more examples to consolidate the concepts. She said the teacher needs to continually assess to ascertain that the learners have grasped the concepts. This strategy is supported by Hayes, et al., (2006:102) which states, “*productive assessment* requires *all* students to accomplish tasks at high levels.” Productive Pedagogy is not suggesting lowering the standards, but rather the pedagogies should, “provide multiple opportunities for

learners to practise, demonstrate and receive feedback on their performance, relative to explicit criteria on tasks over which they feel a sense of ownership." In a Supportive Classroom Environment, according to Hayes, et al., (2006:102), *student direction of ownership* is present when, "students are able to influence the tasks they will do in order to complete the assessment requirements of a particular unit." An example of these tasks might include group work, or research or investigative projects. Students can assume ownership when they can take responsibility for activities required to complete the work.

Ms B (Grade 2) experienced the question of adaptation differently. She said that the teachers receive a preparation plan (which they prepare as a group). There are criteria to cover, but as she says, *"there are different ways in which each teacher covers it, so it just depends on what you want to do. You make sure that what you are teaching is suitable for them"* (Final Interview: Lines 160-162). It seems that teachers are at liberty to make the necessary changes and adjust pedagogic practices to ensure learners will acquire a deep understanding of the concepts in Foundation Phase.

Ms C (Grade 3) felt that the learners were able to cope with the demands of the curriculum if it is kept at a basic level and learners were not extended. When asked if she made any adaptions to the English lesson observed on degrees of comparison, she replied she had not needed to make any adaptations and the lesson had worked well. During observation it was noted that examples used may not always have contributed to consolidation of concepts. For example, the teacher wanted the learners to make degrees of comparison and the example she used was, "The pencil case is beautiful, the marker is more beautiful and the soap is the most beautiful". It could be argued that poor examples may be confusing, especially for learners who are challenged and need authentic concrete examples that provide clarity of meaning. The teacher gave the learners a worksheet containing examples that they did not understand or relate to. For example, John Lennon was (OLD)_____ than Paul McCartney. Even when the teacher asked if anyone knew who these men were, and no one could answer, she did not explain that they were musicians who were famous in the 1960's, but instead, she moved onto the next sentence which was just as obscure for these learners. For example, "Some people think the Met is (GOOD)_____ the Louvre. Again, no explanation was

offered about what the Met or Louvre is. Eventually she said, *"Read the worksheet yourselves."* Even if some of the learners had managed to change the word 'old' to 'older' or 'good' to 'better', I would question the value of this exercise.

According to Hayes, et al., (2006:102) a supportive classroom environment will provide explicit criteria, especially to learners who struggle. To provide adequate support needs specific statements about what constitutes high- quality performance. They also need sufficient scaffolding during the learning processes to facilitate success. Hayes et al., (2006:102) believe that support at the point of assessment requires:

- *Student direction of assessment tasks* – the degree to which learners determine the assessment task
- *Explicit quality performance criteria* – criteria for what counts as high quality student performance is made explicit

It could be argued that what is also key to the improvement of pedagogic practices is an analysis of what worked, or didn't work and why. Shulman (2004:241) believes that in this process of reflection, the teacher, "reconstructs, re-enacts, and/or recaptures the events, the emotions, and the accomplishments." Hayes, et al., (2006:102) cites the work of (Louis, Mark & Kruse 1996:758) who believe this process can increase teachers' 'sense of craft'.

Having discussed how teachers provide a supportive classroom environment, it was of interest to ask how they, themselves feel supported. Participant teachers were asked, *"In what ways do you feel supported or unsupported in the work you do?"* In this research it was useful to interview participant teachers to explore how they felt about teaching Bridging Class learners, and to glean a sense of their psychological frame of mind, as this is likely to influence pedagogical practice. Nias (1999:71) comments on the level of care and commitment teachers are expected to show in their professions. She writes, "Primary teachers continue to accept their accountability to everyone (Broadfoot & Osborn, 1998; 1995), their responsibility for everything (Nias, 1989; Evans et al, 1994; Jeffrey and Woods, 1996), and, underlying all of this, the constant burden of guilt which Hargreaves A. (1994) sees as characteristic of the profession."

Ms A (Grade 1) discussed the issue of support in a more general way. She felt that placing these learners in the correct environment was key. There was very often a fine line between a placement in the Bridging Class and in a remedial school. She implied that this responsibility was really challenging because the teacher in Grade One was assessing whether the learner would 'make it' in a mainstream school, or would need to be referred to a remedial school. She said, *"..when you have that remedial child that is waiting for a remedial school sitting in your class, most of us are not 'remedially' trained, so we don't have those tools to help that specific child"* (Initial Interview: Lines 84-85). Ms A expressed the importance of studying further. She is at present upgrading her teaching skills. Ms A (Grade 1) put it this way, *"I am studying further. Teachers from the Bridging Class need to do that in order to keep up with new strategies. I think, keeping up with, even if you don't do remedial, but how to help these children"* (Initial Interview: Lines 95-97). Ms A also mentioned the fact that the school had opened more Bridging Classes in the past three years, was a help because there were more teachers doing this job which enabled them to form a support group. In the past, each grade had one Bridging class each. Ms A also said the Remedial Therapists, who work mostly with the learners in the mainstream, were also a valued source of support because Bridging Class teachers were able to consult them and draw on their expertise. In her words, Ms A said, *"..the four of us can say "how you doing/what are you doing different in your class, and I think more Bridging Classes help the parents as well"* (Initial Interview: Lines 89-90).

Ms B (Grade 2) felt very supported by her family. She spends a lot of time on the phone in the afternoons and weekends. They are accommodating even though phone conversations don't always happen at times that suit them. Ms B felt supported by the parents, and most of the time they are grateful for the Bridging Class placement. Occasionally, when Ms B encounters some resistance by parents to the advice or recommendations, she will enlist the help of all the therapists. She will call a 'round-table meeting' which will include parents and therapists to discuss how best to support a learner. As she puts it, *"I have found the most success I have experienced is, when the child, teacher, parents and therapists all co-operate together"* (Initial Interview Lines 53-54).

Ms C (Grade 3) responded to the question of support or lack thereof, by saying*, "I feel very supported by our remedial therapist, Mrs S, by the Social Worker, umm,*

and by other teachers in the group because they have to be very understanding that we are probably behind, that we have to go more slowly" (Initial Interview: Lines 25-27). She also said she would like her Bridging Class colleagues to meet, brainstorm ideas and offer each other support.

What has emerged from the discussion about supporting Bridging Class teachers, is that it is very helpful to be able to discuss issues that are specific to teachers who work with challenged learners. These teachers also value the expertise of remedial therapists and social workers. In their discussion on Professional Learning Communities, Hayes, et al., (2006:185) cites the work of (Louis, Kruse & Marks 1996), who formed part of the CORS (Centre for Restructuring and Schools) project and contributed to the Productive Pedagogies Research. Hayes, et al., (2006:185) posit that Professional Learning Communities have a, "positive influence on pedagogy and on student learning outcomes." The CORS project provided the core theoretical framework for the QSRLS (Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study). Hayes, et al., (2006:185) cite (Louis, et al.,1996) who believe that regular contact between practitioners is important because teachers develop their 'sense of craft' and professional learning communities are likely to increase teachers' sense of commitment to successful learning for all learners. Hayes, et al., (2006:186) provide a model developed by (Louis, et al., 1996) which has five essential elements of practice:

- Shared norms and values
- A collective focus on student learning
- Collaboration to foster sharing of expertise
- Deprivatised practice, including peer-coaching and team-teaching
- Reflective dialogue

Two questions were asked about Assessment as part of a Supportive Classroom Environment. The first was, *"What kinds of assessment do you use in the Bridging Class?"* The second, was, *"What do you see as the purpose of assessment?"* According to Hayes, et al., (2006) assessment is used in the Productive Pedagogies context in two ways. The first relates to individual performance; the other is for social purposes and the contribution assessment makes to a learning community for setting standards. Assessment practices should inform teachers of pupil progress

but also help shape pedagogy in ways that support learners. Hayes, et al., (2006:63) writes, “The presence of *explicit criteria* was identified by frequent, detailed and specific statements about the nature of high-quality student achievement. This involved overall statements regarding tasks or assignments, about a specific lesson or programme of work, or about performance at different stages in a lesson.”

Ms A (Grade 1) responded to the question about the different kinds of assessment, saying, *“We use the same assessment as the mainstream and we do that specifically so we can actually see where our children are at”* (Final Interview: Lines 210-211). They use external bench mark tests as well as weekly ‘Friday’ tests. I am assuming that Bridging Classes must be continually compared to mainstream classes because the main aim of the Bridging Class is to provide sufficient support to learners to be able to re-enter mainstream as quickly as possible.

When asked what Ms A (Grade 1) saw as the *purpose for assessment*, she said it was to test their understanding. She said sometimes it looks as though they understand, but when you get the written assessment, you can see haven’t understood. She also mentioned that you will often see the level of anxiety when they are being tested and performance anxiety is evident. Ms A said that with regard to children who perform well, this is also useful information because even though they perform even better than many mainstream learners, there are other reasons why they are in the Bridging Class, and therefore still need the support of a Bridging Class environment. In other words, the measure is not just academic performance, but at least as important is the child’s emotional and social well-being. It could be argued that the child’s emotional health will impact on performance.

Whilst learning to write the letters of the alphabet, Ms A (Grade 1) applied the same format for each letter. She would begin with a story; learners wrote the letter under supervision, and copied sentences off the board. The structure of this lesson provided explicit criteria, but did not challenge the learners in any way.

Ms B (Grade 2) was asked, “*what kinds of assessment are used in the Grade 2 Bridging Class?”* She responded by saying they do the same weekly assessments as the rest of the grades which are the formal maths and spelling tests. They also do the same Maths and English external and internal bench mark tests as mainstream. Mrs B says she observes the children informally during the lessons and

this is most useful because the learner don't know they are being assessed, and therefore they are not anxious, "*whereas the anxiety definitely comes out in formal tests"* (Final Interview: Lines 184-185). Mrs B (Grade 2) was asked what she saw as the purpose for assessment. She responded saying that apart from needing marks for reports, some learners fall between the cracks and so they needed to check they were all in the same place. Assessment results also provide information about what needs to be retaught or consolidated. Ms B said, *"Sometimes after an assessment, I realise my children didn't score well, and I will have to go back and revise some concepts"* (Final Interview: Lines 193-194). The reflective process which Shulman (2004) refers to can also help the teacher assess what gaps still exist, and analyse how best to reteach sections. Shulman (2004:241) says, "Central to this process will be a review of the teaching in comparison to the ends that were sought." Ms B added that a Bridging Class teacher usually knows exactly what the capabilities of each learner are, but what is most important in this context is, to gauge whether the learner is ready for mainstream.

During a maths lesson in which learners were required to play a game, Ms B demonstrated with some learners, how to play the game which made the rules and requirements specific. Once the groups of learners started playing the same, the teacher moved around to each group to ensure they had understood how to play the game.

Teacher: "What's 6 X 2, J?"

J: "16"

Teacher: "Hold up 6 fingers. Let's go through the tables".

J points to his baby finger and calls, "2", then to the ring finger and calls "4" etc until he reaches his thumb on his right hand and says, "12".

Teacher: "So, what's 6 X 2?"

J: "12".

The teacher supported and scaffolded the learning process to ensure success.

Ms C (Grade 3) was asked, "*What kinds of assessments do you use?"* Ms C said her class did continuous and weekly assessments. They do maths and spelling tests every week. They do "Review Tests", and they also do external and internal language and maths bench mark tests. Ms C was asked what the difference was between weekly and continuous assessments. Ms C said, "*I think continuous is weekly because it is weekly and done continuously, and I think also just monitoring their daily work, their integration, their everything, so it's continuous"* (Final Interview: Lines 127-128). During the maths lesson observed, whilst learners were constructing their 'model' (bar graph) and number sentence, the teacher went over to teach learner to check each learner's work. This close monitoring and immediate feedback is a form of assessment. It helps the learner experience success and builds confidence. Ms C rubbed out their work if it was not correct and spoke through the steps to ensure the learner understood the process and could see the final outcome, which was the solution to the problem. At no point did Ms C make any kind of negative comment if the work was incorrect. Instead, she made statements like, *"OK, so now, you have labelled your model, what do you have to do now to do your calculation? What goes on top? What goes underneath?"* When the learner saw the correct outcome and expressed pleasure, the teacher validated the efforts of the learner. Ms C was asked, "*What do you see as the purpose for assessments. What kind of information are you hoping for?"* Ms C responded by saying, *"We need to see where these kids are at, especially when they have to go up (to Grade 4) It will help us to determine whether they should stay in a Bridging Class, or go into mainstream"* (Final Interview: Lines 11-133).

It seems Bridging Class teachers assess in different ways, continuously, and although they seem strongly motivated to ensure learners acquire new skills and knowledge, there is also a huge pressure to ensure learners will reach the required standard to enter the mainstream. Productive Assessment requires learners to complete tasks at high levels. Hayes, et al., (2006:102) discuss Productive Pedagogy research on assessment and inform us that, "Supportive Classroom pedagogies are significantly related with academic performance. These pedagogies provide sufficient opportunities for learners to practice, demonstrate and receive feedback on their performance, relative to *explicit criteria* on tasks over which they feel a sense of ownership."

Gipps (1999) tells us that there has been a significant change in our understanding of how learning takes place and this has implications for assessment of tasks. Gipps (1999) quotes Shepard (1991) who informs us that modern cognitive psychology has built on the idea that we learn new knowledge when it makes sense. Gipps (1999:372) writes, "Learning occurs not by recording information, but by interpreting it, so instructions must be seen not as direct transfer of knowledge, but as an intervention in an ongoing knowledge construction process." A constructivist approach to learning, suggests Gipps (1999:374) requires, "assessment to be diverse, examining in more depth the structure and quality of students' learning and understanding."

4.2.3 Engagement with Difference

Hayes, et al., (2006:67) claim that working with and valuing difference is the element of Productive Pedagogy that provides opportunities for *all* learners to improve their academic and social outcomes. Further, Hayes, et al., (2006) believe that educating to think and behave in ways that respect and celebrate diversity will prepare learners to contribute a 'desirable society'. Working and valuing differences entails:

- *Cultural knowledge and group identities* – diverse cultures are brought into play in the school environment.
- *Inclusivity* – deliberate attempts are made to increase learner of different backgrounds, and in this research, inclusivity discusses learners with different abilities.
- *Group Identities in a learning community* – teaching and building a sense of community
- *Citizenship* – attempts are made to promote active citizenship

During interviews and observations in this research, some elements of Engagement with Difference were relevant, whilst others hardly featured at all. As an example, *cultural knowledge and group identities* defined by Hayes, et al., (2006) as knowledge of diverse cultures and building a sense of community hardly featured in any of the English or Maths lessons observed. There was one reference to an Indebele pattern on a house which a Grade One learners made in the Maths lesson whilst identifying shapes in a village scene on a poster. One of the reasons for the lack of reference to other cultures may be because in the school in which the field

work for this research was conducted, most of the learners share the same race and religious identity.

Elements of *Active Citizenship* were observed. Active Citizenship as defined by Hayes et al., (2006:69) involves teachers who, "have the responsibility to ensure that no groups or individuals are excluded from practices and institutions." Most schools do not make adequate provision to allow learners with moderate learning difficulties to engage with a high quality curriculum at their own pace in preparation to enter the mainstream. This construct of class within a mainstream environment is unique and complies with the above definition of Active Citizenship.

In this section, participant teachers were asked questions to explore their perceptions of the role of Bridging Class teachers as well as their experiences in the classroom. I have also commented on what was observed about their pedagogic practice. Teachers were asked, "*How would you describe the nature of the Bridging Class?"* Ms A (Grade 1) said at *"our school" the Bridging Class is a "mainstream class with less children."* She added that they work at a slightly slower pace but follow the same curriculum as mainstream. The children, she said, receive more attention from the teacher. An example of the high level of supervision in this class was observed during the Maths lesson working with shapes. Learners were required, as a written activity, to complete patterns of shapes. The teacher walked around to check that every learner had understood the instructions by checking the work. This did not take long because there are only 15 learners in the class.

Ms B (Grade 2) mentioned the fact that there are fewer children, but learners do the same work as mainstream. She added, "*There is more time for the teacher to deal with various learning difficulties and the difficulties range from social, emotional and even physical difficulties."* (Initial Interview: Lines 5-7). During the Maths lesson, Ms B also walked around checking pupil's work and scaffolding the strategies she had taught them previously to be able to complete 'balancing sums'. For example, she asked a learner, *"What do we do with the times sum?"* Learner answered, *"We take a photo of the answer and then carry on."* With a walk-about, that took around 5 minutes, she was able to check that learners had understood the concepts and were on task with their written work.

Ms C (Grade 3) responded to the question pertaining to the nature of the class, saying, *"there are fewer kids in the class, which makes it far easier to work individually with children."* She also mentioned that, *"although they (learners) do the mainstream curriculum, they work more slowly with these children"* (Initial Interview Lines 5-7).

The next question participant teachers were asked was, "*What do you see as being the core differences in the way you teach a Bridging Class as opposed to a mainstream class?"* Ms A (Grade 1) said that the main difference is the fact that there are fewer children and therefore you can focus on their individual needs. She said, *"I think the Bridging Class teacher needs to be very patient"* (Initial Interview Line 12). She mentioned the reasons for being placed in the Bridging Class stemmed from reasons such as anxiety, parents in the process of a divorce, or academic barriers. She said the teacher needs to apply many strategies because you also need to take into account that children learn differently.

Ms B (Grade 2) expressed that in her experience, she spends a lot more time introducing concepts and using concrete apparatus. She implied that the balance was between dedicating more time to consolidating concepts and giving more individual attention and this was challenging because the Bridging Classes are expected to cover the same curriculum and assessment are standardized across the grade. She said*, "I believe in giving the children a good foundation for a basic understanding of all the principles taught"* (Initial Interview Lines 13-15). She emphasized, *quality* over *quantity,* in order to devote more time to individual learners or groups of learners.

Ms C (Grade 3) said the core differences between mainstream and Bridging Class teaching are that the teacher needs to be more specific and take much longer introducing and consolidating concepts. Ms C issued very specific instructions during the Maths lesson observed, *"We have to draw a model that shows more boys than girls. Are you going to draw the model next to the margin? No. You are going to skip 4 blocks and then draw. We use 10 blocks to draw our model*." Gathercole & Alloway (2007) observed that learners with working memory deficits, which could be experienced by learners in a Bridging Class, need organizational strategies, and they recommend breaking tasks down into component parts where possible. The

teacher in this case, did not assume all learners would set out the problem correctly, and therefore articulated the steps to remind learners of how this should be done.

Having articulated their perceptions of differences between teaching in mainstream and Bridging Classes, participant teachers were then asked to describe their role as Bridging Class teachers. Ms A (Grade 1) intimated you need to convey your belief in their ability to succeed. She said, *"The kids always say I believe they can do it. It's a huge thing. You got to believe in them and they must know you believe in them, that's very important"* (Initial Interview Line 62-64). Ms A implied that these learners often enter school doubting their ability to succeed. She spoke of nurturing, encouraging and motivating learners to reach their potential. During the English lesson, Ms A taught, she constantly praised learners for their efforts. The lack of confidence was evident as they checked continuously with the teacher that work was correct, and she made statements like, "*Beautiful K, I am proud of you."* Ms A created a safe environment in which learners could take risks. Her approach was summed up well when one learner called out, *"as long as we try our best."* Ms A's pedagogic style of caring and affirmation of learners is supported by Nias (1999) quoting Drummond (1995) who believes that, "We cannot help children learn if we do not pay close attention to them in the sense in which Weil (1986) uses the word. Weil suggests that 'attention' implies the act of putting "oneself in someone else's place, listening for justice and virtue, being alive to truth and to affliction" (Drummond, 1995, p.10).

Ms B (Grade 2) saw her role as a Bridging Class teacher was to co-ordinate communication and co-operation between the four parties responsible for the progress of the Bridging Class learner, namely, the teacher, parent, therapists and child. She mentioned that since she has the same responsibilities as a mainstream class teacher, she needed to conduct continual assessments, and identify difficulties as quickly as possible.

Ms C (Grade 3) sees that the role of the Bridging Class teacher is to be patient, caring and flexible. She said, *"You have to work along with the kids; often things don't go as planned"* (Initial Interview Lines 14-15). She also mentioned that because the learners are challenged, she spends a lot of time encouraging and building their confidence. Many of the learners in her class have emotional as well as academic

challenges. Ms C spent a lot of time mediating friendship issues almost at the expense of teaching time. It is interesting to note that Ms C seems to imply that the emotional well- being of learners has an impact on their learning and her role is to try to help resolve the emotional challenges experienced by these learners. Nias (1999:67) quotes Noddings (1992; 1994) who has, "vigorously argued that caring in this affective sense is not simply an adjunct or aid to the achievement of cognitive goals. Rather, it is central to teaching and should be consciously adopted as amoral basis for practice in classrooms and schools."

Participant teachers were then asked, *"How would you describe your experience of teaching Bridging Class learners?"* Ms A (Grade 1) said that as Bridging Class teacher, you have to be able to adapt to the children. In her words, *"..it depends if the children are mainstream type of children with anxiety needs or a true academic problem bordering on remedial and that changes again, the dynamic of whole class"* (Initial Interview Lines 40-41). Ms A also implied that the intensity of the relationship with the learners can be 'more draining' than with mainstream learners.

Ms B (Grade 2) responded to this question by saying that although the job can be very draining, it is also rewarding. She mentioned the expectation for the Bridging Class teacher to be more tolerant with the learners and their parents. Ms B mentioned that you, the teacher, needs to be self-confident because, *"you can easily be disheartened when the children don't work, you know, do what you expect them to do"* (Initial Interview Lines 37-39). The range of emotions required, according to Ms B, involved patience, caring, flexibility and assertiveness. Ms C (Grade 3) said her experiences as a Bridging Class teacher had taught her to be far more patient and it had helped her develop a different way of teaching.

What emerged from two of the three participants could be described as a fatigue. Bridging Class teachers are accountable to parents, therapists and learners. Words such as 'draining and 'disheartened' were used when they described their experience of teaching learners in a Bridging Class. Nias (1999:71) observed that over the years teachers have been expected to take on moral aspirations described as 'care' and 'commitment' which she feels is beyond the capacity for any practitioner consistently to fulfil.

Accepting accountability for everyone as inclusion demands could potentially contribute to fatigue. Teacher participants were asked to explain their understandings and feelings about Inclusion. Ms A (Grade 1) answered this question by saying, *"I understand Inclusion as children with special needs, physical or academic that would be in a mainstream environment"* (Final Interview Lines 98-99). When asked how Ms A felt about Inclusion she said she thought it was *"amazing",* but doubted it would work in this school because there is already a stigma attached to being in a Bridging Class even though, said Mrs A, *"We are not different, it's just that we have a smaller number of children in our classes"* (Final Interview Line 104). She felt that it would not be the children that would have a problem with the concept of Inclusion, but rather the parents, from the Bridging Classes and the mainstream.

Ms B (Grade 2) said she wasn't sure of what Inclusion meant, but she *"googled*" it, and she thought she was on the right track. Her understanding of Inclusion is that it's learners with 'different needs' included in a mainstream class who need an individual teaching plan. She thought classes would need to be smaller to accommodate this *"type of child",* and possibly a facilitator would be needed to help. When asked if Ms B was able to apply any aspects of Inclusion, she replied saying that she did apply Inclusive strategies, especially for learners whose names were down for remedial schools. She said she adapted her pedagogy to accommodate these learners. Ms B also felt that for Inclusion to work, the teachers would need to be trained because the school structure as it exists, is mark based, with learners having to meet certain criteria Ms B's comment about the need for training is significant. Productive Pedagogies Research informs us that, "most teachers do not know how to deal effectively with difference in classrooms." (Hayes et al., 2006:165). If teachers were provided with more training and support, they may be exposed to Deleuzes' approach to Inclusive education quoted by Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013:257) which focuses on, "opening up to the child, thus opening up to difference, and differences between children are regarded as natural." The other point which Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013:257) make is that, "teachers need to be constantly balancing between an individual trajectory and the standard curriculum." An inclusive environment requires teachers to differentiate, organize and manage the classroom flexibly, support and encourage appropriate social skills and help learners to acquire new knowledge. When observing Ms B teaching a

Maths lesson, she provided support strategies for *all* learners to be able to solve the maths problems. For example, before working in their books, she had learners doing examples on their white boards. She asked individual learners to articulate their understanding of the steps used to find the solution to the problem.

Ms C (Grade 3) thought Inclusion meant accommodating learners with difficulties in mainstream a class. When asked how she felt about Inclusion, she said she had never really worked with, or experienced it. She said she like the idea of Inclusion because she believes Bridging Classes carry a stigma being that they are separated from mainstream. In her words, *"they would be treated as normal, whereas, it's almost like they are not normal, by being separated"* (Final Interview Lines 77-78).

What emerged from the discussion about Inclusion from all the participant teachers is that none of them really understood much about Inclusion or explored the concept in theory, but it appears that inadvertently, they are applying some forms of inclusion pedagogy. Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013:246) note that, "A critical factor for the success of inclusive education is the c*ompetence* of teachers and their *attitude* towards inclusion." (My italics). They believe it is the responsibility of the school to provide opportunities for learners to be part of a class/group. They contend that diversity is the norm in society as well as in a classroom and every child is entitled to a good education. This view supports the claim made by Delpit quoted by Lingard and Mills (2007) that, "When teachers are committed to teaching *all* students, and when they understand that through their teaching change can occur, then the chance for transformation is great."

Since participant teachers were asked to discuss their understanding and views about Inclusion, it seemed pertinent to ask for their perceptions about differentiation. The definition of differentiation according to Qualter (1996) quoted by Westwood (2001:6) suggests that "differentiation involves addressing the needs to students in ways that are appropriate to each individual, and involves processes of identifying, for each learner, the most effective strategies for achieving lesson objectives." Ms A (Grade 1) responded to the question saying, *"So, differentiation for me, is, the children for a particular subject, that can be your stronger group, or your middle group, or your weaker group, and to try and differentiate your activities, so that it would be similar, but maybe one group to write more sentences, or the weaker group*

can do so much and would do less work, all on the same activity, but you know, just levelled" (Final Interview Lines 163-167).

Ms B (Grade 2) understood the concept of differentiation, as grouping learners according to ability and whilst extending her 'top children', she would work on the carpet with the weaker group. Ms C (Grade 3) said she was able to apply differentiation to some extent. She added, *"So, there is a certain group of kids that are academically a bit further ahead than a couple of the others, so I tend to work a little bit differently with them, obviously, and there is one is exceptionally bright, and I try to get her to just move on, so in that way, I do have to differentiate to a certain extent"* (Final Interview Lines 112-116).

Although participant teachers did not deliver different levels of instruction to different groups of learners, they were observed offering more assistance to individual learners. They also monitored the work of some learners more than others. It seemed that intuitively they applied strategies of differentiation.

It could be argued that the structure of the Bridging Class; in that learners are grouped together with similar challenges in a smaller class, facilitates strategies to accommodate learners who may need more assistance, extra practice, or more time to complete tasks. Westwood (2001:7) writes, "The way students are grouped for specific purposes (e.g. by ability, interest, friendships) can also be a part of differentiation of the teaching process."

Another comment that Westwood (2001:8) quoting (Davies, 2000), makes, is that differentiation should never be seen as a 'soft option' because if the teacher lowers expectations, the risk is the 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. Learners will produce less and less and teachers will, in turn, expect less and less.

In all lessons I observed, I checked daily/weekly planning schedules, and learners were following the mainstream curriculum. The teachers, parents and learners in the Bridging Classes understand that the goal of Bridging Class is educational support with the aim of reintegrating the learner back into mainstream. The component of Productive Pedagogies; *working with and valuing difference,* underpins the notion that supports the academic and social development of all learners, and leaders need to engage learners in critical thinking. Hayes, et al., 2006:108) believe that this

requires, “higher-order thinking skills in order to describe, analyse, evaluate and synthesise differences.” Hayes, et al., (2006:109) informs us that tasks that work with and value difference will incorporate critical thinking skills and problem-based tasks; whereas those that don’t will tend to teach without learner engagement on knowledge construction; “a trait of dominant forms of knowledge” (Hayes, et al., 2006:108).

The questions in this section were designed to glean an understanding of whether pedagogic practices in the Bridging Classes value and work with difference. An analysis of the data revealed that although participant teachers were sympathetic, emotionally supportive, and the structure of the Bridging Classes accommodated learner’s needs to a large extent, none of them expressed the notion that *all* learners, regardless of their limitations were entitled to pedagogy that accomplished what Shulman (2004:235) describes as, “student literacy, student freedom to use and enjoy, student responsibility to care and care for, to believe and respect, to inquire and discover, to develop understandings, skills, and values needed to function in a free and just society.”

4.2.4 Connectedness to the World

It would seem that this component of Productive Pedagogy gives learners the opportunity to apply their learning to real-world situations and this could make learning experiences real and meaningful. The components of Connectedness to the World as defined by Hayes, (2006:98) comprise of:

- Integrated school knowledge; the degree to which school knowledge is integrated across subject boundaries.
- Links to background knowledge; the extent to which assessment tasks draw on learners’ background knowledge.
- Audience beyond school; the extent to which the task can be addressed to an audience beyond the classroom.
- Problem-based tasks; the extent to which the assessment task is based on solving a specific problem. There is no correct answer and learners are engaged in knowledge construction.

The school at which this research was conducted has a theme each year which provides creative and practical opportunities to take learning beyond the classroom. Learners can present as classes/groups/individuals at the weekly assemblies. This year the theme is, "The Leader I can Be".

Participant teachers were asked, *"The School's theme is, "The Leader I can Be". How have you arranged to include this concept in your teaching?"* Ms A (Grade 1) said she has included it incidentally and weaves it into everyday activities and classroom management. She said, *"For example, if a child picks up litter without me asking, then I would say, "Isn't that a type of leader? It's so nice how they are looking after our classroom/playground, without me even asking; that's how a leader behaves"* (Final Interview: Lines 118-121). Mrs A also mentioned that the theme of leadership is applied formally and informally. A lot of learning seems to take place through discussions which supports the Productive Pedagogy element of *Substantive Conversation;* a component of Intellectual Quality which promotes shared understanding. An example she provided was when they were discussing 'Mandela Day', an annual event which was coming up. The school community was challenged to knit 6700 blanket squares. The class was discussing the number of blanket squares they had managed to produce when the topic of Mandela, as a leader was raised. A discussion followed about what made him such a great leader. Ms A applied the Leadership theme in her classroom management. She led by example by not raising her voice when the noise level rose in the classroom.

The next question related well to the above discussion. *"Can you provide examples where the curriculum links to the real world?" I* was trying to establish whether there were more formal assessment tasks that would support the component of Connectedness. Ms A responded saying, *"So, the main thing as the Grade One team, (of teachers) is that we are using (Stephen Covey's) 'Seven Habits', which link very nicely to the concept of a leader"* (Final Interview: Lines 137-138). Ms A was asked to provide examples of how she applied the 'Seven Habits'. She said that, for example, working with the Habit 'Win/Win", she encourages learners to manage their time effectively, a life-skill needed to manage in the real world. This trait also encourages *student self-regulation,* a component of the Supportive Classroom Environment. The message she conveys in her words is*, "Finish your activity that you are doing in class, to the best of your ability. As soon as you are finished, you*

can have "free-time", which means you can play a game, or jump on the trampoline for a few minutes, so that idea of, we will all win in the end" (Final Interview: Lines 144-147).

The Leadership theme in the school as well as the 'Seven Habits' with their practical and theoretical components are easy to link to background knowledge and do what Hayes et al., (2006:97) suggest which is, "to make connections between their linguistic, cultural, world knowledge and experience and the topics, skills and competencies at hand."

Ms B (Grade 2) responded to the question of how she applied the theme of, "The Leader I Can Be", by saying they use the 'Seven Habits" all the time. She said, "…*if we are doing an activity, I'll mention you know, we talk about values, respecting others, and I think the most important is, how do we go about improving the children's self-esteem to be leaders…"* (Final Interview: Lines 140-142). Ms B demonstrated an example of integrated knowledge, a component of Connectedness to the World, as defined by Hayes, et al., (2006:97) as, "students are expected to make explicit attempts to connect two or more sets of subject area knowledge." During a lesson I observed, Ms B was teaching learners adjectives and she encouraged them to use words to describe a 'mensch' (a person who is kind and responsible). As learners articulated these qualities, they enriched their own vocabulary as well as engaging in peer-teaching, defining what makes a responsible, democratic citizen. An example of this emerged when the teacher asked learners to provide words to describe the 'mensch':

> Learner: "Respectful."
>
> *Teacher writes words on board.*
>
> Learner: "Standing up for your friend."
>
> Teacher: "In one word, what do we call that?"
>
> *None of the pupils could provide the word.*
>
> Teacher: "We call that loyalty."
>
> *Teacher writes the word on the board.*

Lingard, Hayes, Mills and Christie (2003:20) refer to the term "productive performance" which takes into account students' academic skills which include skills of analysis, social awareness and through "demonstrations of citizenship." These outcomes are cognizant of societies that are experiencing "uncertainty, diversity, change, globalization and risk." (Beck 1994; Giddens 1999; Bauman 2001). Lingard, et al., (2003:20) believe that outcomes should have learners demonstrating skills that construct, "a world within which they and others would want to live."

Ms B was asked, "*Can you provide examples where the curriculum links to the real world?"* Ms B responded saying that she thought when doing story sums in Maths, or covering the Life Skills curriculum in which themes involved learning about food groups, and insects. These themes helped to build general knowledge which links to the real world. She also believes praying in Hebrew as well as learning the customs and values associated with building a religious and cultural identity also link to their real world.

Ms C (Grade 3) was asked how she managed to include the schools' theme, "The Leader I Can Be" in her teaching. She said the teaching and learning happened more incidentally. When appropriate situations arose for discussion, for example, learners are expected to perform poetry/songs at assemblies about leadership. Classes/individuals deliver these presentations. Mrs C said, "…*if an opportunity comes up, you include that, you know, like when we have presentations in assembly, we come back and we talk about it, when other kids do it, not always, but if it pertains"* (Final Interview Lines 82-84). Again, this is another example of teaching and learning through *substantive conversation,* an element supporting Intellectual Quality. These discussions are a welcome departure from the IRE (Initiate/response/evaluate) which participant teachers felt was very necessary as a support strategy for challenged learners. IRE (Initiate/Response/Evaluate) is a concept included in Intellectual Quality. It could be argued that this form of interaction is perfunctory and does not promote high-order thinking as described in the Queensland Education Policy (DoE, 2004) which comprises of 4 elements, namely, *intellectual substance; dialogue; logical extension and synthesis; and sustained exchange.*

Ms C was asked to provide examples where the curriculum linked to the real world. She believes that the Life Skills curriculum which includes themes such as 'Space', 'Inventions' helped to build general knowledge which she said was lacking. Ms C said the curriculum focused mainly on teaching English and Maths. She added that Computer Skills (taken as a separate subject) provided a link to the real world. She said, *"I think they get a lot of that there, especially that computers are such a big part of their lives at the moment; they learn to know that you can use the computer to get information about a topic, so they learn to know they can access information through the internet"* (Final Interview: Lines 90-92).

The element of problem-based tasks of which there are no correct answers and learners are required to engage in their own knowledge construction could be challenging for learners in a Bridging Class in Foundation Phase. These learners are at a stage when they are only just starting to work with abstract concepts and developing formalised language to describe more complex processes. Hugo (2013:11) defines formalization as the process whereby, "regularity, definition or a principle is abstracted from everyday experienced." At this stage, posits Hugo (2013:10), "two things happen as you move away from the everyday to the specialised: the content focused on gets more defined: and the way content is combined gets more precise." This process is gradual and learners, at this early stage in their school career may not have sufficient formalised knowledge to be able to work meaningfully with problem-based tasks.

Teachers would need to structure problem-based tasks very carefully. Learners entering school may have come from more concrete, discovery-type learning pre-school environments, but if they are to be offered a curriculum of high quality, it would be necessary to make the boundary line between the everyday and specialised strong to start off.

Hugo (2013:25) argues using the metaphor of Plato and Aristotle's cave, and says, "Only once a student has moved systematically from the everyday to the specialised and contemplated the forms in their most abstract essence is he allowed back into the cave to negotiate the everyday world in a principled way." Of course the learner must link with the real world, but if it is premature, or linked too early to everyday

experiences, I would challenge how meaningful the learning is in terms of acquiring intellectual principles necessary to build a strong foundation of understanding.

In terms of the element of Connectedness to the World, there were a number of aspects of the various elements working very well and which presented as appropriate for this age and stage of development. Individual and class presentations prepared for the weekly assemblies are a good example of integrated knowledge. Presentations are created using a theme, “The Leader I Can Be”. Connectedness requires that knowledge from multiple areas be integrated. These presentations provide learners with an opportunity to integrate knowledge, as they, “make connections between their linguistic, cultural, world knowledge and experience and the topics, skills and competencies at hand.” (Hayes, et al., 2006:97)

During an interview with Ms C (Grade 3), she implied that technology connected learners to the world, and many learners when preparing for assembly presentations use a power-point presentation which they have created themselves, using research skills, literacy skills and technology. The skills acquired in this process are practical and relevant to preparing for the world beyond the classroom which supports the notion in Connectedness that the curriculum needs to have practical and contemporary relevance.

The theme of Leadership encouraged learners to assume responsibility, and with support from teachers, work with an open-ended task in which there are no ‘right’ answers, but rather, this task provided opportunities to explore this topic using ‘disciplinary processes which entail, “methods of enquiry, research, communication and discourse” Hayes, et al., (2006:93). It could be posited that when learners are given the freedom and responsibility to apply disciplinary skills, the result is likely to be a deeper, transforming and lasting body of knowledge.

4.2.5 Conclusion

It emerged from the discussion of each of the components of Productive Pedagogy, that teachers believe that to support learners intellectually, learning needs to be primarily concrete and kept at what Lingard, et al., (2003) describes as lower-order thinking, until concepts are well consolidated.

Considering the aspects described by Hayes, et al., (2006) that contribute to a Supportive Classroom Environment, the overall impression was that despite learner's distractions, anxiety, or lack of home support in some cases, teachers were able to support learners by providing structured classroom environments that ensured learners were engaged and on-task. The pace, direction and forms of assessment were determined by the teachers who are under pressure to integrate learners into the mainstream.

Teachers engaged with different levels of ability and were cognizant of different learning styles. They offered emotional support by employing a flexible, patient and encouraging approach. Covey's Seven Habits featured as a means of teaching leadership, the aim of which is to develop life skills beyond the classroom. Values of respect, loyalty, humility, and kindness form part of the schools' vision and mission statement. These concepts are infused into the consciousness of every learner who attends this school.

Chapter 5 will present the data analysis utilizing a thematic content analysis.

5 CHAPTER 5 – DATA ANALYIS UTILIZING THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

The second stage of data analysis involved utilizing Thematic Content analysis. This Chapter traces the development of how themes emerged using a Thematic Content Analysis. The data produced three main themes, namely, Cognitive Challenges, Emotional Challenges and Strategies of Support for learners in the Bridging Classes. The discussion of themes explored the academic and emotional challenges Bridging Class learners experience and provide possible strategies for support.

5.2 Interview Transcripts

Thematic Content Analysis was utilised to analyse the Interviews (see Appendix for Teacher Participant Interview transcripts). This section describes the Thematic Content Analysis steps taken in the interview process as well as findings from the analysis as they emerge.

5.2.1 Step 1: Familiarisation with Data

According to Braun & Clarke (2006:6), Thematic Content Analysis, "is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data." Interviews of the three participant interviews were transcribed into tabular form. Table 5.1.below provides an example extract of the transcribed interview transcripts (see Appendix E for transcribed interview transcripts).

Table 5-1 Example of a Transcribed Interview Transcript

Line	Question/Answer	Code
3	How would describe the nature of a Bridging Class?	
4 5 6 7	OK, so I feel at our school, I think the Bridging Class is a mainstream class with less children, and that's why it is often referred to as a 'Small Class' because it has a small number of children in the classes, but the children, I feel get more attention from the teacher.	

5.2.2 Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

Once the interviews were transcribed, according to Braun & Clark (2006), and the researcher had familiarised herself with the data, she started generating a list of ideas of what was interesting about participant responses, and began the process of initial inductive coding. (See Appendix E for transcribed interview transcripts with inductive coding)

Table 5-2 Example of Transcribed Interview Transcript with Initial Inductive Coding

Line	Question/Answer	Code
8 9	What do you see as being the core differences in the way you teach a Bridging Class as opposed to a mainstream class?	
10 11 12 13 14	So, I think the main main difference is that there are fewer kids, but you know those few kids, so much more than you would in a mainstream class and you can focus on the individual needs. I think the Bridging Class teacher needs to be very patient. Children come into your class for various reasons, some for anxiety, or parents are getting a divorce, or academic issues, so you need to be patient with them.	Difference Mainstream Patient Anxiety

After an inductive approach was used to code the interviews of the three participant teachers, each interview transcript was summarised. Tables are in Appendix E. The following are extracts from Table 5.3; Table 5.4; Table 5.5

Table 5-3 Initial Codes Identified for Ms A

Code	Abbreviation	Example from Transcript	Addition Line Numbers (where this code is noted)
Abstract	AB	"…then through your questioning, move to more abstract thoughts or discussion…" (Final Interview: 76)	Final Interview: 76,80

Table 5-4 Initial Codes Identified for Ms B

Code	Abbreviation	Example from Transcript	Addition Line Numbers (where this code is noted)
Academic Challenge	AC	"I would say most of the children have academic weaknesses either in Maths or English, but apart from that children have anxiety and concentration issues which haven't been dealt with ….." (Final Interview(10-12)	Initial Interview: 6,41,53 Final Interview: 22,30,65,117

Table 5-5 Initial Codes Identified for Ms C

Code	Abbreviation	Example from Transcript	Addition Line Numbers (where this code is noted)
Strategies	STR	"I find that structure is vital and the children respond well."	Final Interview: 84

After the interviews had been summarised, the initial codes for all three participant Bridging Class teachers were translated into one table so that similarities and differences between the initial coding could be identified. Braun & Clarke (2006:18) describes this process as "working systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item identifying, "interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data sets." Table 5.6 below reflects the initial coded analysis across the interview transcripts for all three Bridging Class teacher participants.

Table 5-6 Initial Coding Analysis Across Interview Transcript

Ms. A	Ms. B	Ms. C
Different	Academic Challenge	Academic Challenge
Parents	Anxiety	Anxiety
Remedial	Assessment	Assessment
Mainstream	Caring	Caring
Strategies	Different	Comprehension
Support	Concrete	Concrete
Academic Challenge	Difficult	Different
Anxiety	Mainstream	Difficult
Assessment	Parents	Listening
Abstract		Remedial
Caring		Processing
Concrete		Mainstream

5.2.3 Step 3: Searching for Themes

Searching for themes begins, according to (Braun & Clark, 2006) when all data has been coded and collated and the codes have been sorted into potential themes. Table 5.6 shows this process. Table 5.6 is colour coded to show codes were grouped into potential themes. Searching for themes requires codes to be combined and form over-arching themes emerge from the data. (Braun & Clark, 2006)

5.2.4 Step 4: Reviewing Themes

This phase, according to (Braun & Clark, 2006) requires the researcher to review themes carefully to establish whether they really are significant enough to be defined as a theme. Braun & Clark (2006) put it this way, “two apparently separate themes might form one theme. Other themes might need to be broken down into separate themes.”

5.2.5 Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

This phase requires the researcher to identify what (Braun & Clark, 2006) calls “the essence” of what each them is about and the narrative of each theme should be able to explain, “what is interesting about them and why.” Braun & Clark (2006:22). Each theme will generate a detailed analysis. Through an analysis and interpretation of teacher’s responses, patterns could be identified and three main themes emerged. The first two describe the Cognitive and Emotional Challenges experienced by Bridging Class learners. The teacher’s comments together with the relevant literature formulated the third theme which suggests Strategies of Support which could potentially provide intellectual and social support for Bridging Class learners. Table 5.7 demonstrates how themes were generated.

Table 5-7 Initial Coding and Themes

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Step 3:
Initial Codes from Interview Transcripts</td><td>Step 4:
Reviewing Themes</td><td>Step 5:
Naming Themes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ms A</td><td>Ms B</td><td>Ms C</td><td rowspan="2">These are Cognitive Barriers that make access to knowledge a challenge for learners in Bridging Classes</td><td rowspan="2">Cognitive Challenges</td></tr>
<tr><td>Academic Challenges
Abstract
Different
Concrete</td><td>Academic Challenge
Difficult
Different
Concrete</td><td>Academic Challenge
Difficult
Different
Concrete
Listening, Comprehension and Processing</td></tr>
<tr><td>Emotional Barriers</td><td>Emotional Barriers</td><td>Emotional Barriers</td><td>These ideas explore the</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Anxiety Mainstream pressure Parents	Anxiety Mainstream pressure Parents	Anxiety Mainstream pressure Parents	emotional conditions that impact on access to knowledge	Emotional Challenges
Support Strategies	Support Strategies	Support Strategies	These aspects can potentially provide support to learners in a Bridging class	Strategies of Support for Bridging Class Learners
Parents Caring Different Remedial Support Assessment	Parents Caring Different Remedial Support Assessment	Parents Caring Different Remedial Support Assessment		

5.2.6 Step 6: Discussion of Themes

Braun & Clark (2006) suggests that the report to be produced using thematic analysis should, “tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis.” Themes that explore the Cognitive Challenges, Emotional Challenges and Strategies for Support for Bridging Class learners will be discussed in detail using the teacher participant interview responses to support the findings. Reference will also be made to relevant literature as well as insights gained from lessons observed in the classroom.

5.2.6.1 Cognitive Challenges

Theme One: Cognitive Challenges. In this section Cognitive Challenges which prevent easy access to knowledge will be discussed. I will be exploring the cognitive challenges raised by the participant teachers during semi-structured interviews. The discussion includes how lack of focus impacts on learning, as well as the challenges experienced by teachers to move learners from a literal or concrete understanding to more abstract or higher order thinking. Also explored in this discussion is the idea that different learners learn differently and therefore consideration should be given to different styles of learning.

Attention versus Lack of Focus

Swartz, de la Ray, Duncan & Townsend (2008:244) believe that paying attention affects many aspects of our mental functioning including, "perception, memory, and ultimately consciousness." To be able to complete tasks, means that the Foundation Phase learner needs to work with Piagetian concepts characteristic of the "concrete-operational" stages of development. One of the "concrete operational" stages of development is characterised by the ability to compare similarities and differences in quantities. Children learn to order objects according to weight, length or size.

It appears that learners in the Bridging Class experience not only challenges of perception and processing, they also experience high levels of anxiety which teachers believe impact on performance as described above by Ms A. When Ms A (Grade 1) was asked to describe typical challenges experienced by learners in her class, she said, "*Their processing, it's very hard for them to process the information, the other thing is their anxiety, they are very anxious, more so in a test situation, but also during class activities, and very distracted, distracted by their own thoughts, distracted by their peers, by the outside noise. I am finding that is the biggest challenge of this class this year"* (Final Interview: Lines 9-13).

Wilson (2002:625) claims that the developmental psychology of Piaget, "emphasized the emergence of cognitive abilities out of a groundwork of sensori-motor abilities; and the ecological psychology of Gibson, which viewed perception in terms of *affordances* – potential interactions with the environment." The theory of embodied cognition suggests that the mind does not operate in isolation, but is always interacting with the physical world. Wilson (2002:626) claims that, "cognitive activity takes place in the context of a real-world environment, and it inherently involves perception and action. It also responds under the pressures of real-time. Because we have limits on our working memory, we off-load work onto the environment. We are informed by Wilson (2002:626) that, "the environment is part of the cognitive system, and that cognitive functions such as perception and memory guide "situation-appropriate behaviour." Wilson (2002:626) adds that even when the mind is not reacting to its environment or immediate situation, it operates with "mechanisms of sensory processing and motor control." It could be that if the mind is

not responding with the expected response, it may not be sufficiently physiologically mature enough to be engaging with that task.

Wilson's (2008) description of embodied cognition provides some insights into the processes involved in transforming understanding. We can also understand some of the complexities of cognition. Wilson (2008:628) informs us when situations, "demand fast and continuously evolving responses", a child who experiences barriers to learning may not have enough time or opportunity to build up an accurate and/or comprehensive picture of the environment from which to respond appropriately. Wilson (2002:628) observes that, *"humans predictably fall apart under time pressure."* (My italics) She says further, "Lift the demand of time pressure and some of the true power of human cognition becomes evident." Without the time pressures, Wilson (2002) adds, we can step back, observe, assess, plan and then take action. Mrs C (Grade 3) experiences this issue of time pressure with the learners in her class. When asked what factors discourages progress, she said, "…*there is probably a time factor, in that you don't have enough time to consolidate, because they need that much extra consolidation, and there is definitely not enough time for that"* (Final Interview: Lines 67-69). In essence, it could be argued that gaps described as 'disabilities' could be ascribed to a insufficient amount of time given to complete a task, which results in a lack of understanding of task requirements, which is then followed by an inaccurate, inadequate or inappropriate response.

When asked to describe typical challenges experienced in the Grade 2 Bridging Class, Class, Ms B (Grade 2) said, *"I would say most of the children have academic weaknesses either in Maths or English, but apart from that, children have anxiety and concentration issues which haven't been dealt with"* (Final Interview: Lines 10-12). She also said that, "*over the years I have dealt with children with problems ranging from ADHD, anxiety, cerebral palsy and dyslexia"* (Initial Interview: Lines 7-8).

Lack of focus is clearly a cognitive challenge that can impact performance. Shimabukuro, Prater, Jenkins & Edelen-Smith (1999: 397) quote Harris, Graham, Reid, Mc Elroy & Hamby, (l994); Lloyd, Hallahan, Kosiewitcz & Kneedler, (1982); Reid & Harris, (1993) who inform us that, "Researchers have found that students

with learning disabilities often have low levels of attention to tasks and are inattentive and easily distracted." Ms C (Grade 3) was asked how she knew her pupils were engaged in learning. She also raised the issue of concentration when she said, "…*you know you have to get them to, you got to get eye contact, and once you have got eye contact, you can see whether they listening , or not, or they staring out of the window, or they just have a blank look on their facts, and umm, so I often make them read things to get them to concentrate"* (Final Interview: Lines 18-21).

Another cognitive challenge that seems to impact academic performance is the processing of information which it seems, is linked to working memory. This comprises of short-term memory, which is information which we are currently working with, and long-term memory which refers to the information we store and retrieve as and when necessary. According to Swart, et al., (2008) there are different types of long term memory, namely *explicit* memory which is the ability to recall facts of past experiences. *Episodic* memory refers to specific events experienced which may be of emotional significance. *Semantic* memory is a type of explicit memory that allows us to store certain facts or general information such as a telephone number or PIN code. *Gist* memory facilitates identifying main points or salient features of an event or story to be recalled. *Implicit* memory, also referred to as procedural memory is explained as memories that effect current actions, such as driving a car, and although you might not recall the details of driving lessons, the actions necessary for driving would be stored in your implicit memory.

The statement made by Ms C (Grade 3) seems to confirm that there are learners in the Bridging Class who find it difficult to retrieve information. She said, *"..what comes out in the evaluation is often very disappointing because of what you have actually taught, and you think you have consolidated enough, and then you look at the evaluation, and they just haven't retained anything…"* (Final Interview: Lines 46-49).

It was interesting to note that in the lesson observed in the Grade One class, the teacher was discussing the concept of shape. My observation was that the learners were coping well with this lesson. I asked if learners were familiar with the concepts being taught, and the teacher replied saying*, "They definitely have prior knowledge from Grade R. We know they did it (shapes) in Grade R in their Maths, and what for*

me is quite surprising is that there was amazing knowledge that came out, as you say, and the kids said amazing things" (Final Interview: Lines 191-193). The question this response raises is, what pedagogic practices were employed in Grade R that resulted in learners in a Bridging Class being able to retrieve information store in their long-term memory? I would suggest that since Pre-school pedagogy applies a constructivist approach using a variety of concrete, sensori-motor experiences, it is likely that learners were given the opportunity to manipulate, name and classify shapes. This may account for the reason they were able to retrieve this information from their long-term memories.

Concrete to Abstract

All three participant teachers mentioned the importance of concrete work before abstract concepts or higher-order thinking could be introduced as prescribed by Productive Pedagogies. Deep knowledge and deep understanding is described by Hayes, et al., (2006:43) in the Intellectual Quality component as learners being able to, "produce new knowledge by discovering relationships, solving problems, constructing explanations and drawing conclusions." The teacher participants put it this way, Ms A (Grade 1) said, *"I think when you have done a lot of concrete, especially with this class, and you can feel they have got the basics, then you can move on, and still even with that, sort of, with those higher-order questions, I think a few of them will get it right, not all of them"* (Final Interview: Lines 54-56). Ms B's (Grade 2) commented saying, *"I definitely spend a lot more time introducing the concepts, using concrete apparatus, and many more examples are given"* (Initial Interview: Lines 11-12.) Ms C (Grade 3) shared her experience of these learners, saying, *"You know, I think concrete is very important. So umm… whatever you do, it has to be in the concrete. They have to be able to visually see things..umm..to actually enable them to comprehend better"* (Final Interview: Lines 24-26).

The experience shared by all three participant teachers, support Piaget's constructivist approach to learning. Swart, et al., (2008:234) inform us of Piaget's theory of adaptation and assimilation resulting in new information which, "transforms cognitive structures." Swart, et al., (2008: 233), comments further on Piaget's theory of learning and development which states that, "We construct our ability to think as we interact with the world." This concept is supported by Wilson's (2002:626) claim

that, “By definition, situated cognition involves interaction with the things that the cognitive activity is about.”

A cognitive challenge that learners in a Bridging Class present with, and is of concern to the participant teachers, is reading and comprehension skills. Participant teachers were asked to identify skills, abilities, competencies or behaviours they felt were important to develop in learners to equip them successfully to mainstream. Ms A (Grade 1) responded by saying*, “I think what becomes very important for the later grades is, reading and comprehension. You have to be able to read independently, and understand what you are reading because it seems that in the senior school and upwards, that’s what the children need as a really big skill”* (Final Interview: Lines 179-181). Mrs C (Grade 3) expressed her concern about the importance of developing proficient reading skills because as she put it, “…*reading is everything, because whatever they do in the following standards, is based on reading and comprehension”* (Final Interview: Lines 107-108).

It is interesting to note that Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker (2001:280) posit that the older view that some deficiency in one or more of the basic components of cognitive processing causes disabilities has been replaced and the current view is that *inefficiency* rather than *deficiency* (my italics) is the cause of the difficulties encountered in reading. It seems that the breakdowns occur in two areas, namely in strategic processing, and metacognition. These two processes require learners to, “manage their cognitive activities in a reflective purposeful fashion” (Gersten, et al., 2001:280).

Learners who experience reading as challenging may not realize that a strategic skill to improving an understanding of the text as well as fluency, is to re-read the text repeatedly if necessary. This is a way of monitoring comprehension and improving fluency. Proficient readers do this as a matter of course.

Gersten, et al., (2001) are critical of theorists such as Kolligian & Sternberg (1987) who tended to focus too heavily in the 1980’s on cognitive and metacognitive aspects of higher-level tasks at the expense of factors crucial to comprehension. Gersten, et al., (2002) list factors which influence competent reading and comprehension skills:

- a knowledge of text structures
- vocabulary knowledge
- using background knowledge while reading
- the role of fluent reading in comprehension
- the importance of task persistence

Strategies to improve reading and comprehension skills will be discussed further in the section that discusses tools of support for learners who find reading and comprehension to be obstacles in the way of learning.

Learners are Different – Different Styles of Learning

Whilst coding the interviews of participant teachers, what became apparent is that all three teachers experience learners in the Bridging Class as "different" to mainstream learners. Responding to a question asked about the core differences between teaching in a Bridging Class as opposed to a mainstream class, Ms A (Grade 1) said, *"The teacher needs lots of strategies umm..Because you have got all these different kinds if children in your class..uhh.. the kids learn differently (my italics), so you need to focus in on individual needs more so then in a mainstream class…"* (Initial Interview: Lines 14-16). Ms A seems to be suggesting that the teacher needs to recognize and identify the correct pathway for the learner. She also seems to imply when she says, *"kids learn differently",* that there are many different ways children learn and therefore teachers need to find pedagogy that teaches to the strengths of the learner, rather than placing the focus on remediating gaps in knowledge. Ms B (Grade 2) is touching on this concept of teaching in different ways and adapting the curriculum when she said*, "There a certain criteria for example, adjectives, we have to cover, but there are different ways in which each teacher covers it"* (Final Interview: Lines 160-161).

For Ms C (Grade 3), the aspect of dealing with different children was highlighted in two areas. The first, is that when teachers work with children who are different, the relationship is different, and the second is that the teacher develops different ways of teaching. The implication is that she adapts the curriculum and pedagogy so that learners are able to access knowledge. Ms C (Grade 3) put it this way, *"...your relationship with the children is different..umm...as it would be in the mainstream*

class, umm you do develop a different way of teaching" (Initial Interview: Lines 21-23).

The comments from the three participant Bridging Class teachers about different children learning differently imply that it is worth exploring other kinds of intelligences, rather confining learners to the conventional framework of a logical-mathematical and language-linguistic based curriculum. Christensen, Horn & Johnson (2008) seem to support this claim when they write, "Unfortunately, schools standardize the delivery and do not customize it taking into account the unique circumstances of different students. The students who succeed in schools today do so not because of great teaching, but largely, because their intelligence happens to match the dominant paradigm in a particular classroom." This is not to say high standards of mathematical or language skills should be compromised, but could be enhanced by cultural dimensions which may form a pathway for these learners to access knowledge and experience successful learning.

The theory of multiple intelligences and different learning styles is the work of Gardener and colleagues (1989) who claim that, "If different kinds of items were used, or different kinds of assessment instruments devised, a quite different view of the human intellect might issue forth." Gardener believes that other forms of intelligence exist and when teachers identify a strength, they might recognize it as a talent but not use it as a pedagogic strategy. Gardener and colleagues believe that musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intra-personal traits reflect different human intelligences and if developed, can open up options for occupations other than those prescribed by conventional school systems.

Gardener (1989:5) defined intelligence as the, "capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings." He believes that more musicians, dancers, athletes and therapists could be produced if the multiple intelligence theory gained sufficient traction and credibility. Gardener (1989:7) claims, "Tying the activities to inviting pursuits enables students to discover and develop abilities that in turn, increase their chances of experiencing a sense of engagement and of achieving some success in this society."

Tomlinson (2014:12) believes that in the process of formative assessment, teachers should make some allowances for student differences. Her example seems to

support the theory of multiple intelligences, as she suggests that pupils be allowed to construct their knowledge in a personally meaningful way. She suggests the teacher could ask learners to, "illustrate how fractions are used in sports, music, cooking, shopping, building something, or another area they are interested in is more likely to be revealing then asking them simply to explain the uses of fractions."

The use of the multiple intelligences theory also supports the Connectedness to the World component of Productive Pedagogy. This constructivist approach to knowledge facilitates an *integration of knowledge* which Hayes, et al., (2006:97) says, "is identifiable in an assessment when students are expected to make explicit attempts to connect two or more sets of subject area knowledge." The other element of Connectedness to the World could be seen if the learner is given the opportunity to link background knowledge which may include, "community knowledge, local knowledge, personal experience, media and popular culture sources." In other words, a constructivist approach to building knowledge links to life beyond the classroom.

What is apparent is that the participant teachers are able to identify cognitive challenges that impact on learning and they try to accommodate learners in Bridging classes. They provide many structures to support learning disabilities. They try to meet the needs of individual learners and my observations in the classrooms confirm that they try to apply a Piagetian learner-centred and activity-based programme. Much of the data used in this report supports what Westwood (2012:7) quoting Kwong; Leyser & Ben-Yehuda (1999) who describes a classroom environment well suited to support learners in a Bridging Class. He says, "skilled teachers tend to provide additional help to students when necessary, use differentiated questioning, and make greater use of praise, encouragement and rewards during lessons." In other words, they offer academic support in an emotionally supportive environment. The next theme that will be discussed focuses on the emotional barriers that may impact on learning.

5.2.6.2. Emotional Challenges

The second theme: Emotional challenges that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with participant Bridging Class teachers include factors that cause stress and/or anxiety which appears to impact on self-esteem and performance. It was

interesting to learn what teachers believed about intelligence and this is discussed as having an impact on learner's emotional health as well as performance. Parent support or the lack thereof also emerged as a factor that can support or undermine learners and teachers. The final discussion in this section focuses on assessment which can undermine or encourage learning.

Stress/Anxiety/Low Self-Esteem

An analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with participant Bridging Class teachers revealed that many learners experience high levels of stress in the school environment. Swart, et al., (2008:407) believe that, "social expectations put pressure on people to perform (or conform) to certain behaviours that are expected of them. Sometimes people can become stressed in the face of these expectations*, particularly if they are contrary to their own expectations or perceived to be beyond their abilities."* (my italics). The final line in this definition resonates with what many Bridging Class learners probably experience emanating from the classroom or from home. Swartz, et al., (2008) inform us that when a person perceives themselves under threat, they react in a sequence of what is termed psycho-physiological responses called fight-or-flight. The fight-or-flight response occurs whether the threat is real or perceived. Even a new experience can be perceived as a threat and this factor is particularly relevant to learners in a Bridging Class. A thread of stress and anxiety seems to run through the teachers' responses to different interview questions. Grade One teacher Ms A's response when asked what kinds of activities support higher-order thinking seems to confirm the fight-or-flight reaction to perceived threat. Ms A said, *"with a bit of time, and a bit of prodding,* and *"you can do it", they do it, and they are actually very creative thinkers, but the initial anxiety, they just panic, because it's something that they are not used to"* (Final Interview: Lines 50-52). Ms B (Grade 2), when asked what factors discourage pupil progress, she responded saying, *"I would say anxiety, low self-esteem. If there is emotional stress from an incident that happened at home"* (Final Interview: Lines 101-102). When Ms C (Grade 3) was asked to describe the typical challenges experienced by learners in her class, she responded saying*, "I think they perceive themselves as being not able to cope, so whatever instructions are given to them immediately that anxiety is raised because straight way they think, "will I be able to do it?"* (Final Interview: Lines 11-13). Pekrun (1992:363) claims that, "Emotions may enhance or

impede storage and retrieval of information that underlies the formation of academic task motivations, thus indirectly influencing learning and achievement."

The fact that this child is experiencing doubt as to whether he/she can engage with a task successfully and autonomously, could mean that the learner may already be experiencing low self-esteem. According to Swartz, et al., (2008:64) Erik Erikson devised eight stages of psychosocial development that occurs at different stages in a person's life. With each stage of development, the individual must resolve a particular crisis before progressing to the next stage of development. Learners in the Foundation Stage of Development are emerging from what Erikson terms as Stage 3: Initiative versus Guilt, and entering into the fourth stage of development which is Middle Childhood: Industry versus Inferiority. During this stage, children are engaged with formal learning and competency plays a significant role. Swartz, et al. (2008:124) inform us that children at this stage of development tend to compare themselves with their peers. Children who feel less competent feel inferior. We are told, "Those who achieve and who develop confidence about who they are and what they can achieve, become industrious." Ms C (Grade 3) teacher notes in her response when asked to discuss factors that discourage progress, she said, *"There's a lot of competition amongst them. "I can do this, and you can't", and that actually makes them more anxious, so the anxiety is a big stumbling block"* (Final Interview: Lines 69-70).

Children at this stage of development also form self-concept which Swartz, et al., (2008:78) says is made up of "self-perceptions, abilities, personality characteristics and behaviours that are organized and generally consistent with one another." As children progress in a school environment, they perceive themselves through social messages and they, "start developing clearer judgements of their worth which is referred to as self-esteem." (Swartz, et al.,2008:78). It is easy to understand that if a learner perceives themselves as not coping with academic tasks and/or is experiencing challenging relationships with teachers and peers, these factors are likely to affect self-concept and self-esteem.

Friedman & Schustack (2009:247) quotes Bandura (1977a, 1997) who believe that the personality trait of self-efficacy is a cognitive element. Self-efficacy is defined as, "An expectancy or belief about how competently one will be able to enact

a behaviour in a particular situation." Positive self-efficacy is described by Bandura as a belief that one will be able to successfully perform at task. Self-efficacy beliefs are informed by four types of information 1) our experiences trying to perform similar tasks. 2) watching others perform similar tasks. 3) verbal persuasion; people talking to us, encouraging us. 4) how we feel about the task (our emotional reactions).

According to Bandura in Friedman & Schustack, (2009), a person needs the belief he will succeed at some level before, to be able to engage with the task in the first place. Self- efficacy will determine how long the person persists in the face of difficulty or failure, and how success or failure influences our future behaviour. This has major ramifications for the learner at risk and much of what the learner believes about his/her capabilities can be influenced by the school environment. Grade 3 teacher, Ms C, confirmed this belief that some of the learners experience in her class. When asked what she attributed their anxiety to, she responded saying, "…*and straight away they think, I can't do this. They have already made up their minds before and this is what causes this huge anxiety"* (Final Interview: Lines 15-16).

Two different beliefs about Intelligence

The work of Carol Dweck (Dweck & Bempechat, 1983) in Jacobson (2013:40) speaks to the heart of how the anxious child feels about their ability to be able to engage with tasks successfully. "Dweck found that children and adults hold one of two basic beliefs about intelligence: 1. We're born with a fixed amount of intelligence that remains static throughout our life time. 2. With effort, our intelligence will grow." Dweck's theory is there are those learners who have a fixed belief and want to "look smart" and there are those who have a growth belief and who want to "get smarter". Her work produced evidence of the difference in beliefs between the two mind-sets.

During the semi-structured interviews with Bridging Class teachers there was no opinion expressed by the teachers that learners could move beyond IRE (Initiate/Respond/Evaluate) towards higher-order thinking as a logical, sequential progression. When Ms A (Grade 1) was asked what kinds of activities support higher-order thinking, she said, "*So, this is very hard for the Bridging Class, the higher order thinking. I think when you do it, it has to be done in a fun way, through games and in a concrete way and because those questions are so challenging for*

them, you got to make it out that it is fun.." (Final Interview: Lines 44-46). When asked about the kinds of activities which could support higher-order thinking, Ms B (Grade 2) responded saying, "*Honestly, not many in my class. Most of the time is spent consolidating the basic concepts, and if we do something that involves higher-order thinking, it will usually be an oral discussion that is done at the end of the lesson for a short amount of time"* (Final Interview: Lines 47 – 49). Ms C (Grade 3) said of activities that support higher order thinking, "*You know, I think concrete is very important. So, umm..whatever you do, it has to be in the concrete.."*

One could interpret these responses to mean that the participant teachers appear to have low expectations of the learners in the Bridging Class to be able to engage in activities that challenge them intellectually. Hayes, et al., (2006:61) argues that teachers in a Supportive Classroom Environment as described in Productive Pedagogies, should, "scaffold learning in ways that enable them to achieve; and encourage students to take risks without fear of 'put-downs'..." It could be argued that the risk of a mindset of learners who believe they are limited in their capabilities is that it could become a self-fulfilling prophesy. If learners experience teachers as judgemental, even in subtle ways, the learner may see the teacher, "not as a facilitator and resource for their learning, but as a 'rewarder' and punisher, as a judge and critic" (Dweck & Elliot, 1983). Jacobson (2013:41) claims that the result of this mindset is that, "These students become anxious that their responses, mistakes, or lack of perfection will embarrass or humiliate them." Jacobson (2013) quotes Dweck, who says learners who have a "fixed belief" self-image tend to employ negative protective behaviours such as cheating because they are afraid of producing wrong answers or giving up. Jacobson (2013:42) quoting Dweck (1983) provides the example of Talisha, a pupil who was reading a story to the class. A few students gave her suggestions for improvement in a pleasant, non-judgemental way. "I think I'll throw this away", she responded. She seemed to think that if her story needed changes, it just wasn't good enough.

The job of the teacher, believes Jacobson (2013:43), is to help learners who "feel they are sitting on a stage and who are anxious about being judged, criticized and evaluated," and to help learners turn inward "to refocus their attention on their own effort and abilities." Jacobson (2013) believes teachers have the power to change a classroom from a stage to a learning forum."

Lack of Parental Support

Swartz, et al. (2008:78) tells us that research indicates that stressful family circumstances can also impact on self-esteem. Research indicates that the involvement of parents in the school can impact the children's academic progress and achievement at school. Epstein (1992:3) posits that, "When schools and families work in partnership, students hear that school is important from their parents and teacher and perceive that caring people in both environments are investing and co-ordinating time and resources to help them succeed. The student's own work is legitimized by this process of mutual support." Epstein (1992) believes that the partnership between the parents and school can contribute to improving the learner's skills and self-esteem.

Epstein (1992) draws on the work of Bourdieu & Passernon (1977) to inform us that parents' knowledge and level of education contribute to what these theorists term, cultural capital. Epstein (1992:4) informs us that studies show that, "On average, families with higher socio-economic status and education are more invested in the children's education, and their children achieve more."

It is interesting to note that in the school where this fieldwork took place, the parents are mostly middle class with many parents as professionals. The school is private and therefore the costs of tuition are comparatively more expensive. Parents pay a 20% surcharge above a private school fee charge for the Bridging Class, and yet Ms A (Grade 1) when asked about factors that discouraged progress, one might assume it would be the moderate learning disabilities these learners experience, but instead, Ms A responded saying*, "I think not enough consolidation, and that is sort of happening on the homework level, not doing homework, the parents not being supportive, doing the homework, and not taking them for therapies, or stopping therapy.. umm.. and some of the children being very easily distracted"* (Final Interview: Lines 92-95). Ms B (Grade 2) presented another scenario, where, *"The child will go to therapy year after year and there is no improvement, as well as I think the last one would be, if there is no help from home, no homework being done, I think that would* impact *it as well"* (Final Interview: Lines 104-106).

If parents are not doing the homework, they may be working long hours to pay the fees, and do not want to engage with their children in this way after work, or perhaps

it is because since they are paying such high fees, they feel the school and therapists should take more responsibility for academic progress. If a child attends therapy year after year with no tangible improvement, this suggests very poor communication, if any, about the learner's progress between the therapist, teacher and parent. It could be surmised that the anxiety many children in the Bridging Class experience could be caused by lack of parental support.

Covington (2000:183) cites parental behaviour patterns which have a negative effect on children's learning. These include parents taking their children's school failures personally, and punishing them accordingly or responding to success with faint praise or indifference. Other debilitating parental behaviours include giving children mixed or inconsistent messages. Sometimes they punish poor performance or successes when they perceive results as not good enough, or they tell the child the performance is adequate when it really is not. The result of this, Covington (2000:183) quoting (Mineka & Henderson, 1985) is that, "parental reactions have been implicated in the development of learned helplessness, a phenomenon in which learners give up trying because they come to believe, often rightly, that they have no control over their own destiny."

Another parental behaviour of concern is when parents set overbearing demands for excellence with little or no guidance on how to achieve these standards. Covington (2000:183) quoting (Kernis, et al., 1992, Kimble, et al., 1990) tells us the result of this can be children setting standards for themselves that are unrealistic with no way of attaining these standards. Many of these parental practices are associated with children uncertain of their personal worth and children who suffering with, "chronic achievement anxiety with an increased likelihood of self-handicapping behaviour."

In the case of parents from the Grade One Bridging Class, the teacher felt that although the support afforded to learners in the Bridging Class helped the parents, some parents were embarrassed about their children not being in a mainstream class. Ms A (Grade 1) put it this way "*There was a bit of a stigma attached to the Bridging Class. "Oh, my child is in <u>that</u> class," but now we (the teachers) have said – it's not remedial (the Bridging Classes) and socially I think it's been better, for the teachers and for the children and for the parents"* (Initial Interview: Lines: 90 – 92).

Epstein (1992) suggests that the total responsibility for parental involvement in the school cannot be placed solely on the parents. She believes, at all grade levels the development of partnerships will require new ways of thinking about the shared responsibilities for children. It is not only parents that need to keep well informed on the progress of the learner, it is also the responsibility of the educators to know more about the families of their students in order to capitalise on family strengths in helping children to succeed.

Assessment

Assessment can be potentially threatening for both learner and teacher, and can therefore pose as an emotional challenge which may impede, rather than promote progress as intended. Assessment has the feel of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can be a tool for tracking knowledge building and on the other, it can demotivate and become a source of anxiety. Tomlinson (2014:11) observed that, "Students often feel that assessment equals test equals grade equals judgement." That association leads to many discouraged students to give up rather than risk another failure. Assessment causes many high-achieving students to focus on grades rather than learning, and on safe answers rather than thoughtful ones. Pekrun (1992:360) notes that, "To date, there is only one type of emotion in students which has received widespread scientific attention. This is students' test anxiety – one major finding was that test anxiety can impair complex learning achievement."

In the context of the Bridging Class, valid assessment is an essential tool because the aim of the Bridging Class is to prepare and transfer learners to mainstream when they are ready. It appeared that Ms A (Grade 1) experienced pressure as evidenced in three of her statements. The first was in response to a question which asked what kinds of assessment are used in a Bridging Class. She said, *"OK, so with the Bridging Class, we use the same assessments as the mainstream and we do that specifically so we can actually see where our children are at"* (Final Interview: 210-211). Ms A went on to talk about verbal and written assessments (second statement) and said, *"Oral or on a white board, just to see where they at, and if they understanding, which you might have to do a bit more of than that weekly test in a mainstream class"* (Final Interview: 218:219). The third statement was in response to a question about the possible information the assessment might be giving the

teacher. She said, "…*with the children that perform very well, sometimes better than mainstream, that's also good evidence, just to know that these children are in the Bridging Class for whatever but are on par, or even better than those other children (in the mainstream)"* (Final Interview: Lines 227-230).

Ms B (Grade 2) felt that assessment should be more to revise concepts but also feels the pressure to assess in order to gauge the learners in comparison to mainstream learners. She said, "…*it's always good to know where these children are at, and usually, to be honest, a Bridging Class teacher knows where their children are; they don't really need a formal assessment, but the most important thing is that I know my children could be mainstreamed in the near future"* (Final Interview: Lines 194-197). Ms C (Grade 3) expressed similar sentiments when asked about the purpose of assessment. She said*, "It will help us determine whether they should stay in the Bridging Class, or go into the mainstream, so it's very important for us to know exactly where they are in relation to the mainstream"* (Final Interview: Lines 132-134).

Whilst the Bridging Class has a specific context and mandate, learners may feel less undermined if teachers explained the purpose for assessing which Tomlinson (2014:11) suggests is, "Assessments are for teachers to help them learn and immediate perfection should not be their goal." She says teachers should tell students, "When we're mastering new things, it's important to feel safe making mistakes. Mistakes are how we figure out how to get better at what we are doing."

The manner in which the feedback is given can come across as judgemental to the learner. A comment such as, "weak effort", could be interpreted as critical and judgemental. Even a positive comment like, "excellent work" has a judgemental and emotional undertone and can backfire if the learner's next assessment does not meet the same standard. Tomlinson (2014:12) suggests that it's helpful and guides the learner when teachers provide instructive feedback. For example, "Your sentences are clear and correctly constructed, but now you need to start using more adjectives to add colour and imagination." Tomlinson (2014:12) says further, "When feedback serves its instructional purpose, students are clear about the learning targets at which they are aiming."

Tomlinson (2014:13) discusses another aspect of assessment in which the teacher develops a partnership with the learners so that both teacher and learner take responsibility for the learning that takes place. She tells us that, “A great teacher is a habitual student of his or her students. A keen observer, the teacher is constantly watching what students do, looking for clues about their learning.” Tomlinson (2014) provides an example of teachers truly in tune with pupils’ learning. These teachers will ask their learners to signal their level of confidence with the task they are doing with a “thumbs-up, thumbs-down, or thumbs-side-ways” to glean a sense of the general feeling of competence prevailing in the classroom.

During the observation of a Maths lesson in the Grade 3 Bridging Class, I experienced the teacher’s feedback similar to Tomlinson’s description of a relationship communicating trust between learner and teacher. My notes from the Grade 3 lesson observed, reflect the following, “At one point she (Ms C) asked a learner to talk through the number sentence (to unpack the understanding of a maths problem) and then asked for a “high-five” to display her pleasure at the child’s understanding of the concept. She (the teacher) constantly walked around and checked that learners were carrying out the requirements as per her instructions.”

Not only does assessment have emotional implications for learners, but it does appear to impact on the teachers functioning in the way she views herself as a teacher and the relationship she has with learners. Nias (1999:72) observes, “As significant others for teachers of all age ranges and of all lengths of experience, pupils have always had the capacity to undermine teacher’s self-confidence and self-esteem. Teacher’s relationship with pupils is so central to the way in which they see themselves, as people and practitioners, that when it goes wrong, it undermines their sense of who they are, sowing self-doubt and a deep sense of failure” (Nias, 1989).

The Grade Two Bridging Class teacher seems to reflect how the process of assessment can undermine the teacher. When she was asked what she felt helpful in dealing with the academic challenges learners in her class experience. She mentioned that the remedial therapists offered support, but she said, *“I find it quite difficult because as a Bridging Class teacher, you continuously looking at yourself and thinking, you haven’t done a good enough job, but it’s actually the children who are limited and it is quite frustrating at times and it can be quite demotivating*

because you have put in so much more effort to get to a certain point" (Final Interview: Lines 20-24). What seems to emerge from Ms B's response is a sense of being overwhelmed when you as a teacher, have put in so much hard work and when you assess, the learner are not producing the results commensurate with the teacher's efforts.

Ms C (Grade 3) also expressed how she feels at times after the assessment, *"I find it difficult because they find everything so difficult, and when you evaluate them, and you know what comes out of the evaluation is often very disappointing because of what you have actually taught, and you think you have consolidated enough, and then you look at the evaluation, and they just haven't retained anything, and so, sometimes you just have to move on because, what can you do?"* (Final Interview: Lines 45-49). Ms C appears to express a sense of hopelessness. Pekrun (1992:373) notes that, "hopelessness produces a resignative motivational state. Therefore, if hopelessness generalises across academic task domains, it may drastically reduce on-task behaviour and resulting achievement." I am assuming that Pekrun (1992) is referring to the hopelessness learners may feel, but I am suggesting that this emotion could be shared by both learner and teacher.

The weight of the responsibility and a sense of despondency appears to emerge through the statements made the respective Bridging Class teachers. Steinberg (2008:46) expresses what many teachers experience, particularly working with challenged learners. "Because teaching activities influence students' learning outcomes, teachers feel responsible for their students' successes and failures. When students fail, despite teachers' best efforts, such failure can generate feelings of disappointment, powerlessness and helplessness for teachers." Steinberg (2008) draws on the work of Kelchtermans who believes that teachers take their students' failures personally. Conversely, when students succeed, it reflects well on the teacher and they experience joy and pride.

The purpose of raising the issue of teacher's emotions in the assessment process, is to explore and contemplate whether teacher's emotions could present a further challenge for learners in the Bridging Class. Words such as 'disappointment, 'frustrating', 'demotivating' were used during the interviews and one wonders whether these emotions could impact the teacher's attitude towards learners in their

classes. Are they not expressing their own anxiety in the pressure they feel to integrate learners into mainstream?

Perhaps if teachers are provided with support from colleagues as Ms A (Grade One) teacher suggests, "…*the four of us can say, "how you doing/what are you doing different in your Bridging Class?"* Ms C (Grade 3) teacher supported the notion of collegial support when she said, *"I think maybe what we could do, is, the Bridging Class teachers should maybe get together and maybe brainstorm and kind of support each other"* (Initial Interview: Lines 27-29).

Steinberg (2008:51) proposes that teachers would benefit from 'emotional labour' which she describes as the "process of self-regulation that teachers need to perform so as to embody the emotions that are appropriate to the situation and institutional discourse." Winograd (2003) in Steinberg (2008:51) draws a distinction between functional and dysfunctional use of emotions, this being, "The functional uses of emotion tend to alert teachers to problems, so they can effectively take action to address those problems. The dysfunctional use of emotions reflect situations in which teachers' emotions (especially dark emotions like anger and disgust) do not lead to positive action, but instead, lead to the blaming of either self, students, parents or the system."

Returning to the impact emotion has on learner task performance, Pekrun (1992:372) notes that the relation between emotion and performance is by no means a simple one. To assume that positive emotions have good outcomes and negative emotions, bad outcomes is probably too simplistic and does not ably describe the complexity and correlation of how cognitive skills and emotions work together and affect one another. The impact is probably different for every learner, depending on age and stage of development, cultural capital, personal experience, extent of learning disability and levels of resilience. Pekrun (1992:360) informs us that, "It can be assumed, however, that emotions may be an essential part of the student's psychological life, and that they may profoundly influence academic motivation, cognitive strategies of learning and achieving, and resulting achievement."

5.2.6.2 Strategies for Academic Support for Bridging Class Learners

In this section the response of the participant teachers to the question posed about higher-order thinking is discussed. The first sub-section demonstrates that what teachers believe about the capabilities of learners can impact on the quality of their learning. All three participants expressed a general belief that Bridging Class learners rely very heavily on concrete work. It was felt that Reading and Comprehension were areas of importance to work on because as Ms C (Grade 3) put it, *"reading is everything*" (Final Interview: Line 107). Managing ADD/ADHD beyond medication is also a topic for discussion in the section. Gathercole & Alloway (2007) suggest 'Strategies for Improving Working Memory' in this section. Another strategy to support learning is to enlist the co-operation of parents under the sub-section 'Parental Support'. We learn that parents can form part of a team to ensure the best possible academic outcomes for learners and local schools can become community centres that offer parenting workshops and support groups.

Concrete versus Higher Order Thinking

From the responses discussed under the sub-section titled 'Two Different Beliefs about Intelligence', it seems that participant Bridging Class teachers believe that learners in their classes were limited in their ability to engage with higher-order thinking and need a very strong concrete foundation before abstract concepts could be considered. Vygotsky (1978:88) has a very different outlook on teaching learners who are challenged. He cautions us about the teacher's assumptions they are drawing from diagnostic tests that may limit children's learning. He brings proof of his hypothesis when he discusses the error made when teaching 'mentally retarded' children. The conclusion was made that the teaching methods for these children should be confined to concrete, look-and-do-methods. This pedagogy reinforced their limitations and, "their handicaps by accustoming children exclusively to concrete thinking, thus suppressing the rudiments of any abstract thought that such children have." Vygotsky (1978:89) presented a powerful argument when he says the school should be pushing them in the direction of abstract thinking and helping them to fill in the gaps, "what is intrinsically lacking in their own development." Hayes, et al., (2006:45), whilst discussing the components of Intellectual Quality in Productive Pedagogies, comment on early self-fulfilling prophesy studies (Rosenthal

& Jacobson 1968; Rist 1970) and studies of streaming and tracking (Oakes, Gamoran & Page 1992). These studies showed that one of the reasons why some students did not perform well was because they were not expected or required to produce work of high intellectual quality. In contrast, as mentioned earlier, Hayes, et al. (2006) tells us that, "Newman & Associates (1996) found that when students from *all* backgrounds are expected to perform work of high intellectual quality, overall student academic performance increases and equity gaps diminish." The need for intellectual quality in schooling has been argued by philosophers and educational theorists for centuries (Presseisen, 2000).

Of course the manipulation of concrete objects is important and for children to truly understand the features of Piaget's concrete-operational stage of development, learners must be able to place objects into different size containers, compare, contrast, weigh and order but Vygotsky (1978:89) states it categorically, "Concreteness is now seen as *necessary and unavoidable only as a stepping stone for developing thinking, as a means not as an end it itself."* (My Italics)

It could be argued that the role of the teacher is to provide the materials and opportunities for learners to consolidate their understanding of Piagetian concepts characteristic to concrete operational thinking, but also to work with Vygotsky's theory which Swart, et al., (2008:80) cites in essence is, "cognitive growth as a socially mediated activity, one in which children gradually acquire new ways of thinking and behaving through co-operative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society." Intellectual Quality with its elements of Substantive Conversations should occur to promote shared understanding and Metalanguage containing technical vocabulary and encouraging reflective processes. These processes support Vygotsky's theory that conversation between the learner and teacher will convert to internal speech which will help organize a child's thought process until it becomes part of her internal mental functioning.

One of the ways in which teachers and learners can be supported is for teachers to continuously engage in professional development that facilitates the delivery of a curriculum of high intellectual quality. Ms A (Grade 1) teacher raised the importance of professional development when she was asked if there was an area she could identify that the school could offer more support. She replied saying, "*I*

think..I..think..for example, I am studying further. Teachers from Bridging Classes need to do that in order to keep up your new strategies. I think, keeping up with even if you don't do remedial, but how to help these children" (Initial Interview: Lines 95-97).

Productive Pedagogy Research (QSRLS (2001:149) advocates investing in teacher professionalism. "In terms of professional development, there is evidence here that the investment in teacher's social capital and their intellectual capital is both necessary and, where targeted effectively in combination with particular enabling approaches to school leadership, sufficient for improved pedagogy and outcomes."

It could be argued that professional development holds the key in terms of a better understanding of how to manage the cognitive and emotional challenges mentioned in the previous section such as distraction, processing, reading and comprehension skills and performance anxiety. Professional development may also provide teachers with the tools to manage inefficiencies and teach learners to, "manage their cognitive activities in a reflective purposeful fashion" (Gersten, et al., 2001:280)

Improving Reading and Comprehension

One characteristic of students with learning disabilities that impact on reading and comprehension mentioned by Gersten, et al.,(2001:286) is their limited task persistence. They write, "Motivation and persistence affect performance in all academic areas and are clearly related to students' developing a sense of failure and frustration in the presence of academic tasks. The accumulation of repeated unsuccessful efforts to solve academic problems decreases their motivation to work hard at learning." This probably poses one of the greatest challenges to learners at risk. If they lose motivation to stay on task, Gersten, et al., (2001) quote Stanovich (1986) who suggests that these learners will start seeking out environments that minimise academic engagement with the minimal amount of reading required and probably avoid after-school recreational reading. Professional development can equip teachers with techniques to help with extrinsic and intrinsic motivators as well as increased rates of peer interaction to encourage "peer-mediated and socially mediated instruction" Gersten, et al., (2001:287). An essential component of reading and understanding is helping students become aware of their level of comprehension and, "providing them with repair strategies when they determine they are not

understanding the text adequately. This is typically called "comprehension monitoring" Gersten, et al., (2001:292).

Ms C (Grade 3) described a reading strategy she uses when she was asked how she knew her pupils were engaged in learning. She responded saying, "..*so I often make them read things to get them to concentrate. If not read, then to follow to actually use something to follow, like a ruler or some kind of marker to keep them engaged"* (Final Interview: Lines 20-22). Gersten, et al., (2001:283) quotes Wong (1980) who says students with learning disabilities have limited ability to organize information on their own. Wong (1980) found that these students were able to recall as many main ideas as their peers without learning disabilities, but only if they were provided with prompting questions. Professional development in the area of reading and comprehension could provide techniques and strategies to support these learners.

Managing ADD/ADHD

With regard to managing learners with ADD/ADHD, many of whom experience difficulties with learning and academic performance. According to Shimabukuro, Prater, Jenkins, & Edelen-Smith (1999), they are often inattentive and easily distracted and not easily able to work independently and manage their behaviour. Mathes & Bender, (1997) in Shimabukuro, et al., (1999:398) inform us that, "Although medication is the most common intervention for students with attention problems, educational interventions including instruction in organizational strategies, self- monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-instruction procedures can also help these students to perform better in general in special education settings"

The Bridging Class does provide a 'special education setting' in that the teacher is a aware of the disabilities learners may experience and the fact that these classes do not exceed 15 learners is taking into account that these learners need more attention than learners in a mainstream, but learners may increase their academic productivity and on-task behaviour if they were taught strategies suggested by Barkley, (1990; and Fowler (1991) quoted by Shimabukuro, et al., (1999). The implementation of these strategies can be set up with a minimum disruption to an already existing structure and could improve the quality of pedagogy, reduce teacher stress and learner performance anxiety and contribute to a supportive classroom environment.

The self-management/self-monitoring programme was designed by Shimabukuro, et al, (1999) to improve on-task behaviour for students with, “learning disabilities, emotional disabilities and attention and academic difficulties” (Shimabukuro, et al., 1999:398). The dependent variables that are peer-assessed for are a) academic accuracy, b) academic productivity and c) on-task behaviour. Learners self-monitor for a) and b) and the teacher monitors for c). All three of the variables can be used for self-monitoring maths and language tasks. The teacher introduces the tasks and the method for self-monitoring. Reasonable time-limits are set for all tasks. Learners correct their work in groups and then the teacher reads out the correct responses. Completion scores are recorded and graphed. Lines are drawn to connect the bullets to establish trends. Shimabukukuro, et al., (1999) report that when these self-monitoring strategies were tested on students, productivity improved and more assignments were completed. Learners were provided with functional skills of recording and analysing graphs. These self-monitoring/self-management procedures align to elements of a Supportive Classroom Environment described by Hayes, et al, (2006:61) which include “student direction of activities, social support, academic engagement, explicit criteria and self-regulation.” Hayes, et al., (2006:61) add that socially supportive environments provide explicit criteria for academic performance as well as opportunities for on-task behaviour, “without the teacher having to refer to their behaviours.” The strategies suggested by Shimabukuro, et al, (1999) can be adapted for all age groups.

It was interesting to observe Ms B (Grade 2) facilitating a lesson in which these learners worked in groups. The task required learners to share their ideas about how they could demonstrate leadership. The teacher allocated 10 minutes for this group work. The noise level rose and the teacher realised that many learners had not understood the task requirements. She stopped the class and re-instructed learners on how to engage with one another in groups. It seemed that these learners had had very little exposure to this way of learning. The teacher realised learners needed to be taught skills of self-monitoring and peer-interaction as a form of learning. One learner asked, *“But why must we talk?”* The teacher responded, *“So we can share ideas”.* After re-instructing the class, she asked them to return to their groups for a second attempt at group discussions. What emerged from this lesson was, of equal importance to the learning taking place in group discussions, were the

skills of self-monitoring these learners acquired through this process. A number of these learners have been diagnosed with ADD/ADHD which is why they are in the Bridging Class.

Strategies for Improving Working Memory

Teachers were asked to describe the typical challenges learners in a Bridging Class experience. They seemed to indicate that for many learners, memory recall was a challenge. This challenge of retrieving information could be related to cognitive processes related to the 'working memory' which is described by Gathercole & Alloway (2007:31) who say, "Psychologists use the term 'working memory' to refer to the ability we have to hold and manipulate information in the mind over short periods of time. Ms A (Grade 1) described the challenge of working memory from the teachers' point of view. She put it this way, "*You teach something* (in a mainstream class) *and everyone gets it and you move on and here you feel that, "but I have done it with you", and you do it and you do it…you have to do it again"* (Initial Interview: Lines 55-57). Ms C (Grade 3) when asked how a teacher can move beyond IRE (Initiate/Respond/Evaluate), she said, "…*and you think you have consolidated enough, and then you look at the evaluation and they just haven't retained anything"* (Final Interview: Lines 48-49). Gathercole & Alloway (2007:31) suggest that loss of the contents of working memory could be caused by:

- *Distractions* – an unrelated thought or interruption can erase the contents of working memory.
- *Trying to hold in mind too much information*.
- *Engaging in a demanding task* – tasks that require difficult processing can result in a loss of other information already held there.

Gathercole & Alloway (2007:33) inform us that learners with a small memory capacity do not perform academically because of memory loss. They describe working memory as a 'bottleneck' for learning, and without sufficient working memory capacity, the individual classroom activities will have to be carefully designed by the teacher in order to build up knowledge and skills across time to encourage effective learning" Pekrun (1992) offers another perspective on the impact emotions have on performance. He tells us that anxiety related to assessment can severely impair cognitive performance. Pekrun (1992:365) cites the studies of Eysenck, (1988) and

Wine, (1971) which indicate that, “anxiety occupies capacity of the working memory, which implies that the remaining capacity may not be sufficient for tasks drawing heavily on such resources.”

Gathercole & Alloway (2007:34) inform us that although there are no known ways of improving working memory yet, the teacher can apply strategies for alleviating the disruptive consequences to learning as well as stress created from excessive working memory loads.

Gathercole & Alloway (2007:34) provide a summary of possible challenges and suggested support strategies.

Table 5-8 Summary of possible challenges and suggested support strategies

CHALLENGES	SUPPORT STRATEGIES
Child forgets a task	• Give brief, simple instructions • Check the child can remember instructions
Child cannot meet combined processing and storage demands and activities	• Increase familiarity of vocabulary
Child loses place in a complex task	• Use memory aids such as number lines and useful spelling • Ensure learner has plenty of prior practice in the use of aids before using them in more complex task settings • Find ways of marking, for the child, their progress in a complex task structure

It is interesting to note that all three participant Bridging Class teachers used some of the above strategies in some form. I noted in the Lesson Observation of a Maths lesson on Shape in Grade 1, that the, “Teacher issued very specific instructions, one or two at a time and then walked around to check that instructions were being carried out correctly.” Another observation recorded during the Maths lesson,,“Teacher repeated instructions patiently and maintained control throughout the lesson.” Ms B (Grade 2) teacher said, “*I find that structure is vital and the children really respond*

well. They know exactly what time. I put up an agenda every day" (Final Interview: Lines 84 – 86). It appears that the structure, order and predictability support these learners and possibly help to aid concentration. My recorded comment when observing Ms B's English lesson was that, "It is a very structured, quiet learning environment which also helps to provide a Supportive Classroom Environment." Another comment recorded in the observation of the English lesson, *"*The teacher provided immediate feedback to pupils, either affirming their correct answers, or helping them correct their work. This was evidence of a Supportive Environment*."* When Ms C (Grade 3) was asked how she knew her learners were engaged in learning, she responded saying, "*I often make them read things to get them to concentrate. If not read, then to follow, to actually use something to follow, like a ruler or some kind of marker just to keep them engaged"* (Final Interview: Lines 20-22).

I also observed during the English lesson Ms B (Grade 2) was teaching that she provided explicit criteria and clear parameters when briefing the learners before the task. The class had discussed the definition of an adjective and provided a lot of examples. The teacher then asked learners to write down one adjective to describe a classmate. This would require a thoughtful and elaborate response. One learner asked if he could write down two adjectives. The teacher suggested he start with one and then try the next one. It seems that the teacher wanted to ensure a smaller, better quality piece of work, rather than undertaking too many tasks which may have compromised quality. It is often in those small details in the interaction and structure of lessons that the expertise of the teacher can be seen. The teacher knows what each learner is capable of and sets tasks accordingly. This strategy is supported by Gathercole & Alloway (2007:35) who recommend that teachers, "break down tasks and instructions into smaller components to minimize memory load."

Parental Support

There is increasing evidence that family and school partnership practices are more important for children's success then family structures or ascriptive characteristics, such as "race, social class, level of parent education, marital status, income, language of family, family size, or age of child. The more that schools do to involve families, the less these status variables seem to explain parental behaviour or

children's success." Epstein (1992:16). It seems that many of the personal, cultural, academic or behavioural challenges that present at school, could be improved or eliminated if schools find ways to involve parents that do not cast aspersions on parents for their child-rearing practices or come across as judgemental, or present the school as the institution that has all the answers for every child.

Graham-Clay (2005) claims that teachers are not specifically trained with the skills they need to communicate effectively with parents. Graham-Clay (2005) suggests that even a 'Welcome' sign that reflects all the different ethnic languages spoken when the parents arrive at the school sets the tone and creates an inviting atmosphere. She also suggests that clean school grounds with children's artwork displayed on the walls can add to a "customer-friendly" atmosphere. Graham-Clay (2005:118) quotes several authors such as Davern, (2004); Williams & Cartledge, (1997) who propose a daily communication book to share information with parents, "particularly for children who have special learning needs." Graham-Clay (2005:118) suggests that "teachers need to be sensitive to the balance of good and bad news contained in the message and education "jargon" should be avoided." Davern (2004) recommends that teachers, and this is particularly pertinent for learners whose children are in the Bridging Classes, to decide the most appropriate means of communication, a written message, a phone call or a face-to-face meeting. Ms B (Grade 2) teacher sees this as part of her role as a Bridging Class teacher to communicate regularly and effectively with parents. When she was asked for core differences between Bridging Class teaching and mainstream class teaching, she said, "*..there is a lot of outside classroom time, so I spend a lot of time with the parents and the therapists on the phone ensuring that all the issues are addressed and the parents are guided through different processes"* (Initial Interview: Lines 22-24).

Graham-Clay (2005:119) tells us that a relationship develops when parents and teachers communicate constructively. She quotes Lawrence-Lightfoot (2004) who says, "Effective dialogue develops out of a growing trust, a mutuality of concern, and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives." It could be argued that in the Bridging Class context, trust develops when teachers take the time to do what Love (1996) in Graham Clay (2005) suggests, which is to use the "good news calls" to give recognition to work well done, or to validate and reinforce learners' efforts to try, as

progress is made. Especially in the Bridging Classes, it is important for teachers and parents to avoid any form of blame, to be solution-orientated and consider the "whole child." The calls to parents, suggests Love (1996) will promote good relations with parents.

With regards to parent/teacher meetings to discuss progress more formally, Price and Marsh (1985) in Graham-Clay (2005:120) advise teachers to plan and identify the information to be discussed with written follow-up recommendations for future improvement. Epstein (1992) notes that most parents want to know how to help their children and want to know how they can stay involved in the education of their children. Epstein (1992:6) reminds us that, "Despite a real decline in teachers' practices to involve parents in the upper grades, parents of children at all grade levels want schools to keep them informed about their children's instructional programmes and progress."

Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013) make a very important point when talking about teacher/parent dialogue. They say that information that parents can give to teachers about their children is probably going to be very useful. After all, parents know they have rich experience in dealing with their children and can offer tips on how to handle their child. The information from parents can assist the teacher in the development of classroom practices.

Brandt (1998) in Graham-Clay (2005:122) notes that, "the public in general are becoming increasingly estranged from public institutions". This could be attributed to being overwhelmed by the demands placed on them. I would also argue that in many cases, both parents work because of the ever-increasing costs of private school education. Graham-Clay (2005) suggests that if teachers can appreciate that every positive interchange with parents will not only build stronger relationships from which learners will benefit, but a more informed community. Schools are well positioned to run parent education workshops with topics that can vary from child development to stress management. Graham-Clay (2005:122) puts it this way, "Local school needs to become a vibrant part of the community, and schools have the advantage of being a natural point of interaction with parents."

Two of the participant Bridging Class teachers confirmed the benefit of working with parents with the following statements. Ms A (Grade 1) said, *"I also think the other big*

thing is that parents and the school need to work together as a team" (Initial Interview: Lines 23-24).

"I have also found the most success I have experienced is when the child, and the teacher and the parents and the therapists all co-operate together" Ms B Grade 2 (Initial Interview: Lines 53-54).

These teachers sum up the best possible results that come from regular and constructive interaction between the significant adults in the learner's life.

5.2.6.3 Strategies for Creating an Emotionally and Academically Supportive Environment

Broadly speaking, the teachers who participated in this research all felt that it was important for learners in a Bridging Class to feel safe, to feel cared for, to have their efforts validated and to motivate through positive messages and instruction that was adjusted to meet their academic needs.

Nias (1999:72) draws on the writings of Nel Noddings who believes that the aim of education in Western society should be, "to produce citizens who 'care' in the relational sense about one another, intellectual ideas and the environment which they share with other species." She continues, saying that education in Western societies as it stands, "neglects feeling, concrete thinking, practical activity and even moral action.."

When asked to describe the core differences between teaching in a mainstream class as opposed to a Bridging Class, Mrs A (Grade 1) responded saying, "*Children come into your class for various reasons, some for anxiety, or parents are getting a divorce, or academic issues, so you need to be patient with them"* (Initial Interview: Lines 12-14). The need for a patient response implies that if learners are experiencing emotional and/or academic challenges, this is likely to play out in the classroom. When Ms B (Grade 2) was asked what factors discourage pupil progress, she said, "*In the class, I would say, anxiety, low self-esteem; if there is emotional stress from an incident that happened home"* (Final Interview: Lines 101-102). Ms B also mentioned her strategy of using Steven Covey's Seven Habits to teach values, "*respecting others and I think the most important is, how we go about improving the children's self-esteem to be leaders"* (Final Interview: Lines 141-142).

What seems to be emerging from these responses, is the need for learners not only to be cared for, but also children need to learn how to care for others. Nias (1999:67) puts forward the views of Noddings (1992; 1994) who said, "Noddings in particular has vigorously argued that caring in this affective sense is not simply an adjunct or aid to be achievement of cognitive goals. Rather, it is central to teaching and should be consciously adopted as a moral basis for practice in classrooms and schools."

Ms C (Grade 3), when asked what kind of an environment supports a child with barriers to learning? She responded, saying, "*Nurturing, safe, they got to feel, you have to build up their confidence, you have to try and make them feel like they can do things, you have to make them feel that they have got something; that they can do it, because in their heads, they can't, and that's this environment of just this nurturing, pushing, encouraging, safe, loving, you just have to love them"* (Final Interview: Lines 62-65). Ms C's statement seems to support what Nias (1999:69) believes about teachers. Nias (1999) writes, "Many teachers feel that their relationship with individual learners lies at the heart of what they do."

It is worth exploring the kinds of conditions Productive Pedagogies would consider a Supportive Classroom Environment and one which is conducive to learning. Social support described by Hayes, et al., (2006:67) means that learners feel supported academically and emotionally to the extent that they can take risks without fear of being undermined or shamed. Learners are, "encouraged to participate in the classroom in such a way that they hypothesise, challenge and discuss possible ideas each other in a safe environment."

A deeper analysis of what conditions promote or constrain learners in their learning environment revealed that a great deal depends on the teacher. From the work of Leroy, Bressoux & Sarrazin (2007) we learn that there seems to be two schools of thinking about intelligence which appears to influence attitudes of teachers towards learners as well as instructional practice. The first is that academic ability is a fixed trait and it's a question of working with that inherent ability and the other is the belief that academic abilities can be improved through the learner's own efforts.

What Leroy, et al., (2007:530) observed is that, "teachers who believe that academic abilities are fixed tend to create a classroom environment that employs more

incentives, more directive language and controlling modes of communication." They also tend to be more critical and show disapproval. This teacher is likely to do most of the talking and will only allow limited time for completion of tasks. On the other hand, the teacher who supports the notion that academic abilities can be improved will, "seek to identify students' inner motivational resources by creating classroom conditions favourable to meeting students' needs in a way that promotes internalization processes and enhances intrinsic motivation" (Leroy et al., 2007:530).

Studies cited in Leroy, et al., (2007) done by Moore & Esselman, (1992); Rich, Lev & Fischer, (1996) reveal links between the teachers' self-efficacy and the kind of classroom climate created. Enochs, Scharmann & Riggs, (1995) in Leroy (2007) believe that if the teacher feels competent she/he is likely to adopt a more humanistic approach and will also look for ways to help learners achieve mastery. The 'fixed ability' type teacher tends to focus more on performance and abilities, "which creates more competitive learning situations" (Leroy, et al., 2007:531).

What I observed from the three participant Bridging Class teachers, was interaction characteristic of both types of teachers and therefore it would be difficult to categorize these teachers as the one type or the other. For example, in the case of Ms A (Grade 1), I did feel that the "learning was very directed and teacher-controlled", (from my notes taken whilst observing an English lesson on the introduction of the letter 'Y'). As mentioned earlier, I also noted that the lesson had virtually no higher-order content. For example, the teacher asked about the meanings of 'Y' words up on the board, but as my notes observe, "they were mostly words known to them i.e. 'yolk', 'yawn', 'yo-yo'. I noted further, "There was a picture of a small animal on a tree with the word "yearling" underneath, but this was not discussed at all". Another example of teacher-controlled behaviour was demonstrated when learners were required to write sentences containing 'Y' words. Learners were instructed to copy the teacher's sentences and write the 'Y' words in colour. One of her instructions was, *"If I use pink to write a word, so do you."* This excerpt from the English lesson does not appear to support learners' motivational needs or encourage autonomy. Yet, I also observed supportive empathic interaction. I noted, "The environment is supportive in the sense of the teacher being very well prepared, predictable and structured. Learners know what is expected of them." I noted further, "Teacher kept tight control in a positive way. She constantly praised

her pupils for their efforts to do what was required of them." Admittedly, the learning was tightly prescribed by the teacher. Learners checked continuously with her that their work was correct and would say, *"Beautiful K, I am proud of you".* One learner called out, *"as long as we try our best."* The pedagogic style seems to contain a combination of what can be described as humanistic and supportive and yet the controlling elements are at odds with what Leroy et al., (2007:530) describes as developing, "internalization processes and enhancing intrinsic motivation." The other contradiction which emerges from the findings of Leroy, et al., (2007:531) and working with Ms A is, that these researchers seems to suggest that, "the more effective teachers feel, the more they tend to create an environment that promotes self-development and co-operation." I experienced the classroom climate in Grade 1 as co-operative and safe. As it happens, of the three participant teachers, Ms A is the only teacher who expressed the need to improve her pedagogic knowledge. In the semi-structured interview conducted, she acknowledged that the Bridging Class teachers are not equipped to help learners who are remedially challenged. She put it this way, "…*most of us are not remedially trained, so we don't have these tools to help that specific child"* (Initial Interview: Lines 84-85). She did, however, add, *"I think, for example, I am studying further. Teachers from the Bridging Class need to do that in order to keep up with your new strategies. I think, keeping up with, even if you don't do remedial, but know how to help these children"* (Initial Interview: Lines 95-97). (Ms A is currently studying a course on Dyslexia).

Another interesting study was conducted by Urbach, Moore, Klingner, Galman, Haager, Brownell & Dingle (2015) to compare the differences in beliefs between the more accomplished teachers and less accomplished teachers. The purpose of this study was to inform professional development programmes. In summary, the more accomplished teachers placed the focus on a need for "instructional intensity", and felt this is where their roles and responsibilities lay. The more accomplished teachers expressed a desire for professional growth and said their students should be working continuously. The less accomplished teachers tended to focus on building relationships and protecting their students. Allinder (1995) in Urbach, et al., (2015) found that teachers with higher teaching efficacy set higher standards and appeared to have higher expectations of their students as opposed to teachers with low efficacy. Low efficacy teachers tended to attribute failure to external factors,

whereas high efficacy teachers were willing to accept responsibility for learner performance. Low efficacy teachers believed that, “special education should *not* be intense.” (Urbach, et al., 2015:329). One less accomplished teacher felt that, “its fun and helpful to take the students off a programme for a while to give them a break”, while another shared that, “he (a student), loves inventing his own curriculum” (Urbach, et al., 2015:330).

One of the themes explored by Urbach, et al., (2015:331) was to ask the two categories of teachers about the specific influences that affected their teaching. The more accomplished teachers felt that teachers have a responsibility to, “teach regardless” of influences that affected their instruction e.g., parental support, district mandates, specific learning disabilities, support from general education.” Another accomplished teacher said, “I’m not going to give up and I’m not going to use these things as excuses” (Urbach, et al., 2015:331). As mentioned earlier, less accomplished teachers spoke more about building student-relationships, “in terms of making students feel loved and nurtured and creating a supportive relationship as their priority.” (Urbach et al., 2015:332).

At the core of all the strategies discussed in this section is the belief that continuous professional development will impact the quality of instruction, whether it is a more informed approach to working with specific learning disabilities or strategies for working more effectively with parents, or in the case of Bridging Class teachers, finding the balance between quality instruction and a teacher/learner relationship that conveys authentic but appropriate care. Bondy & Ross (2008) in Urbach, et al., (2015:332) call these teachers “warm demanders”. They describe “warm demanders” as teachers who convey, “warmth and a non-negotiable demand for student effort and mutual respect.” (p.54). This concept is supported by Hayes, et al., (2006) who propose that learners need a supportive environment but are clear that the curriculum content must be intellectually demanding.

The following quote from Productive Pedagogies Research strongly advocates developing teacher professionalism (QSRLS 2001:149), “In terms of professional development, there is evidence here that the investment in teachers’ social capital and their intellectual capital is both necessary and, where targeted effectively in combination with particular enabling approaches to school leadership, sufficient for

improved pedagogy and outcomes. The good news is that many positive achievements are possible with the appropriate levels of school and systemic support and targeting for professional development" (Hayes, et al., 2006:204). An investment in professional development may also facilitate the creation of support groups in which less experienced or less accomplished teachers can be guided and supported by the more experienced and accomplished teachers. Support of this nature may also reduce some of the external pressure and stress both Bridging Class teachers and learners experience in the process of preparing to enter a mainstream environment.

The value of professional development was expressed well by Ms B (Grade 2) who commented on the difference it made to her to attend a talk on managing disabilities. She said, "*Yesterday we went to a course and I found the speakers were so inspirational and it just made me understand, from the child's perspective sometimes you teaching and just not getting anywhere and you really become despondent, but by listening to these experts, you really feel more motivated" (*Final Interview: Lines 32 – 35).

What Hayes, et al., (2006) reports on the effects of professional development is supported by Ruiz et al., (1995) in Urbach et al., (2015:325) who found that all the teachers who participated in a research project began believing that learning disabilities were a deficit inherent in the child, but with professional development they changed their views, beliefs and practices. This has to be the most persuasive reason to invest in the development of teachers.

5.3 Overall Findings

When reviewing and analysing data, which consisted of interviews, observations and themes which emerged, the following overall findings are presented.

5.3.1 Finding One

Time Pressure Impacts on Teaching and Learning

From semi-structured interviews conducted with participant Bridging Class teachers, it emerged that anxiety, which emerged as a theme, was caused by time pressures on both teachers and learners. The teachers were under pressure to keep up with a mainstream curriculum which resulted in learners, at times, not having sufficient time

to consolidate concepts. Lack of understanding could be perceived as a learning disability, whereas if learners were given enough time for repetition and consolidation, concepts may be better understood.

5.3.2 Finding Two

Anxiety Affects Cognitive Functioning

Factors such as a chaotic home life with divorce, disorganization or lack of parental support, can cause anxiety which distracts and interferes with concentration. This claim is supported by Perkins (1992) who claims that emotions can affect the storage and retrieval of information necessary for cognitive functioning.

5.3.3 Finding Three

Learner's Achievements Can be Affected by Teachers Beliefs, and Knowledge of Learning Disabilities

The interviews and classroom observations revealed that teachers did not consciously apply higher-order thinking as part of their teaching practice because they did not believe these learners were capable of being challenged or given the strategies to, "synthesise, generalise, explain, hypothesise or arrive at some conclusion or interpretation". (Hayes, et al., 2006:90). They also believed that strategies such as IRE (Initiate/Respond/Evaluate) as well as rote recitation were necessary for embedding concepts and providing strategies for retrieval of information. Higher-order elements that emerged were more coincidental rather than planned for. Teachers did not express the purpose of concrete work as a the step before higher-order thinking as per Vygotsky's (1978:89) belief that concrete work is a stepping stone towards higher-order thinking and not an end in itself.

All three participant teachers placed an emphasis on the importance of concrete work as an end in itself, and therefore the concept of 'concrete work' emerged as a theme in the coding process.

5.3.4 Finding Four

A Culture of Caring is Achieved by Combining Academic and Emotional Support

Participant Bridging Class Teachers were aware of the emotional support their learners needed, as many children were emotionally fragile due to various factors

such as dysfunctional backgrounds or lack of confidence resulting from poor performance. Observations in the classrooms revealed that learners were taught in a structured environment with planned lessons and follow-up tasks. Learners were engaged and on-task as per the Productive Pedagogy requirement of a Supportive Classroom Environment.

Teachers encouraged and praised learners' efforts. They created emotionally 'safe' environments in which learners could take risks without fear of making mistakes or being wrong. This concept is supported by Productive Pedagogies. A 'safe' environment also supports Leroy's, et al. (2007) theory of self-determination which encourages learners to engage in activities for their own sake, rather than for teacher approval, incentives or rewards.

All three participant teachers expressed the need for learners to feel cared for and their efforts validated, and therefore, the theme of 'caring' was considered significant.

Teachers were open to adapting the curriculum to suit the needs of the learners. The adaptations are constrained, however, because they are expected to complete a mainstream curriculum.

5.3.5 Finding Five

Bridging Classes in a mainstream are a form of Differentiation and Inclusion because adaptations are made to Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

It was observed during classroom visits that teachers made adaptations to the curriculum. The focus was for learners to produce 'quality work' which resulted in deep understanding, rather than 'quantity' which may result in superficial understanding. The pedagogy takes into account the necessity of paying more attention to individual performance. In the Bridging Class, results from various forms of assessment come from immediate feedback, weekly assessment and benchmark tests which inform teachers of the level of comprehension, and knowledge acquired.

During class visits, teachers walked around checking and assisting learners. The fact that there are fewer learners in the class meant they could respond immediately when learners asked for help and provide immediate feedback. This level of attention produced the theme of 'Different' because the class structure is different compared to mainstream classes. The theme of 'Assessment' emerged because teachers were

able to make the necessary accommodations and adaptations to assessments. These differentiating responses were interpreted as forms of Differentiation and Inclusion.

5.3.6 Finding Six

Strengthening the Relationship between home and school will support the Academic and Social Outcomes of Learners in the Bridging Class

What emerged from interviews with Ms A (Grade 1) and Ms B (Grade 2) is that children can experience anxiety when parents do not support or communicate effectively with the school. Epstein (1992) claims that a partnership of shared responsibility between home and school can help improve the learner's skills and self-esteem. Learners understand that parents and teachers are investing time and resources to support academic and social outcomes. The role 'parents' play seemed an important theme to explore as way of supporting learners emotionally.

Strengthening the relationship between home and school will impact on the learner's academic skills, self- esteem and attitude toward learning. Schools can facilitate, "improving parents' knowledge about child development, parenting skills, and the quality of parent-child, parent-parent, and parent-teachers interactions and relationships" (Epstein,1992:6). Schools can be resource centres for parent education and support groups.

5.4 Conclusion

The themes covered in this Chapter explored the Cognitive and Emotional Challenges Bridging Class learners' experience. Exploring each challenge using literature as well as teacher responses and observations of lessons provided useful insights for Support. The data also revealed the challenges Bridging Class teachers experience. From this analysis, six core Findings provided information which can be used to make recommendations to support the academic and social outcomes for Bridging Class learners and their teachers.

What emerged from Finding One and Finding Two, was that teachers need to find ways to utilise time in a way that reduces pressure on learners. The pressure appears to create anxiety, the effect of which, can compromise learning. Poor performance can be associated with a learning disability.

Time pressure is also likely to limit verbal interaction through sustained discussions which Intellectual Quality, a component of Productive Pedagogy, requires for deep understanding and deep knowledge.

In Finding Three, it was of concern to discover that participant teachers did not really believe their learners were capable of higher-order thinking. Of course learners need to work with concrete materials, but it could be argued, with this approach, there is a real risk of labelling learners as having limited capabilities. It seems that learners will produce work of high quality if teachers convey this as an expectation. This claim is supported by the research conducted by Newmann and colleagues cited in (DoE, 2002:3) which states, "when students from *all* backgrounds are expected to perform work of high intellectual quality, overall student academic performance increases and equity gaps decrease."

Useful information emerged from the data informing Finding Four which discusses the necessity for creating a culture of care. This is best achieved by combining academic and emotional support. It seems that authentic care conveys sensitivity to the emotional well-being of the learners, but at the same time ensures the learner stays on-task. Urbach et al., (2015:332) believe that skills cannot be compromised at the expense of relationship building. The Grade 3 participant teacher encapsulated this view when asked the question, "what kind of environment supports a child like this, a child with barriers to learning?" Ms C responded saying, "*Nurturing, safe, they got to feel, you have to build up their confidence, you have to try and make them feel like they can do things, you have to make them feel they have got something…"* Final Interview: Lines 62-

Finding Five concluded that the structure of the Bridging Classes facilitates forms of Differentiation and Inclusion. The smaller number of learners in the class means that teachers are able to pay more attention to individual needs and offer more appropriate support. Teachers also have a certain amount of flexibility to make adaptations to the curriculum and assessment accommodating learning deficits.

Finding Six pertains to the relationship between home and school. From the literature as well as interviews with participant teachers, a theme emerged which called for an exploration of how the relationship between the home and the school impacted on the learner. Teachers of these classes understand the value of

establishing good relationships with parents. It appears that learners benefit from regular, honest, non-judgemental communication between teachers and parents and what Graham-Clay (2005:119) describes as, “a growing trust, a mutality of concern and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives.”

Chapter 6 utilises these findings to answer the research questions posed for the study and forward recommendations.

6 CHAPTER 6 – DISCUSSION AND CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE STUDY

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and discuss pedagogic practices, reflections and experiences of teachers in Bridging Classes in Foundation Phase. Observations of Bridging Class teachers in their classroom together with semi-structured interviews provided insights into the challenges that both teachers and learners experience during the teaching and learning process. It is felt that the dialogue between me as the researcher and the participant Bridging Class teachers unpacked the processes and perceptions of the nature of these classes and the role these teachers play. The investigation drew attention to the importance of adapting the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to the needs of these learners who are at risk. This section will attempt to use the findings presented in Chapter 5 to answer the Research Questions. It will present the Limitations of the Study and discuss what contribution the study makes to the area of educational support for learners with moderate learning disabilities. This Chapter also includes recommendations to support not only learners but also their teachers. It is hoped that the recommendations will empower teachers and enhance the quality of the teaching experience for Bridging Class teachers.

6.1.1 Research Question One

"What are the perceptions and experiences of participant Bridging Class teachers regarding the nature of the Bridging Class?"

Question One was designed to have teachers articulate their perceptions and experiences regarding the nature of the Bridging Class. Teachers were clear on the fact that although there are fewer learners in the Bridging Classes, which means creating time and space for individual needs, in reality there is still an underlying pressure to reintegrate these learners back into mainstream. Teachers felt that because of time pressure to complete a mainstream curriculum, they often compromised on the time learners needed to consolidate concepts. It appears this time pressure tends to cause anxiety for both learners and teachers.

Although the participant teachers did not consciously apply strategies of Differentiation and Inclusion, they used pedagogy aligned to these concepts. For example, Ms B responded to a question asking how she understood Differentiation.

She said, "*so I would give maybe the top, the children who perhaps, the children in my class, they usually have their strengths, which might be Maths, but English is their weakness, so for Maths I would extend them, put them in a group and do extension with them..*" (Final Interview: Lines 127-129). Ms B was of the opinion that to apply Differentiation, the teachers would need training. It could be argued that the structure of Bridging Classes addresses many aspects of an Inclusive environment. Teachers give learners individual attention, which could be viewed as a form of differentiation. Westwood (2001) supports the idea of differentiated attention according to a learner's individual needs.

Another perception held by the teachers is that it is the nature of Bridging Class learners to experience anxiety which often originates from chaotic or dysfunctional family backgrounds. A learner from this type of home was unlikely to receive the academic support in the form of homework being done on a daily basis, or emotional support which encourages and validates the efforts of the learner.

In the experience of the teachers it becomes their responsibility to build a relationship in which the parent feels respected, understood and not judged by the school. It should be a relationship in which the teacher, therapists, parents and child work together as this is likely to have a positive impact on the learner's self-esteem, and attitude towards learning. Participant teachers confirmed that this was the ideal working relationship. According to Epstein (1992) positive emotional characteristics can influence other areas of academic and social development that contribute to success.

Teachers are of the opinion that the relationship between teacher and learner could be more intense for the Bridging Class teacher. She may be called on to mediate between parents and the school. She is also expected to support and close knowledge gaps. Bridging Class teachers do not have formal remedial training and although the structure of the class as 'support', rather than 'remedial' is conveyed to the parents, both the teacher and pupil experience the pressure of working to attain a level at which learners can integrate into the mainstream.

To distinguish between what is offered in the Bridging Class as opposed to a mainstream class, there needs to be a great deal more collateral information about the learner who is applying for a place in the Bridging Class. For a learner to secure

a place in the Bridging Class, there is a requirement for a full Psychological/Educational Assessment to ensure that learners are placed correctly. Information from this assessment as well as the pre-school, will inform the junior school as to whether the learner should attend a remedial school, or with educational support, the learner would after a year or two, manage to integrate into mainstream. Decisions are made by the pre-grade teachers together with Grade One teachers. Often they will consult the educational psychologist responsible for conducting the Psychological/Educational Assessment. The Bridging Class learner sits on the cusp. The decision whether to place the learner in the Bridging Class or a remedial school has academic, emotional, social and financial ramifications for learners and parents. As Ms A (Grade 1) put it, "*And just to get them in the right places, if need be, to help them in that interim time while they are waiting to get into a remedial school because that is for me, the fine line between the Bridging Class because a lot of the time we say, "you in Grade One, so let's give you a chance, but maybe you remedial, and maybe you need a remedial school and for a Bridging Class teacher, that's the hardest thing to see, will you make it in our system, or you not actually in the right place"* (Initial Interview: Lines 99 – 103).

What was expressed in interviews was that although teachers were committed to the academic and social development of the learners in their classes, they expressed a level of fatigue, frustration and at times despondence and doubt in their own ability. Ms B (Grade 2) did concede that teaching in the Bridging Class could be "draining", but with the added responsibility came the reward.

To investigate the nature of the Bridging Class, Productive Pedagogy was used as a lens with which to view the different elements of classroom structure with a focus on pedagogic strategies that are used to support learners. Productive Pedagogy investigates the quality of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment used to support the academic and social needs of learners

6.1.2 Research Question Two

"What are the perceptions and experiences of participant Bridging Class teachers regarding their role as Bridging Class Teachers?"

With regard to the way teachers perceive their role, which was the second question the research addressed, they understood that the Bridging Classes should be an

environment that provides a safe space for the learner. They also understood that this learner's self-image and self-esteem, even at this very young age of school entry, is often fragile. Ms A (Grade 1) expressed it this way, "*I think the most important is where they feel safe, where they know that it is a nurturing environment, it's non-competitive, and I think that, that is the main difference, I feel in our school between the mainstream and us. It's just smaller, it's quieter, and they don't have that competitiveness"* (Final Interview: Lines 83 – 86).

Teachers were also clear on their role which they believe, is to prepare learners to integrate into mainstream. What emerged from the discussion about Assessments and their purpose, is that teachers saw the main reason to assess was to compare learner's performance with that of mainstream. The decision about when to move the learners to mainstream was not only academic; their emotional maturity and level of home support is also assessed and a decision made by the teacher, remedial support and parents. In terms the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding their role as Bridging Class teachers, it was useful to probe and unpack what it means to deliver a curriculum which keeps concepts age-appropriate, includes the development of higher order thinking skills, and retains a real connection to the world. These issues were addressed in the component of Connectedness to the World. Ms A (Grade 1) and Ms B (Grade 2) demonstrated this as they taught leadership skills through Steven Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Productive Pedagogy provides specific guidelines on how to create a Supportive Environment. It became apparent that learners in the Bridging Class need to know their teachers have high expectations of them and a belief in their capabilities and that "*all* members of the class can learn important knowledge and skills" (DOE, 2002:10). Ms A (Grade 1) finds many opportunities to reinforce this concept with the mantra, "*A leader is proactive; a leader never gives up"* (Final Interview: Line 125).

The component of Engagement with Difference provided insights on the importance of making provision for learners who may be part of the non-dominant culture and these differences can include ability, race, ethnicity, culture or religious practice. The question teachers need to be asking is, *What is necessary to allow the pupil to participate in the learning?"* Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013) supports Rodina (2006:18) quoting Vygotsky who urges us not to focus on the weakness, but rather,

"the strengthening and empowerment of individual skills", and this of course has implications for assessment of Bridging Class learners in a supportive environment.

6.1.3 Research Question Three

"What pedagogical and assessment strategies are observed in the Bridging Class that support the intellectual and social outcomes of learners?"

This research question addresses pedagogical and assessment strategies observed in the Bridging Classes that support the intellectual and social outcomes of learners. From a Productive Pedagogies perspective, the overarching impression from a research point of view, is that the participant teachers applied many elements of effective pedagogic practice. A Supportive Classroom Environment requires teachers to provide *explicit criteria.* For example, Ms A (Grade 1) demonstrated this well by using the same format when introducing a new letter from the alphabet. She would start with a discussion about the words beginning with that letter, followed by a short story and end off with the construction of sentences incorporating words beginning with that letter. Teachers were drawing from their training and experience. All three teachers appeared to support Piaget's constructivist approach to learning. Wilson (2002:626) supports this approach, "We construct our ability to think as we interact with the world." Learners in these classes were given ample opportunities for interaction in a concrete, visual way. Ms C (Grade 3) confirmed this strategy when she said*, "You know I think concrete is very important. So, umm...whatever you do, it has to be in the concrete. They have to visually see things...umm... to actually enable them to comprehend better"* (Final Interview: Lines 24-26). All three participant teachers were of the belief that the IRE (Initiate/Respond/Evaluate) modus operandi was a pedagogical skill necessary for teaching learners in the Bridging Class. They were not confident that these learners were capable of higher-order thinking or that this was the natural progression from concrete operational thinking. They seem to believe that in Bridging classes, keeping activities to visual/ concrete was key to the teaching and learning process.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is that this research was conducted in only one school with three participant teachers from Grade 1,2 and 3 respectively. It is, however, representative of the nature of the Bridging Class and its uniqueness within a mainstream school setting. By observing Maths and English lessons in each of

these classes, patterns and commonalities as well differences, emerged in the structuring, classroom management, classroom climate and pedagogic styles of the three participant teachers.

With regard to the uniqueness of the Bridging Class model, Yin (1984:10) raises the question, “How can you generalize from a single case?”, and the simple answer, he says is, “that in doing a case study, the goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization).”

The other reason why it is necessary to engage in analytic generalization, is that there are only one or two Bridging Classes per grade, so the number of observations and interviews poses a limitation on this case study.

The limitations of the study centre around its’ uniqueness as a response to learners at risk, but because there are so few schools that provide Bridging Classes as a form of support, there is no basis for comparison with Bridging classes in other schools. Comparisons which would be illuminating would include the strengths and challenges in other Bridging Classes in other schools. A limitation exists in the small number of Bridging Classes throughout the school system.

6.3 Contribution the Study Makes

The Bridging Class in a mainstream school is a unique response to Inclusion and Differentiation because it does attempt to address the needs of the individual who is at risk but does not necessarily need a remedial school. It could be argued that the learner at risk in a mainstream class will probably not receive as much attention as he/she does in a Bridging Class. The fact that there are fewer learners in a class makes it a, “quieter, less competitive” environment as described by Ms A (Grade 1) earlier in this section. Shulman (2004:230) supports a class structure, “where pupils can attend to instructional tasks, orient themselves towards learning with a minimum of disruption and distraction, and receive a fair and adequate opportunity to learn.”

Lingard, Hayes & Mills (2003:405) observe that the theoretical work of sociologists, Bernstein and Bourdieu compel us to develop a language for professional conversations about pedagogy and the components of Productive Pedagogy provide a comprehensive framework with which to support *all* learners regardless of ability.

The language of Productive Pedagogy with its components of Intellectual Quality, Supportive Classroom Environment, Connectedness to the World and Engagement with Difference could support Shulman's (2004) description above of the ideal classroom.

Lingard, Hayes & Mills (2003:403) propose that teachers need to be regarded as public intellectuals rather than technicians, and they should be part of the process of developing policies. Lingard et al., (2003) observe that historically in places like the UK, educational policy and restructuring, "have been done *to* teachers, rather than *with* them." Their professionalism has been denied and they have been granted 'choices' rather than 'voices'.

This research process of observations and interviews gave these teachers a voice, and an opportunity to reflect and express what they found to be supportive as well as factors which impact negatively on themselves and the learners. The questions in semi-structured interviews were posed in a way that demonstrated respect for them as professionals and experts in their field of work.

What also emerged from this research is that whilst learners, and particularly learners at risk need support, so too do teachers. Considering the daily demands Bridging Class teachers are subjected to such as closing knowledge gaps and dealing with parents who are often not as committed to the process of remediation because of their own personal challenges. These teachers are expected to communicate with therapists and continuously review and adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of individual learners. It is little wonder the teachers feel somewhat beleaguered at times. Nias (1999) mentioned earlier in this research report that Hothschild referred to the emotional intensity of teachers and the fatigue that can result from what is termed "emotional labour". Professional development and a Community of Practice could support teachers to create appropriate boundaries to protect themselves.

The process of this investigation provided data which can be used to design professional development that could potentially enhance the current programme offered to Bridging Class learners. The data could also to construct strategies that support the emotional well-being of teachers who are also at risk of burn-out or may be lost to the teaching professional if overloaded with too much responsibility.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the Themes and Findings, the following four recommendations are made.

6.4.1 Recommendation One: Professional Development Could Improve Teaching Practice and Reduce Anxiety

Professional development could provide strategies on how to improve in the areas raised by the Bridging Class teachers such as reading and comprehension skills. Support strategies suggested by authors such as Gathercole & Alloway (2007) for learners who experience memory and processing difficulties may help to reduce anxiety and thereby provide opportunities for learners to experience success. Self-monitoring skills as described by Shimabukuro, et al., (1999) may be able to provide organization strategies to all learners, not only those who have been diagnosed with ADD/ADHD disorder.

Professional development may help teachers enlist the support of parents who, as Van de Putte & De Schauwer (2013) suggest, have a wealth of knowledge about their children to share which could assist with behavioural management and inform instructions practice.

Professional development may help teachers to challenge their own assumptions that intelligence is fixed as opposed to a notion that intelligence can be improved if classroom conditions are favourable and learners are motivated as suggested by Leroy et al., (2007).

Professional development could influence teachers to explore different types of intelligence and encourage teachers to teach to a learner's strength which could open up other options for learners other than those prescribed by conventional school systems.

Knowledge of Inclusion and Differentiation could enhance and improve pedagogic and assessment practice. Knowledge of learning disabilities could serve to inform and empower teachers which may reduce teacher anxiety and therefore, learner anxiety.

6.4.2 Recommendation Two: Communities of Practitioners could provide a sharing of Knowledge, Expertise and Experience

The creation of Communities of Practice could provide a form of mentoring and support from the more experienced and accomplished teachers. Included in this Community of Practice, experts such as internal and external remedial therapists could offer their expertise and avail themselves for consultation.

What emerged from classroom observations, were also some very effective pedagogic practices which also highlights the need for setting up a Community of Practice. Teachers know when lessons work, and both colleagues and learners would benefit from a sharing of best practice. Shulman (2004:228) supports this idea. He believes teaching is a learned profession and teachers need to be continuously asking, "*What are the important ideas and skills in this domain? And, how are the new ideas added and deficient ones dropped by those who produce knowledge in this area?"* (my italics).

6.4.3 Recommendation Three: Assessment in Bridging Classes should be used for Instructional Purposes

It emerged from interviews with participant Bridging Class teachers that assessment is used primarily to ascertain whether learners are ready for mainstream. Learners are continuously assessed to check if they are performing to the standards of mainstream classes.

It could be argued that assessment is not only an academic issue, it also has the potential to undermine learners. It can come across as critical and judgemental. Learners in an emotionally caring and safe environment will take risks without fear of making mistakes. Tomlinson (2014:11) believes assessments should help teachers develop the best methods for teaching and learning and perfection or total mastery should not be their goal. Tomlinson (2014:12) puts it this way, "When feedback serves it's instruction purpose, students are clear about the learning targets at which they are aiming."

6.4.4 Recommendation Four: Working with the Multiple Intelligences theory may Improve Learners' Access to Knowledge

Greater recognition and exploration of multiple intelligences could help learners access knowledge rather than trying to remediate the gaps of a logical-mathematical and language-linguistic curriculum. More emphasis on cultural dimensions could form a pathway for learners to experience successful learning. In response to the question posed to participant Bridging Class teachers about what they found as core differences between main steam and bridging class teaching, Ms A confirmed that she needed "lots of strategies" because there are all different kinds of learners, who, "learn differently". (Initial Interview: Lines: 14-16).

From coding the interviews of participant teachers, it emerged that Bridging Class learners learn differently to mainstream learners and therefore, 'Different' appeared to be theme worth exploring in various ways.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to make visible the role and the nature of the Bridging Class within a mainstream school. At face value, these classes appear to address the issue of social justice which requires what Lingard & Mills (2007:237) describe as, "well educated teacher who know the research literature, but mediate it through a careful reading of the demands and specificities of their students, classes, locale, and place and space of nation and globe." Lingard & Mills (2007) add that if we want to create a socially just schooling environment, we need to trust our teachers.

Throughout the process of this research, teachers were regarded as the experts as they were asked to share their views and experiences of being Bridging Class teachers. Observation in the classrooms and answers to questions during interviews revealed so much more than I had ever previously understood, even as a Bridging Class teacher for 5 years. What became apparent is Bourdieu's point quoted by Christie (2008:174), and mentioned earlier in this report is that, *"inequalities are most easily perpetuated when they are not recognized to exist."* (my italics) Many schools have a system of teacher appraisal during which the teacher is assessed primarily on whether she is teaching to the standards of a curriculum, but it is only through discussions that the opinions and attitudes reveal the more subtle, but more significant aspects of teaching practice. For example, all three participant teachers

delivered lessons that definitely do what Shulman (2004) defines as effective pedagogical practice which is that teaching ends with new comprehension and knowledge beyond the learners' context, but through the interviews, it was revealed that the teachers did not believe that learners were capable of a level of cognition that could produce higher-order thinking. From the literature reviewed, as well as observations and interviews, I am of the opinion that what learners are able to achieve is affected by teacher's beliefs and pedagogical content knowledge. Pajaras (1992) in Urbach (2015) asserted that beliefs may be the "single most important construct in educational research" (p.311). After conducting professional development with a group of teachers who started out believing that learning disabilities were inherent and function could not be improved. After the training, these teachers were convinced otherwise, and this influenced their teaching practice. The upgrading of skills and improving of teacher competence may result in a standard of teaching that supports the teaching of critical thinking skills as per the requirements of Intellectual Quality.

The interactions during the interviews also revealed the need for collegial support. Most of these teachers operate in isolation and may share a problem or solution with a colleague in passing, but there is no forum to share their challenges or successes. It was the process of this research that revealed the need to establish a Community of Practice, to offer professional support to Bridging Class teachers who are charged with working with different kinds of pupils. Very often these learners also have emotional challenges of which they have little control over, but which impact on learning. A Community of Practice could provide professional and psychological support for all parties concerned. Mahony & Hextall (2000:51) quote Connell (1993) who observed that, "learning is a full-blooded, human social process, and so is teaching. Teaching involves emotions as much as it involves pure reasoning."

In a Community of Practice, teachers could use professional development to learn the delicate art of combining academic and emotional support in more or less equal measures so that neither is compromised. Nias (1999:68) informs us that primary teaching needs a culture of care, "whose underlying values emphasize the importance of making children feel secure, happy and cared for." Urbach, et al., (2015) are of the opinion, however, that teachers cannot focus exclusively on one at

the expense of intense, high-quality instruction and that the two are not mutually exclusive.

In a Community of Practice teachers could use professional development to become what Urbach, et al., (2015) describes as “warm demanders”. Hopefully they will learn that loving, respecting, and supporting their students means implementing pedagogic practices that enable *all* learners to access knowledge.

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APPENDIX A – ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER

APPENDIX B – LETTERS OF CONSENT FROM GENERAL DIRECTOR, TEACHERS, PARENTS AND LEARNERS

APPENDIX C – INITIAL AND FINAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND TRANSCRIPTS OF PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

APPENDIX D – PARTIPICANT OBSERVATION SCHEDULES AND LESSON OBSERVATIONS OF PARTICIPANT BRIDGING CLASS TEACHERS

APPENDIX E - INDUCTIVE CODES FOR PARTICPANT TEACHERS