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Inclusive education: learners' perspectives on their special school placement

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR SPECIAL SCHOOL PLACEMENT

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by

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ABSTRACT

Special schools in the South African context are seen as part of the inclusive movement, as these schools cater for and accommodate learners that have higher support needs. Although special schools often have negative connotations, as they are still perceived as a deficit approach to inclusion, such schools are alternative placements to mainstream schools, where learners with barriers to learning are accommodated, and where their specific needs are met. Little is known about how learners in special schools feel about their placement. Therefore the core objective of this research study was to ascertain how high school learners in five Johannesburg schools perceive their placement in special school settings.

Five special state schools within the greater Johannesburg area consented that learners from their schools could participate in this research study. Participants from the study were randomly selected, so as to avoid stereotyping based on disability or classification. Participants were each involved in three focus group interviews, where photo diaries and written responses were used to elicit information. On completion of the three focus group interviews, each learner participated in an individual interview.

The study used a qualitative approach, which was informed by the methodology of phenomenography, where the experiences of the learners, as well as the similarities and differences between the learners, were described through the collective experiences of the group. Data was analysed using aspects of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1976), where the findings of the research were presented in accordance with phenomenography, where the collective responses from the learners in terms of the separate categories were shown, underpinned by the differences and the similarities that exist between participants.

The findings were reported according to five main categories, namely placement, peers, teachers, academic considerations and sport, and the data were solicited through three sub-questions that the research study posed. The findings revealed that although the majority of the learners enjoyed their placement in a special school and spoke of their experiences positively, it was evident that the establishment of separate schools that cater for learners with higher support needs intensifies the

differences between learners that attend mainstream schools and those that do not. The limitations in the design and execution of the study are clarified and recommendations are provided for further research in the field. An exposition is given of the researcher's reflection on the research, followed by concluding comments.

Key words:

Inclusive education	Special school	Learner voice
White Paper 6	Inclusion	Exclusion
Marginalisation	Placement	Mainstream

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research report is my own unaided, original work. It has been submitted exclusively to the University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

_____

Tarryn Taylor 17 February 2014

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADD	Attention deficit disorder
ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
EBD	Emotional and behavioural disorder
EFA	Education for All
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
LRE	Least restrictive environment
LSEN	Learners with special educational needs
NCESS	National Committee for Education Support Services
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training
SEBD	Social, emotional and behavioural disabilities
SEN	Special educational needs
SIAS	National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and support
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WHO	World Health Organisation
WP6	White Paper 6

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

After continually observing the ritual of high school learners at a special school taking off any item of clothing that could identify them with their school, I found myself wanting to know the reason behind such a strange act. My curiosity got the better of me and I enquired of one of the learners why he took off his school jersey and blazer when he walked home, no matter what the weather conditions were. The response took me by surprise when the learner explained that he was embarrassing to be seen with the school emblem, as identification with the school had a negative impact on the way others viewed him.

This conscious effort of the learner to rid himself of any attire that could identify him with his school made me wonder whether this was only due to the fact that the learner was in a special school, or whether placement was an issue for learners in mainstream school settings as well. Before this particular conversation, the implications of placement, specifically placement within a special school setting, and the way it impacted the learner had never been seen as an issue, either by me or by other professionals in the field of education. It is often assumed that being placed in a special school is a privileged opportunity for learners with higher support needs, and it is taken for granted that learners in special schools feel the same, yet through the voice of the learner that removed items of clothing that identified him with his special school, it indicates that many learners may feel differently. As a teacher working in a special school, this issue of placement is of particular interest to me, but I feel that it should also be of interest to parents with children in special schools, as well as to those in the education sector who have power to make decisions as to what effects, if any, placement has on a learner.

Education in South Africa has historically been fragmented due to an education system that discriminated against learners of different colour and disability. After 1994 the newly elected government introduced a new Constitution and Bill of Rights

that “safeguards and entrenches the rights of all South Africans” (Engelbrecht, 2011, p. 147). This philosophy filtered through to the education system and informed national guidelines for special needs education, namely the White Paper Six (WP6) (2001), which focuses on developing an education system that is inclusive of all learners. Yet, contrary to the ethos reflected in various policy documents, a discrepancy is noted in the distinction between learners with disabilities and learners with moderate to high education support needs (Engelbrecht, 2011, p. 150). This discrepancy is intensified through the establishment of separate schooling for learners with disabilities and high support needs. Mainstream schools accommodate learners who do not require intensive support while special schools accommodate learners with moderate to intense or high support needs as well as various kinds of disabilities. Therefore, despite the fact that South Africa has an education system that is underpinned by a vigorous policy of inclusion, it must be questioned whether separate schooling, and separating learners on the basis of their specific support is congruent with these values of inclusion.

Joining the voice of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) and the WP6 (2001) on inclusion, which celebrate diversity, Miles (2000) states that “special needs education assumes that human differences are normal and that learning must accordingly be adapted to the needs of the child rather than the child fitted to pre-ordained assumptions regarding the pace and nature of the learning process” (Miles, 2000, p. 11). Ball (1994) suggests that policy needs to move beyond concepts that underpin inclusion, to a practice of education that brings about equal human rights through social justice. These equal human rights favour social unity as reflected in values and beliefs that are accepting of difference. This acceptance could result in a transformational vehicle for change in collective thinking (Slee, 2011) and the reinforcing of true inclusive values in society.

1.2 PROBLEM-PURPOSE STATEMENT

Problem statement:

Although inclusion is not a new concept in the field of education in South Africa, it is still far from combating many of the exclusionary practices that exist within mainstream schooling, as well as special schooling. While South Africa’s inclusion policies recognise the need for special schooling, there still seems to be a large

disparity between learners in special schools and learners in mainstream schools. Even though this disparity does exist, very little is known about how learners feel about their school experience, specifically learners in a special school setting. There is not much research that has been conducted to identify learner's perceptions concerning placement, and not much research has been conducted that provides a platform for learners "voices" to be taken seriously.

Inclusive education policy has been seen as a form of social reform and redress with regard to disability, as well as racial inequality in South Africa, the inclusive education movement will remain stagnant until more is known about those at the core of inclusion itself, that is (the learners). For this reason, it is imperative that the 'voices' in the system are regarded as tools for change, and therefore not just heard, but listened to as well.

Purpose statement

The purpose of this research is to identify learners' perceptions regarding placement within special schools. The research intends to give learners in special school settings a voice with regard to their placement, as well as the opportunity to share their personal experiences of placement. Not only does the research aim to capture the voice of learners regarding their special school placement, but also to enlighten educational professionals and parents on how learners feel when placed in special schools. Because South African's education system consists of mainstream and full-service schools which cater for learners with low to moderate support needs and special schools which cater for learners with moderate to high support needs, many learners that fall into the higher support categories often do not have a choice as to which school they go to, as they need to attend a school that caters for their specific support needs. It is therefore imperative that parents and education professionals listen to what learners have to say about their placement, and it is hoped that this research will stimulate interest in people's thoughts and feelings around placement.

Aim:

Placement is an area in education which has not received much emphasis. When inclusion was implemented, most of the focus was placed on people's perceptions of inclusion or the way teachers were coping with or handling inclusion, and whether or

not it was a viable practice. The focus was therefore on the concept of inclusion and the policy that enforced inclusion, but little thought was given to the people who were most affected by inclusion, namely the learners. For this reason this research aims to focus inclusion research away from the mere implementation of this practice (although this is important) to how inclusion is perceived by those at the heart of the practice (the learners). Although there is a large gap in the literature on placement internationally, and particularly locally, the aim of this research is not to close the gap in the literature, but to start inquiring how learners in their various kinds of placement, particularly special schools, perceive and feel about their placement.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question for this study is “How do high school learners in five Johannesburg schools perceive their placement in special school settings?”

Sub-questions

- How do learners express their perception of placement in terms of academic considerations, sport, and sociability?
- What are the benefits and disadvantages of placement in a special school, according to learners in that placement?
- How does the placement of learners in a special school affect the way they perceive themselves and the way others behave towards them?

1.4 METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted as qualitative research where phenomenography was used as the research design. Phenomenographic studies describe the “meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57) in this case learners’ perception of their special school placement. Five schools in the greater Johannesburg area consented that learners from their schools could participate in the research study. Five learners from each school were randomly selected, so as to not select a specific group of individuals, but rather a group of peers that fit the set criteria, namely that they should be in high school and that their placement should be in a special school.

Three focus group interviews per school formed the basis of the data collection, where photo diaries and a written message in a bottle were used to elicit information in the interviews. On completion of the three focus group interviews per school, each learner took part in an individual interview to elicit more focused and in-depth data from each participant. Data was recorded by means of a tape recorder and was transcribed verbatim. Data was analysed phenomenologically Data is presented according to five main categories namely, school placement; peers; teachers; academic considerations and sport, each with additional sub categories.

1.5 TERMINOLOGY USED

In the study terminology needs to be defined so as to aid comprehension and to clear up misconceptions that are often associated with some of the terms. A brief definition and explanation will be given of the main terms.

Inclusion

"Inclusion" as a term means different things in different contexts, and therefore the focus of the term in this study will be within the context of this particular study. Inclusion refers to the accommodating of learners with barriers to learning (learners with moderate and high support needs) in special schools and learners with low support needs into mainstream schools. Although this study does not focus on inclusion in mainstream settings, the term "inclusion" can be used to refer to special needs schools. Inclusion can be seen as responding to the diversity of *all* learners and their different needs (Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou, 2011, Engelbrecht, 1999). The WP6 (2001) reiterates the key concept of inclusion by stating that inclusion is about "recognising and respecting the differences among all learners" (DoE, 2001, p. 17). Inclusion within the South African context is accommodating learners with different support needs, yet within a divided system of separate special schools and mainstream schools.

Inclusive education

As discussed above, inclusion is the guiding principles and ideas that inform an education system that recognises difference (DoE, 2001, p. 17). Inclusive education, on the other hand, is the *practice* of these ideas to produce an education system that strives to eradicate the divide and to accommodate difference.

Mainstream school

As previously stated, South Africa's education system is divided in that it has separate schooling for learners based on their specific needs. Mainstream schools in South Africa should cater for learners with low to moderate learning support needs, while special schools should cater for learners with medium to high support needs (DoE, 2001; SIAS, 2008).

Special school

Although an inclusive approach to learning is applied in mainstream schools at present, South Africa's past political status has created a divide between races and with regard to disability, and this has been perpetuated in the education system today. Having said this, special schools are viewed as facilities that offer a wider selection of support services, as well as facilities that offer a continuum of services for "learners who require high-intensive educational support" (DoE, 2001, p. 15). Special schools are further-reaching in that they have become resource centres for mainstream schools, with many mainstream schools converting to full-service schools (DoE, 2001, 2010).

Barriers to learning

The term "barriers to learning" is a preferred term to "special needs" as it is seen as a socially accepted paradigm (Pather, 2011, p. 10) and it recognises that "educational difficulties may arise from a number of sources" (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller, 2009, p. 107), which may be due to external or internal factors.

Learners with medium to high support needs

"Medium to high support needs" refer to the "scope and intensity of support needs" (DoE, 2008, p. 3) that a learner requires. The type as well as the level of support often depends on the particular barrier to learning, be it intrinsic or extrinsic.

Placement

Placement refers to the learning environment where a child receives the best possible opportunities and learning support. Placement should be made through an informed decision by the parents, education specialists *and* the child.

Marginalisation

"Marginalisation" refers to a broader context which has been defined by the UNDP (1996) as cited in Messiou (2011, p.2) as being "considered unimportant, undesirable, unworthy, insignificant and different resulting in inequality, unfairness, deprivation and enforced lack of access to mainstream power". Marginalisation in the context of education can also refer to any form of exclusion, where interest is shown in those that are "silently excluded" (Lewin, 2009, p. 157).

1.6 CHAPTER DIVISION

Chapter 1 set out the main objective of this research report and gave a clear indication of the research topic. The research question and the sub-questions were stated as well as the problem and purpose statements. The terminology used in the study was defined.

Chapter 2 discusses pertinent topics related to inclusion, marginalisation and exclusion, voice research and placement in special schools. The literature covers international as well as local trends in thinking and ideas, with the focus being on what is currently happening in South Africa in terms of inclusion and placement.

Chapter 3 explains the methodologies that have been employed in this study. The qualities of the research design are discussed, as well as the various data-collection instruments that have been used. The data analysis procedures are also explained.

Chapter 4 presents the main findings of the research, and it discusses the findings. The chapter presents the data through the use of a metaphor and uses five categories with various sub categories to describe how learners in special schools perceive their placement.

Chapter 5: provides an overview of the study in terms of the aim, the method and the purpose of the study. The research question and the various sub questions are

answered based on the findings of the research, and pertinent themes from the literature are addressed. Recommendations will be suggested for further study, and the limitations of the study will be explained, followed by a brief reflection on the research project. Finally, a closing statement will form the concluding remarks.

1.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the reader was introduced to the research topic and the research question, where the aim of the study is to listen to learners' experiences with regard to their special school placement. The chapter outlined key concepts around inclusion and the policies that underpin it globally, as well as in South Africa. In the chapter to follow, namely the literature review, issues and contestations surrounding inclusion, exclusion, and marginalisation will be explored in depth, with the focus being on the placement of learners in special schools. Issues around using "voice" as a research approach will be addressed, as well as whether children have a place in contributing towards research, and not just to be the subjects of research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the issues of marginalisation and exclusion, inclusion, placement and the concept of using learners' voices to elicit information. Throughout the chapter, concepts are defined and explored, but also debated and analysed in terms of the contradictions and contested issues surrounding the topics. The literature covers international and local trends, with the focus being on the current context in South Africa. Although many of the topics discussed are expansive, the broader picture is presented with the focus being on the content of the current debate on pertinent education issues in South Africa that are relevant to the study.

2.2 MARGINALISATION AND EXCLUSION

2.2.1 Marginalisation, and exclusion and statistics

The WP6 (2001, p. 6) defines inclusive education as "acknowledging and respecting differences in learners". This having been said, South Africa's education system in the past blatantly neglected learners of colour ("black" learners), as well as disability, and for this reason, special schools were seen as places that accommodated learners with barriers to learning and high support needs, while mainstream schools accommodated learners with fewer barriers and lower support needs. Although this is the case, the WP6 (2001) reported that 280-000 disabled learners are out of school, which points to the fact that "inclusiveness" often falls short, as it is not reaching the needs of "all learners", as defined in policy definitions of inclusion (Slee, 2011).

The RSA Gazette (2010) reported that some 200-000 disabled learners were still not accommodated in schools in South Africa. The WP6 (2001, p. 6), in its executive summary, states that one of the strategies of the Department of Education (DoE) was to ensure a "barrier-free physical environment and a supportive and inclusive psycho-social learning environment, developing a flexible curriculum to ensure

access to all learners" and that the vision of the DoE was to place *learners with difference* in an education system that views disabled people as a natural part of society, where they are accommodated accordingly. Despite the DoE's vision, *The Sowetan* (2012) revealed that at least 400,000 disabled children of school-going age are still not included in the education system in South Africa (Nonama, 2012). Problems cited for these learners not being in school include, lack of access, lack of transport, overcrowding, long waiting lists, and a shortage of educators and specialist personnel (Nonama, 2012; DoE, 2001). This figure corresponds with UNESCO's (2009) findings that South Africa has one of the highest rates of disabled learners not in school, while Wakefield, as cited in *The Sowetan* (Nomana, 2012), states that 10% of children in South Africa live with disability, which shows the extent of the problem in the South African context. These statistics not only show the immediate problem with regard to exclusion in the field of education, but are also an accurate reflection of South Africa's past historical injustices, which have been inherited by the education system today.

It can be questioned why such obvious discrepancies exist in the number of learners cited by the three sources (WP6, 2011; RSA Gazette, 2010; *The Sowetan*, 2012), but this could be answered by assuming that *The Sowetan*, being a mass medium, exaggerated the numbers for publicity purposes which suggests that the actual number of learners not in school is unknown, or even that the problem is so far-reaching that further research needs to be conducted in order to report more accurate findings. It is also important to distinguish between the total number of children not at school, including children that have never attended school, and the number of learners not at school at any one point in time, which is often seen as a grey area in the reporting of statistics of learners not in school. Whatever the reason for the discrepancy in the statistics of learners not in school, suggests the scope and enormity of the problem. Therefore, despite there being well-intentioned policy of inclusion in writing, many learners are currently marginalised and excluded from the education system, which is intended to be a tool for reform to ensure equity (Engelbrecht, 2011).

2.2.2 Means and ways of exclusion

Under South Africa's apartheid regime, education was blatantly exclusionary towards people of race (colour) and disability. Marginalisation was evident through the establishment of separate schooling for learners of different colour, as well as special schools for learners with disability (Pather, 2011). Even though documents such as the South African Constitution (1996) and policy reforms such as the WP6 (2001) were implemented which state that everyone has the right to basic education and equal access to educational institutions, exclusion is still evident through the existence of separate special schools that cater for learners with barriers to learning. Barton and Oliver (1992), as cited in Armstrong et al. (2009) contend that special education is reproducing the exclusion and oppression of disabled people as well as learners with high support needs. Yet exclusion is not only exclusive to those labelled with a disability, but is exclusive to those in the education system as well.

Although this study is local and based in South Africa, cases of exclusion is evident from a study conducted abroad, where Merry (2005) relates how culture and religion both form means of exclusion in Belgium. For example, leaners who are Muslim are not allowed to attend the local schools, but are 'placed' in inferior schools, which means that these young adults have only the capacity to perform menial jobs when they complete their education. Similarly, in a South African study of refugees, Sookrajh, Gopal and Moharaj (2005) mention ways in which refugee learners from different countries in Southern Africa perceive that they are excluded through the terminology that is used to describe them as well as through curriculum issues, physical alienation, and vulnerability.

In a recent article by Franaaz Parker (2013) in *Mail & Guardian*, it was reported that many principals were expelling or suspending girl learners because they were pregnant. Although the practice of excluding a learner because she is pregnant is unconstitutional, the article reveals that over the space of three years one high school in the Free State recorded 25 pregnancies, where over half of the girls left school after they were suspended. The article goes on to state that the extent and prevalence of such exclusion is unknown at this time. As a means of explaining the

different elements of access and their impact on equal opportunities for children to learn, Lewin (2009, p. 155) proposes seven “zones of exclusion”.

2.2.3 Theories and definitions of marginalisation and exclusion

Lewin (2009, p. 157) proposes seven zones of exclusion, where the third zone is of particular interest to this study, as he refers to learners in this zone as “silently excluded” learners. Although some learners in special schools are in fact attending school, and so cannot be said to be excluded, they are not included in mainstream settings and are so excluded from the educational resources of mainstream schools. These learners are thus silently excluded because of their separation based on their support needs. An article by Shireen Motala in *Mail & Guardian* (2012) titled “Children’s silent exclusion”, suggests that although access to education in South Africa is a major problem, a greater problem is the phenomenon of learners being in school but learning little, for reasons such as the poor quality of education; minimal resources; and deep-rooted endemic inequalities (Motala, 2012). Messiou (2006, p. 306) offers another way of perceiving exclusion and explains it by stating that “inclusion is concerned with any kind of marginalisation that might be experienced by the child, regardless if this is perceived as being about notions of special needs or not”.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1996), as cited in Messiou (2011, p. 2) defines marginalisation within a broader context, stating that marginalisation “is considered unimportant, undesirable, unworthy, insignificant and different resulting in inequality, unfairness, deprivation and enforced lack of access to mainstream power”. While redefining marginalisation in the context of education, Messiou (2006) suggests four ways of conceptualising marginalisation and exclusion with children.

The first way of conceptualising marginalisation, according to Messiou (2006), is when a child is being marginalised, and they, as well as others, recognise it. An example of this is education system under apartheid, which was clearly segregated on the basis of race and disability. The second way of conceptualising marginalisation is when a child is experiencing marginalisation but others do not see it, which is pertinent to this study, as through the learners’ voices and their

perception of special school placement, it is hoped that their views regarding their placement will be heard, with the question being whether the learners feel marginalised and excluded or included as a result of their placement. In a study conducted by Coudier, Lenior, Veerechia, Assouline, Ledesert, Michelan, Pry, Aussillous and Baghdadli (2008), they question the fact that although *many*, parents and teacher professionals often feel that it is best for learners with disabilities to be placed in special schools, this may be a disadvantage in terms of sociability and academic considerations.

The third way of conceptualising marginalisation is where a child is in a situation where marginalisation is taking place but they do not recognise this for themselves. This form of marginalisation is evident in a study conducted by O'Keeffee (2011), where learners with special educational needs who attended a mainstream school were interviewed. The findings revealed that these learners did not feel that they were any different from *other* learners, despite the fact that they attended separate special classes because of their additional support needs.

Lastly, marginalisation can take place when a child is experiencing marginalisation but does not admit to this. The last type of marginalisation is often one of the hardest types to detect, as a learner will keep the marginalisation or exclusion a secret, such as in the case of a learner who is being bullied, and thus being marginalised, because of a physical "defect" or because of a label that they have been given because of difference. Hayden (2000), as cited in Evan and Lunt (2010), echoes this by stating that learners with special educational needs (SEN) that have labels associated with them are six times more likely to be excluded from or marginalised in the system. Cefai and Cooper (2010) reinforce this by stating that learners that have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) often feel excluded, as the labels that are given to them predetermine how people act towards them. In accordance with this, Rose and Shevlin (2004, p. 155) mention that marginalised groups, (such as learners with disabilities), are on the "peripheries of decision making" in the field of education, despite their first-hand experience of marginalisation.

Consequently, despite the existence of inclusive policy and framework, the current inclusive system marks a clear divide between learners in mainstream schools and those in special schools (Slee, 2011). Walton (2011, p.86) as cited in Allen (2007), explain that research with children in a specific domain can be seen as an "aporia", or "double contradiction", in that in order to find out more about the minority and excluded learners, in this case learners in special schools, the views and perceptions of the majority are being excluded. Yet, on the other hand, if research is not conducted into specific scenarios it will never be established what learners' perceptions are concerning special school placement and inclusive practices will not be able to be improved upon. Therefore, listening to the voices of learners in special schools is pertinent, as not having such information will mean that many learners will continue to fall victim to exclusion and marginalisation in an era where policy and implementation of inclusion is meant to be ensuring just the opposite.

2.3 INCLUSION

2.3.1 Inclusion: A definition

"Inclusion" as a term has long been contested, and the definition of the term is continually changing and evolving. Inclusion has been seen as many different things over the years, especially with the different evolving models of education. Education was initially seen through the lens of the medical model, where learners with disabilities were categorised according to what was wrong with them, where *they* were essentially seen as the "problem" and had to change in order to fit into the system. This saw the segregation of people with disabilities into separate and inferior schools, where learners needed to be "fixed" by professionals and experts. As the social model gained credence and the needs of people with disabilities became apparent, learners were slowly integrated into mainstream schools, where placement was not restricted to special schools (Greyling, 2009). Although integration was a step towards inclusion, learners with disabilities were often included in the school, but they attended separate classes, and they were isolated from the "normal" children.

Today inclusion recognises not only learners' needs, but also their societal and personal rights. Therefore learners with special needs and disabilities are not only

integrated into mainstream schools and seen as part of the system, but it is also seen as paramount to have a philosophy and value of inclusion at the heart of society (Thomas, 1997). O'Brien (2001) argues that inclusion is essentially about where, as well as how, a child learns best, while Mitchell (2005, p. 92) contends that inclusion is a "complex, multidimensional and problematic concept and one that resists a universally accepted definition". Consequently, it can be said that there is no one standard definition of inclusion today, as it varies according to country, context, school (Booth & Ainscow, 1998), and political ideology (Naicker, 2005, Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011).

Inclusion has multiple and evolving meanings, Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006, p. 15) identify six ways of conceptualising and framing inclusion. The first way is concerned with "disabled students", as well as "categories of special needs". Traditionally inclusion was conceptualised from a disability stance, where the focus was on the integration of learners with disabilities, or learners with prescribed labels or categories. Although this view of inclusion still dominants, it raises questions regarding the value of categorisation and whether it is worthwhile, and it challenges such a narrow view.

The second view of inclusion identified by Ainscow et al. (2006, p. 15) is the "response to disciplinary exclusion". Disciplinary exclusion refers to the large number of learners that are outside of mainstream schools and are placed in special schools due to behavioural difficulties. Although this concept of disciplinary exclusion is more of a European concept, it is increasingly being seen in South Africa, with a surge in the number of learners with behavioural problems being transferred from mainstream schools to special schools. In this regard, Ainscow et al. (2006, p. 18) define exclusion as follows: "instead of seeing exclusion as a state of being barred from a school, we see it as concerned with all the discriminatory, devaluing, as well as self-protective processes that go on within schools and society". The response to disciplinary exclusion view of inclusion is therefore societally derived, from what is considered to be acceptable, and what is not. Aspects such as truancy rates, daily suspension, and pregnant girl learners who are discouraged from going back to school are all addressed by, the response to disciplinary exclusion.

Ainscow et al.'s (2006) third way of conceptualising inclusion relates to groups that are seen as "vulnerable to exclusion". By this view, inclusion can be seen as including marginalised groups and "overcoming discrimination and disadvantage" (Ainscow et al, 2006, p. 19). A term commonly associated with this way of conceptualising inclusion is societal inclusion or exclusion, yet problems often occur when distinctions are made between minority groups, regarding, who is and who is not included. Such distinctions could relate to Armstrong et al's. (2011, p. 31) definition of inclusion, where inclusion is defined from a "broad" as well as a "narrow" perspective. Broadly speaking, Armstrong et al. (2011) recognise inclusion as responding to the diversity of *all* learners and their varied needs. Narrowing the definition, however, the focus is usually placed on "a specific group of students", being learners who are disabled or "students with special educational needs" and the need for these students to be included in mainstream settings (Armstrong et al., 2011, p. 31) where a distinct divide is created between learners with special educational needs and those that do not have such needs. Although both broad and narrow views have merit, as well as disadvantages, inclusion was initiated as an attempt to bridge the divide between learners from mainstream schools and learners that were previously excluded due to a disability of some sort. This relates to Ainscow et al.'s (2006, p. 20) fourth view of inclusion, namely "developing a school for all".

"A school for all", is a view that sees schools as a common ground in which little divide is seen in terms of race, class, and disability (Ainscow et al., 2006). This view highlights the relationship between the school and the community, and the need for inclusion to be universal. Slee (2011, p. 172) reinforces this point, stating that "inclusion is "everybody's business". Although this is the idea, this view fails to address the existence of "special schools" and overlooks diversity and the need to value difference. As much as the idea of a school for all is promising, this cannot be actualised before "education for all" (Ainscow et al., 2006, p. 22) is a reality, which is seen as the fifth view of inclusion.

Education for All was co-ordinated by UNESCO in the 1980s and was concerned with access to and participation in education across the world, with particular attention being paid to girls, as well as the barriers that need to be overcome in order

for *all* children to be able to receive quality education (Ainscow et al., 2006). Although these considerations are beyond the scope of this study, the question can be asked “What is quality education, and how is it defined”?

Ainscow et al. (2006, p. 23) describes to the sixth view or way of conceptualising inclusion as a “principled approach to education and society”, which extends to the broader definition of inclusion and the need to meet the needs of each and every learner. This view suggests that inclusion is a process, and Messiou (2011, p. 2) states that inclusion “focuses on learners’ presence, participation and achievement in school”. This means the restructuring and re-shaping of schools, policies, and cultures to address marginalisation and exclusion, while actively responding to the diversity of needs. Although Ainscow et al.’s (2006) views of inclusion have been explained only briefly above, this explanation serves as a foundation from which further discussion will be engaged in on the topics of *inclusion; marginalisation and exclusion; placement and special schools;* and in *using voice as a means of research*.

2.3.2 Inclusion internationally

Internationally inclusion was popularised and given a “voice” by the World Conference for All (EFA), which was held in Thailand in March1990, prompting the World Declaration for All to enforce education as a fundamental human right for all, regardless of disability (Peters, 2008) and individual difference (Miles, 2000). Emanating from this conference, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) was published, and it is based on “the concept of social equity” and “is consistent with the social model of disability” (Peters, 2008, p. 20). The Salamanca Statement (1994) proposes that all learners, regardless of sex; creed; religion; race; and socio-economic background, should be afforded the opportunity not only to go to school (that is, integrated education) but also to be part of an inclusive environment (that is, to participate in school). The document moves away from a mere physical (disability) stance of inclusion to a broader definition of inclusion for all, where the provision of special schools is noted, but not promoted. This having been said, the Salamanca Statement (1994) advocates that “regular schools within this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving

education for all" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 3). Although the document promotes the inclusion of learners in mainstream schools, there are mixed feelings concerning the provision of special schools.

In an EFA monitoring report, it has been said that only 10% of disabled children worldwide are in school (UNESCO, 2007). Factors contributing in this are inadequate support and resources in mainstream settings (Lingaurd & Miles, 2007), a lack of knowledge and expertise among teachers (Jenkinson, 1997), and inability to cope with special educational needs (SEN) learners. For this reason, Florian (2008) supports the traditional practice of providing special schools, as she says that it is "preferable to education in a mainstream school" (Florian, 2008, p. 203). Often failure of a learner in a mainstream school environment is a factor that leads to a special school becoming an advantage. Slee (2011, p. 70) describes the special schools as "a reflection of a natural order of human difference", where learners who are seen as different or "deviant from the norm" are catered for in specialised settings. In reflecting on Ainscow et al.'s (2006) ways of framing inclusion, support for special schools can be found.

In the first way of conceptualising inclusion from a disability stance, the view can be seen conversely in that learners with high support needs (disabilities) can be catered for in schools that support the learners' individual needs. Therefore, instead of seeing this stance negatively, the fact that special schools exist guarantees that learners will be provided with every necessary resource to achieve, because of the expertise offered in such schools. In the sixth way of conceptualising inclusion, Ainscow et al. (2006) regards inclusion as a principled approach to education and society, which focuses on the learner's presence, participation, and achievement in school. If a learner is not receiving adequate support to achieve in school, marginalisation will occur, as the diversity of the learner has not been addressed. For this reason, special schools can be seen as the fingers on the hand of inclusion. The special school and the important role that it plays in the South African context will be discussed in greater depth in sections 2.3.3 and 2.4.4.

2.3.3 Inclusion in context-South Africa

Since the institution of a democratic government in 1994, South Africa's education system has focused on human rights and equality. With the shift from an education system that discriminated against learners of colour ("black" learners) and disabled learners, South Africa's implementation of the new Constitution and Bill of Rights (1996) brought about a change in mind-set, not only to education but to the nation as a whole.

The shift in perspective from a medical model, which viewed the child as the problem, to a rights discourse, which regarded and embraced the learner as an individual with the right to learn (Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009), saw the transition towards inclusion in South Africa. In 1996, the South African Schools Act (SASA) was passed in accordance with the South African Constitution (1996, p. 4), which states that "a public school must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating in any way". Yet, despite the intentions of the SASA (1996), the rights of learners with barriers to learning were still overlooked. For this reason, in 1996 the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) researched these needs, and this information then informed South African's policy guidelines, namely the White Paper 6 (WP6): Special Needs Education (2001) (Hay, 2009; Pather, 2011).

The WP6 (2001) and the Department of Education, policy documents that followed were seen as a redress of past inequalities, and were intended to ensure that the rights and "needs of all students who have to overcome barriers to learning and development" (Dyson & Forlin as cited in Engelbrecht 1999, p. 146) are met. The policy, the WP6 (2001), aimed to address barriers to learning, exclusion and marginalisation due to past inequalities, and unfair distribution of resources. Over and above this, the WP6 (2001) devised a 20-year plan to convert 500 of the country's 20 000 primary schools into full-service schools, beginning with 30 districts on this set out development programme.

In order for the WP6 (2001) to be implemented, the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (2008) document was introduced as a

means of addressing the most vulnerable and marginalised learners in school. The aim of introducing the SIAS strategy into the education system was to "overhaul the process of identifying, assessing and providing programmes for all learners requiring additional support so as to enhance participation and inclusion" (SIAS, 2008, p. 1). The policy provides "clear guidelines on enrolling learners in special schools and settings, which also acknowledge the central role played by parents and educators" (WP6, 2001, p. 7). The policy is seen as a tool for teachers and education professionals to screen, identify, assess, and support learners with barriers to learning.

In 2009 Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education: Full-Service Schools was published to outline the next step in the implementation of inclusion, namely the establishment of full-service schools. More recently, the Department of Basic education published Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (2010), which explains strategies and means of implementation which could contribute to a more inclusive education system. Other policy documents, such as Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025 (2011), provide framework for plans that are based on research and reliable sources to combat the challenges faced by the Department of Basic Education. All of these documents form the driving force behind South Africa's inclusive education movement, from a politically motivated system to one of human rights and social justice. This having been said, inclusion in South Africa can be described as both policy and practice, in that it is both written understandings of what inclusion is and the state of what is happening at present. Although much progress has been made with regard to inclusion, there are contestations about what inclusion is, and contradictions between what is said in policy and what actually happens in practice.

2.3.3.1 Inclusion in context South Africa: Inclusion, a contested issue

The mere notion of inclusion shifts the focus from equality in education to who is and who is not included in the system. Once a distinction has been made between different groups, the implication is that one of the groups will be included, and other groups will not be included (Walton, 2012). South Africa's education system claims to be an inclusive one, in which all learners are provided with the same opportunities

and access to education. Yet this is in direct contradiction to the dual education system that still exists, and the very existence of separate schools for learners with moderate to high support needs. Sayed and Soudien (2005, p. 116) compellingly illustrate the inherent contradiction of a dual education system, when they say that "inclusion produces its own exclusions". In discussing South Africa's new decentralised education system which was implemented to "undo" the inequalities of the past, Sayed and Soudien (2005) describe how this system has, in fact created more inequalities or injustices in return. In segregating learners into separate schools a value difference is created between learners that attend mainstream schools and those that attend special schools. Although the divide was intended to offer support to learners that needed additional support which was not offered in mainstream schools, a clear value judgement is made on learners who attend special schools, as it is perceived that they cannot "cope" in mainstream schools.

Florian (2006, p. 202) states that inclusive education is based on the principle "that local schools should provide for all children, regardless of any perceived differences, disability or other social, emotional, cultural or linguistic difference". Although this position of inclusion is seen to be the ideal situation in inclusive practice, there is still a definite divide between learners with barriers to learning and mainstreams 'normal learners'. Although South African policies promote learners with low to moderate needs to be accommodated into mainstream settings there are many factors that prevent this from being realised.

Wildeman and Nomdo (2007) assert that there is insufficient funding and unclear direction and standards from national government for South Africa to be able to implement inclusion successfully. Pillay and Di Terlizzi (2009) confirm Wildeman and Nomdo's assertion by stating that South Africa has not come to terms with the ideology of inclusion and does not have the resources to be able to implement inclusion successfully, while Pather (2011) contends that teachers do not have the knowledge, ability or skills to accommodate learners with special needs. Notwithstanding these factors cited above, the matters of access to education, high dropout rates (Lewin, 2009), disproportionate and unmanageable ratios of teachers to learners in the classrooms, HIV/AIDS, racial tensions and many other factors are still fundamental problems that need to be addressed before mandatory education can occur (Miles and Signal, 2010). Regarding the dilemma of needing to resolve

fundamental problems in education before matters of inclusion can be addressed, Mitchell, De Lange and Thuy (2008, p.10) assert that South Africa is rich in policy but "poor in implementation". Authors such as Nkosi (2011) have expressed their views on the discrepancies that exists between policy and implementation, and they have questioned Department of Education documents such as the WP6 (2001), and Inclusive Guidelines (2010) and whether the promises made will be fulfilled.

Although the realities of South Africa's education system described above seem to paint a grim picture for inclusion in South Africa, inclusion need not be dependent on resources, expertise and know-how (Pather, 2011). A study by Pather (2011) reveals that there are schools, specifically in rural areas, that are implementing inclusive practices, in spite of a lack of resources. Communities or individuals in communities have made physical modifications to schools to enable access to learners who make use of wheel chairs. Ways of inclusion as a natural part of schooling have also been included. Using inclusion as a natural part of schooling can be described as putting values into action where inclusion is a natural part of social justice in education (Booth, 2005). Pather (2011, p. 12) stated that the Department of Education "does not clearly recognise or address support which is already evident in practice, particularly in mainstream school settings not designated as full-service schools". If inclusion is to work and be successful, disability needs to be "seen as an accepted part of life in the community", where divides between "normal" learners and "disabled" learners will be diminished, promoting inclusion not just in the classroom, but in the broader community as well (Pather, 2011, p. 8). Pather's (2011) example of inclusion points to the fact that inclusion does not only pertain to education, but extends to a belief in human rights as well.

2.3.3.2 Inclusion in context South Africa: Inclusion and social justice

As previously mentioned, inclusion means different things to different people, but it is assumed that inclusion is not just concerned with the transformation of educational ideologies, but with underlying human rights and social justice (Artiles, Harris-Murri & Rostenberg, 2006). Lingard and Mills (2007, p. 235) mention that it is important "to consider the purpose of schooling", as well as the pedagogies that underlie the policies and prescribed systems, as these often create or deny social justice. Yet it can be argued whether pedagogies alone are enough (Lingard & Mills, 2007).

Policies need to move beyond concepts that underpin inclusion, to a practice of education that brings about equal human rights through social justice (Ball, 1994). These equal human rights "favour social cohesion as reflected in values and beliefs that are embraced by members of a group or community" (Artiles et al., 2006, p. 264).

The term "equal human" rights would imply that those that were previously excluded are now included, yet in order for values such as democracy through education and social justice to prevail, everyone needs to be treated fairly. When talking about the concept of fairness, the distinction between equity and equality needs to be clarified. Equality means that everyone is treated the same, while Raphael (1970, p. 188) defines fairness in terms of equity, that is "giving equal shares to equal persons and unequal shares to unequal persons". Therefore equity is the fair treatment of people in terms of their needs. The distinction between these two words is pertinent, as inclusive education strives for equity as all learners have diverse needs, and so the support that is offered needs to be in accordance with a person's unique needs not just a case of everyone getting the same. In illustrating correct and justifiable equity, social justice is demonstrated through the valuing of human rights. Mitchel, De Lange & Thuy (2008, p. 107) bring this together by stating that "educational policies are essentially constructed through the wider fabric of social practices, where individuals engage in the struggle to make their voices heard, to take social action and to insert their moral and political values into the existing social relations of power".

As has been shown in this section, social justice is not just about action, but policies, and the way learners with barriers to learning are to be treated. Part of the way *these* learners are treated is through the language used to describe *them*. Ball (1994) echoes how language can determine social justice, by stating that "we need to move beyond the tyrannies of improvement, efficiency and standards, to recover a language of and for education articulated in terms of ethics, moral obligations and values" (Ball, 1994 as cited in Slee, 2011, p. 94). In the following section, the way language is used to describe different learners will be discussed.

2.3.3.3 Inclusion in context South Africa: Inclusion policies and language use

Janks (2010, p. 60) defines language as "a discourse…it contains social categories, it gives orders, it persuades us, it justifies, it explains, gives reasons, excuses… it constructs reality". This definition implies that language is not just a means or tool for communication, but supplies certain "truths" that society inherently adopts as their own. This implies that language "thinks" what is socially constructed. Slee (2011, p. 104) describes this by stating that "how we describe the world reflects certain understandings and it determines how we reproduce that world".

Many of South Africa's policy documents speak in terms of categories and "labels", for example "learners with attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder" (AD(H)D) or "learners with barriers to learning". Gabel, Cohen, Kotel and Pearson (2013) contend that labels given to children are essentially socially derived and constructed, and so, the identity of the child is forgotten, and a social identity is attached to them. For this reason the labels that are given can be seen as political terms that reduce learners to their "deficits" and marginalise or even exclude them from the very starting point of inclusion, through the "inclusive policy".

A large discrepancy is created when policy documents and guidelines, such as the Salamanca Statement (1994), the WP6 (2001), Inclusive Education Guidelines (2010) and many others, reinforce the idea of inclusion and the underpinning of EFA, yet the language that is used in the policies to describe people attaches "ascending and descending values *to different people*" (Slee, 2011, p. 14). A clear distinction is made between "*learners with barriers"; "learners with special needs"; "disordered learners"; "learners with deficits" etc.* as opposed to learners who are *"normal"*. In section 1.5, terminology pertinent to this study was defined, to prevent any confusion that may exist regarding certain terms. The term "barriers to learning" was defined as "educational difficulties that may arise from a number of sources" (Walton, Nel, Hugo and Muller, 2009, p. 107). These difficulties may be due to external or internal reasons or factors. Although the term "barriers to learning" is used, it is only because it is deemed to be a preferable term to "special needs", as it is seen as a more socially accepted paradigm (Pather, 2010, p. 10), as well as the fact that the term includes learners who have "special needs" due to either learning difficulties, contextual factors or disability.

Taking into account the background described above, the guidelines for inclusive teaching and learning state that “learners who experience barriers to learning as a result of disability should be welcomed in ordinary school environments” (Pather, 2010, p. 13). If the language in these guidelines is analysed, the terms that have been used degrade the learners who *experience barriers to learning* by stating, firstly, that they are “welcomed” and secondly, that they are welcomed “into ordinary schools”. Learners with special needs automatically need to be seen as “included” in the system, and not seen as burdens or guests (Walton & Lloyd, 2011). The choice of words used to describe learners with barriers to learning implies that “these” learners are, in fact different, and that only now that the inclusive reform is taking place are they good enough to join “ordinary schools”. Slee (2011, p. 12) describes this as a “code for the implied *normal school*”, which, in turn, assumes that a normal school has regular students, while a special school has children who are not seen as normal. The WP6 (2001) also uses terms such as “*learners with disabilities* and *impairments*”, which again reduces children to their deficits or impairments, making them inferior to other “*normal”* children. The choice and use of language not only contradicts the underlying ethos of inclusion and what the policy documents are intended to promote but foregrounds difference and suggests an explicit distinction that learners with barriers to learning are inferior.

In further promoting inclusion in schools and the education system itself, there needs to be a change in mindset, in the way learners with disability and special needs are viewed, and the terminology used to describe such learners, needs to be evaluated. Slee (2011, p. 69) describes disability as follows: “Disability may be more understood as the collateral damage of unequal social relations, where impairment reduces human value and marks people out for subjugation”. Slee’s (2011) description above embodies the essence of the societal oppression of learners who demonstrate deviance from the norm and are classified as having special educational needs or a disability. This language used to describe learners with barriers to learning and special needs often resonates with a value difference between *normal* learners and *special learners,* as well as between mainstream schools and special schools, and “locates the problem within the learner, rather than in the system” (Howell, 2007 as cited in Walton, Nel & Hugo, 2009, p. 107). In seeing the distinction between

learners in mainstream schools and learners in special schools, the use of language again foregrounds difference and a social distinction of deviance from the norm.

Another term that is associated with learners with barriers to learning that are in special schools is “placement”. When referring to the placement of these learners, it is often explicitly stated that “*they* were placed” (Gabel, Cohen, Kotel & Pearson, 2013, p. 74), whereas *other* learners (that attend mainstream schools) merely go to school. The use of the passive voice in the phrase “were placed”, marks out, firstly, that the learners are different, and therefore must be placed in a separate facility, and secondly, that the learner has little choice in their placement decision. Janks (2010, p. 39) explains this choice of language in terms of nominalisation and passivisation. Nominalisation is the changing of a verb to a noun, changing an action to an object/state, while passivisation is the changing of active voice to a passive voice. Both nominalisation and passivisation remove the actions and the actors. In other words, learners (the “actors”) do not have a choice (the “action”) as to which school they would like to attend, because of their predetermined barrier to learning. Therefore it can be said that not only the labelling/classifying language used to describe learners with barriers to learning but also the language that is used when describing their placement emphasises deviance and difference. It should be noted that the term “*placed”* will be used in the text because of the nature of the topic, but that the term is used with reservation.

The use of terminology that differentiates learners as well as the assigning of labels and the categorisation of learners does, however, have merit. One of the most compelling arguments for the use of classification is that of planning, educational resources, and provision. Croft (2012, p. 2) maintains that correct data on the number of disabled children in school can “demonstrate transparency and accountability in the distribution of resources and services” which can contribute to social justice. Margaret, McLaughlin and Ruedel, (2005), express the same sentiment when they state that “classification affects resources”. Disability data not only helps to determine “numbers” for administrative purposes, but it is also important in addressing the inequalities found in education. Bines and Lei (2011) as cited in Croft (2012) state that disabled children have unequal access to education

compared to their non-disabled counterparts. Associations such as the United Nations, UNESCO, the WHO and the World Bank, among others, rely on disability statistics to account for how many disabled learners are in school, the relationship between poverty, disability, and schooling as well as many other factors that aggravate marginalisation due to children being disabled (Croft, 2012). Although the accuracy of such statistics are often questioned (Croft, 2012) they serve as advocacy for the rights to empower learners with an SEN classification. In turn, much of the classification statistics are used for advocacy "ammunition" to quantify the extent of the problem, for example the numbers of disabled learners that are not in school (Croft, 2012). Bearing in mind the positive perceptions that learners have in special schools, how do these schools fit in, in South Africa?

2.3.3.4 Inclusion in context South Africa: Inclusion – how do special schools fit in?

Despite the implementation of "inclusive education" in South Africa, a dual education needs to remain since mainstream schools "accommodate" only a small percentage of learners with low to medium support needs. The WP6 (2001) has set a 20-year plan to convert many mainstream schools into full-service schools and special schools into resource centres to service the full-service schools. Therefore, special schools can be seen as a stepping stone to ensure that South Africa is on its way to becoming *truly* inclusive. Yet, as Nkosi (2011) points out, policy and practice do not always correspond. Although the implementation of full-service schools means that learners with barriers to learning will be included in mainstream schools, the planned 20-year period for converting schools is a long time, considering the urgency of inclusion in South Africa. There is thus, a discrepancy between policy and practice with regard to inclusion in South Africa. Sayed and Soudien (2005) refer to this as "inclusion-exclusion" practices, where the urgency of inclusion is not being met, resulting in previously marginalised learners being excluded, as they are either in placements (mainstream schools), where there are inadequate support services for their specific needs, or at home, because of the large number of learners with barriers to learning who cannot be accommodated in special needs schools due to space constraints.

According to the WP6 (2001), ordinary schools are required to accommodate learners with disabilities and other barriers to learning. This may create the perception that special education is no longer necessary. Slee (2011) argues that special education and inclusive education should be decoupled. Yet this brings to the question the role of specialist knowledge within special education, and the perception that specialist knowledge is no longer necessary. Yet, with the many barriers to learning that exist, such as disabled learners who have needs that are specific to them (Norwich, 2008), it is naive to consider impairment and disability from a social perspective alone, as "a child's learning difficulties are causally linked to their personal features" (Terzi, 2008, p. 246), and these needs should therefore be catered for.

In light of the above background, Florian (2008, p. 203) describes special schools as "ends having justified means", in that these schools cater for individual means and the support that each individual needs. Fuchs and Fuchs (2010, p. 305) speak of a "traditional special education continuum of placement", which states that where needs become more intensive so does the support required to match those needs. Pather (2011) and both departmental documents WP6 (2001) and Guidelines for Inclusion (2010), see special schools as an integral part of South African's education system as they accommodate learners with moderate to high support needs. Special schools are seen as resource centres and feeder schools for mainstream settings and places of expertise which in their own right contribute to the broader community and the development of inclusive education. Therefore, special schools need to not only be recognised as part of the dual education system of the past, but also be defined and recognised as part of South Africa's inclusive education system. In the following section the views on placement will be discussed.

2.4 PLACEMENT AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS

2.4.1 Placement internationally

Inclusion internationally has progressed at different rates, with some countries showing inclusion of learners with barriers to learning in mainstream schools, and other countries have a mere integration model, where learners with special educational needs are placed in mainstream schooling, but are not part of an inclusive system.

Simpson (2004) relates that in the past, learners with barriers to learning, particularly learners with disabilities, were accommodated in special classrooms or schools. The accommodating of learners implies that learners were often “housed” in separate venues or schools based on their disabilities or classification, where they had little contact with those outside of their placement. But as the demands of inclusion have increased, learners with barriers to learning have been integrated back into general classrooms. Yet, Simpson (1994) mentions that learners that have a classification of EBD (emotional and behavioural disorders) are included much less than learners with other disabilities. Although many learners are introduced back into mainstream schools, Jones and Hensley (2012, p. 35) cite the incidence of self-contained classrooms, where learners with special needs are “physically and socially isolated” from their peers, even although they attend the same school.

Studies conducted in the United States made use of the legal term that is used for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) to support inclusion as the *least restrictive environment,* or LRE. This enables learners with disabilities to join peers in mainstream schools (Theoharis, Theoharis, Orati & Cosier, 2011) and be part of inclusion, through social as well as academic aspects. In this regard, the National Report to Congress (US Department of Education, 2007) shows that “nationally, although 49.9% of students with disabilities receive inclusive services for 80% of their school day or more, approximately 23% of students receive their education primarily in separate special education settings” (Theoharis, et al., 2011, p.61). Freeman, Eber, Anderson, Irvin, Horner, Bounds and Dunlap (2006) use the term “co-existing” which refers to learners that have been “included” into a mainstream setting, but do not benefit from the placement in any positive way. Although inclusion is seen differently abroad, with various advantages and disadvantages linked to inclusion, it is important to view placement from within the South African context.

2.4.2 Placement historically in South Africa

In South Africa in the past, special education meant exclusion from mainstream schooling, and often from society as well. Under the former apartheid regime, provision for learners with special educational needs (LSEN) reflected some of the “greatest distributive disparities” (Pendlebury & Enslin, 2004, p. 45). The WP6

(2001), states that although disparities were even greater in learners with disabilities, black learners who were disabled were the most affected. With the past education inequalities noted, these patterns often continue and increase to a lesser or greater extent in future education. Pendlebury and Enslin (2004, p. 44) address the situation in schools in South Africa when they state that “across the system social justice in educational access, participation and outcomes is far from achieved, especially for rural children, the poor, illiterate and semi-literate youth and adults and children with disability”.

As noted in section 2.3.1, the medical model was informed by a deficit and disability approach where learners that demonstrated deviance from the norm were sent to special schools. This deficit approach to difference saw learners that were different, taught in separate and different curricula to those of mainstream schools, and teachers had to attend separate training if they taught learners that were different. Both the separate curricula for learners that were different and the separate training for teachers that taught such learners were congruent with the prevailing deficit approach of the medical model and underpinned the ethos of special schooling that prevailed at the time. These ideas of special education reinforce the fact that in the past, specialised schooling was seen as exclusionary, which maintained the “segregation” of the minority of learners with barriers to learning. The same assumptions are found in the education system today. Miles and Singal (2009, p. 10) echo this by saying that special schools are often “poor quality and watered down schooling for the minority”. Miles and Singal’s (2009) description of special schools as a “watered down schooling” may be quite radical, but when compared to schooling now, the schooling of the past can quite accurately be described as “watered down”.

2.4.3 Placement and the schooling system in South Africa today

Although the previous two sections paint a grim picture of special schools in the past, the WP6 (2001, p. 10) states that “the National Disability Strategy condemns the segregation of persons with disabilities from the mainstream of society”. For this reason, many mainstream schools in South Africa are being converted into full-service schools which can cater for learners diverse and special needs. The Department of Education started a pilot project in Gauteng, converting 15

mainstream state schools to full service schools with continuation of the project being dependent on the project's success. The Department of Education (2009) defines a full-service school as "colleges, further and higher education institutions are first and foremost mainstream education institutions that provide quality education to all learners and students by supplying the full range of learning needs in an equitable manner. Full-service schools strive to achieve access, equity, quality and social justice in education" (DoE, 2009, p. 8). The Guidelines for Full-Service Schools (2009) emphasise that these schools are to cater for the diverse needs of *all* learners with mention of flexible teaching and learning, accompanied by the necessary support needed to achieve this.

In this regard, special schools are part of South Africa's inclusive education system, as these schools cater for learners with medium to high support needs, while full-service and mainstream schools cater for learners with low to medium support needs (SIAS, 2008). All state schools are required to subscribe to and follow the guiding principles of the WP6 (2001) and adopt the underlying principles of inclusion.

Special schools follow the same curriculum as mainstream and full-service schools, but are afforded the opportunity to have additional support personnel in the form of occupational therapists, psychologist, speech and hearing specialists and often a school nurse or sister. Because of the specialised expertise, many of the state special schools are becoming resource centres for the full-service and mainstream schools, providing professional expertise in the fields of special needs and disability. South Africa has many special schools that specialise in a particular field or a specific disability, some of which are privately run. Although independent schools form an integral part of the special schooling system in South Africa, this is beyond the scope of this research, as the focus will be on state run special schools.

According to the statistics on the distribution of learners in South Africa in 2011, 93.1 % of learners attended public schools, 3.8% attend independent schools, and 0.9 % attended special schools, which constituted 108-240 learners. Although special school learners make up less than 1 % of South Africa's total learner population, it should be taken into consideration the high number of learners with barriers to

learning that are excluded from education and are not in school, as well as the fact that special schools form an integral part of expertise as resource centres for the 93 % of learners (or 11,808,036 learners) in ordinary public schools.

2.4.4 Controversies regarding special education and special schools

Although it has already been mentioned, special schools are often seen as controversial, as they are perceived as exclusionary to learners with barriers to learning. One of the arguments against the special education model is that it emphasises “deficit, diagnosis, categorization and individual treatment” (Slee, 2011, p. 10), where reliance is made on specialised knowledge. Florian (2008) proposes that specialist knowledge can assist in inclusive education through the support of teachers, but that it is not a necessity in determining an individual’s “deficit”.

It was also noted that the teaching methods and strategies that are used in a special school, are not very different from those that are used in a mainstream setting (Florian, 2008). The previous points support the argument that mainstream teachers are capable of teaching learners with a diverse range of needs, and that reliance on specialist knowledge detracts from “education for all” and overlooks the teacher’s role of becoming an expert. Special school placement can thus be conceptualised as the subject of a debate, in which Florian (2008) proposes ways in which special education and mainstream education can unite.

Instead of seeing special education as uniquely exclusionary, Florian (2008) states that it can indeed be exclusionary, as well as inclusionary, for learners that do not fit into the standardised ‘norm’ of education. On the other hand, Slee (2011, p. 71) points out that devoid of due acknowledgement, the “narrowness of the curriculum and pedagogical repertoire of the neighbourhood school” will often steer learners in the direction of a special school, where the needs of that learner will be met. Florian (2008, p. 203) supports the practice of having special schools, stating that it is “preferable to education in a mainstream school”, as often a learner’s failure in such an environment is a factor that leads to a special school becoming an advantage. Norwich and Kelly (2004) warn that although inclusion can be academically effective, learners that are integrated into mainstream schools could experience rejection and bullying.

Both arguments for and against special schools have merit and can be validated according to the situation and the child. In understanding the greater picture of inclusion, special schools need to be seen not in totality, with their pros and cons, but as relating to the learners that attend them. As mentioned in the earlier debates special schools often have negative connotations, where exclusion and marginalisation are prevalent. Yet, for many learners, special schools are seen as environments of access.

Learners who have struggled academically in mainstream schools can be given the tools and necessary support in special schools to access and reach their potential, such as individualised teaching, a flexible curriculum, and a slower pace of learning. In a study by Pillay, Dunbar-Krige and Mostert (2013) of learning support units in London, United Kingdom, learners with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties were placed in what was termed “learning support units” in the school or “pupil referral units” outside of the school, where these learners were given the support that they needed to be reintegrated into mainstream school. Special schools are not only beneficial academically, but they are places of physical access to learners with disabilities. Mainstream schools are designed with ‘normal’ children in mind, where the infrastructure and the architecture of the buildings, as well as the facilities do not accommodate for learners with disabilities. The facilities provided at special schools for learners with disabilities therefore allow *them* to function with dignity, as their needs have been accounted for. Special schools can also be havens of social access for many learners. Bullying and rejection are common phenomena in mainstream schools, with the result that learners then attend special schools (Norwich & Kelly, 2004). Although Norwich and Kelly (2004) have an international perspective, their findings have merit and present similarities to the South African context. Thus, special schools have importance and worth for the many individual learners that benefit, in one form or another, from the access that they gain.

It is clear from the discussion above that special schools are controversial, and opinions regarding them vary from country to country and from person to person. While this fact is acknowledged, the special school does have a role to play in the South African context. As mentioned, special schools in South Africa are slowly being converted into resource centres for full-service schools (DoE, 2001). Likewise,

the conversion of mainstream schools to full-service schools is a step forward in closing the gap on the dual education system that exists in South Africa. Although full-service schools play an important role in the South Africa's education system it is beyond the scope of this study.

Although there are considerable differences in the benefits or the value realised from special schools, due to the various problems regarding marginalisation and exclusion in these settings, little is known about how learners in special schools feel about their placement.

2.4.5 Learners' views on placement

Research conducted in Ireland by O'Keeffe (2011) provides views learners with special needs, and their perception regarding their placement in mainstream settings. Similarly, Messiou (2011) and Arnot and Reay (2007) have conducted research with learners in mainstream schools regarding issues related to school and learners' experience of them. However, none of these studies have researched placement within special school settings. Pertinent to the current research, is a study by Nind, Boorman and Clarke (2012), who gives voice to learners in a private special school who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Although the above mentioned study does not focus on placement, it does raise questions regarding special school settings and the differences that exist between special schooling and mainstream schooling. Many of the participants in the study by Nind et al. (2012) described their mainstream school placement as oppositional, confrontational, and generally disengaged. Many of the girls mentioned that they felt excluded by their peers in mainstream schools, and that they felt judged by their teachers. By contrast, in descriptions of the participants' special school placement, words such as "love", "enjoyment" and "friends" were used. The girl participants described the staff in the special schools as caring, and they claimed to have close bonds with their peers. Their general comments were that strong attachments were created in their special school.

Although Nind et al.'s (2012) research presents comparisons between mainstream school settings and special school settings, Whitehurst (2006) contends that much research has focused on learners in mainstream schools, but that little focus has

been placed on learners with disabilities, or in this case, learners who attend special schools. Therefore there is a clear need to discover more about learners in special school settings, and their views and perceptions on placement. Ware (2004) expressed similar sentiments when he says that a large gap will remain in the research if the views of people with disability are not recognised and acknowledged. This suggests that there are two main gaps in the research. Firstly, there is a gap in the knowledge with regard to special school placement, and, secondly, there is a gap with regard to the concept of "voice" and learners as active participants in research.

2.5 LISTENING TO THE "VOICE" OF LEARNERS

2.5.1 "Voice" as a means of research

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as cited in Hadfield and Haw (2007, p. 487) explain the concept of voice as follows: "Voice is meaning that resides in the individual... The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else… Finding the word, speaking for oneself and feeling heard by others is all a part of this process". Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) explanation highlights three key aspects of voice. Firstly, using voice is individualistic, in that what is said is specific to and based on a specific person's thoughts and experiences. Secondly, voice is used as a means of communication, or message giving, where a person has the opportunity not only to share their thoughts and experiences, but also, thirdly, to feel that they have been heard. Zion (2009) refers to this process of using voice in research as conversations about education related issues, where one not only talks about issues, but is immersed in dialogue (Pickering, 2008), where one indicates that one has been heard and understood. In using a phenomenographic design for this study, it must be mentioned that the individual voice, although important, is not the focus of this study. Rather, the focus of this study is a collection of many individual voices (Entwisle, 2006), which make up, the group experience of special school placement.

Voice is often likened to participation where Barber (2009) describes a person's voice as their right to citizenship, where an active role is taken in order to support assertions (Barber, 2009). Hadfield and Haw (2007) link participation to empowerment, where the process of letting one's voice be heard is empowering. Participation can also be described as an "element of strong involvement and

consultation on the part of the subjects of the research" (Pratt & Loizos, 1992 cited in Bennet & Roberts, 1994, p. 5). A necessary part of participation is listening, which is an active process that incorporates both verbal and non-verbal ways that people communicate (Clark, 2005). Therefore, it can be said that voice in research is a tool that elicits what people think and feel; often leading to positive outcomes such as a sense of belonging, empowerment, as well as the need to feel heard and understood. Although this is true, the use of voice as a tool in research has often been questioned with regard to the validity of the data produced, as experiential knowledge is seen as biased and subjective, in that it is concerned with what a person thinks and feels. This will be explored in the following section.

2.5.2 Contestations around using "voice" as a means to produce knowledge

Hadfield and Haw (2001) assert that voice research relies on "interior authenticity", as it is more concerned with an individual's experience of something than the theory of the thing. In cultural studies, Pickering (2008) maintains that a person's subjective experience and the link between social arrangements, underlies a clear interconnection between individual and public culture which is a key factor in understanding how people make sense of things and the contradictions that arise. Although this kind of knowledge is valuable to any kind of change and social reform, there is still much contestation around the actual value of voice.

In using voice as a means to produce knowledge, there are two central debates regarding the use of voice in research. The first debate confronts the fact that voice is purely based on experience, for this reason, Arnot and Reay (2007, p. 313) contend that knowledge derived from voice research is questionable; as they argue that "it's unscientific, has no basis in reason and constructs only a weak knowledge edifice". This view is shared by Moore and Muller (1999, p. 191) who assert that 'voice' lacks credibility. Both Moore and Muller (1999) and Arnot and Reay (2007) express their concern over knowledge derived from voice research, as it lacks sustainable trustworthiness and reliability as knowledge that is based in experience cannot be deemed dependable. However, Pickering (2008, p.19) explains that researchers should not just assume that "knowledge simply derives from experience or that experience simply validates what is said". Pickering (2008) goes on to state

that experience always needs to be questioned, as experience is not only what happens to us but also what we choose to happen to us.

Dealing with the fact that voice is based on experience, which is the nature of knowledge, and the value of listening to and seeing it as a source of knowledge, highlights another debate. Young (2002) contests the nature of knowledge by stating that knowledge is essentially socially derived, and asserting that, it is important to look at how different cultures shape, mould, and change knowledge and the content thereof. For this reason, a person's experiential knowledge needs to be evaluated with a critical eye and evaluated against other such knowledge. In this way, experience can have value in itself, as well as the experiences of many together, which can form a "pool" of collective experience.

Furthermore, voice research is contested, as it often questions dominant structures and patterns of previous knowledge forms or dominant epistemological claims. Moore and Muller (2000) question certain epistemological claims and the objectivity of these various knowledge claims. One such claim pertains to the debunking of dominant knowledge, or in other words, forming new knowledge from existing knowledge. Young (2000) contests Moore and Muller's (1999) argument concerning "debunking dominant knowledge claims" as he states that this is a way for younger generations to stake their claim and position themselves in society. Kearney (2003) maintains that people build their identity through reflecting on their lived experiences, and that for this reason, it is imperative that these experiences be acknowledged in research. These arguments are supported and follow on from much research in the domains of feminist and disability studies, which contest previously accepted issues of power and dominance (Mullender, 1993 as cited in Flemming, 2010, p. 4).

It is thus evident that the use of voice in research is, in fact, controversial, yet without the soliciting of people's voices, the inner thoughts and feelings of people will never be known (Ware, 2004). This is especially true of the phenomenon of inclusion, and the progression thereof. Much research has focused on what teachers feel about inclusion (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart & Eloff, 2003; Rae, 2010; Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2010; Hays, 2009), why inclusion will or will not be realised (Florian, 2008; Evan and Lunt, 2010) and what the negative implications of inclusion are (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007), but very little research has focused on the people whose lives are

affected by inclusion, namely the learners. It is for this reason that listening to children's voices in schools is essential in the combating of inclusionary and exclusionary matters. Thus listening to voices, in essence is not a new idea, but it can be considered developing and evolving as far as voice research and young people is concerned (Flemming, 2010).

2.5.3 Contestations around using "voice" as a means of research with children

Research conducted in the past was more concerned with the psychological and medical needs of the child, and little value was attached to what children think and feel (Swain & French, 2000). Historically, children were to be seen and not heard, where they were objects of research, and not part of the research. Yet, as the rights of children have evolved, and advocacy for them to be part of decision making has increased, so has their participation and contribution to research increased.

Voice research with young people is becoming "increasingly sought as part of the general move towards social inclusion" (Hadfield & Haw, 2001, p. 485). Rose and Shevlin (2004, p. 160) express the same view with regard to education, by stating that "listening to the opinions of young people who have recently experienced the education systems which we have developed should at least enable us to reflect upon how future developments may afford greater opportunities to those who have been previously denied". In terms of the research at hand and discovering learners' perceptions about their placement in special school settings, it is important that children's voices be viewed as the "challenging starting point for the creation of more inclusive practices within schools" (Messiou, 2006, p.314). However, until now much research has focused, **on** learners with disability (as well as special needs), excluding the learners themselves from the research (O'Keeffe, 2011). In using children in research, there are not only benefits, but also posing problems.

Slee (2011) directs our attention to two distinct problems with researching attitudes towards inclusive education and children. Firstly, such research constructs the disabled child or the child with a disability, as the problem. Consequently, disability is "pathologised", which perpetuates the cycle of "deficits" (Slee, 2011, p. 49). Veck (2009) supports this argument by stating that labelling a child forms a barrier to listening, as it focuses and marks the child's identity as the *disability* (Hooks, 1994), and disregards the child's unique and individual identity. The second problem with

this type of research is that the perusing of this kind of research “obstructs social cohesion” (Slee, 2011, p. 50). Slee’s (2011) assertion corresponds to Messiou’s (2008) caution against the dangers of stereotyping. In working with children or learners with special educational needs or disabilities, it often limits our perspective regarding learners if we have preconceived ideas due to the learner’s classification. One of the participants in a study by Walton and Rusznyak (2013) mentioned how she was surprised at the variations in what was meant to be the same kind of classification. For this reason the implications on focusing on inclusive education and or a specific disability relates to the aporia in researching one specific group, against the whole group (Walton, 2011). Consequently, research with children and the knowledge gained from hearing their voices cannot be denied, yet the way this knowledge is presented needs to be in a manner that illuminates the way forward for inclusion and not perpetuate the cycle of exclusion. In looking at the broader problems with children being involved with research, there are other issues that may arise as well.

Voice research in children can often be interpreted incorrectly by an adult, as children’s way of thinking is different from that of an adults, which often results in wrong interpretation of the message that the child is trying to convey (Lewis, 2010). Adults and children have different “standpoints”, or perspectives. Adults see things very differently from children. This could give rise to concern that this kind of research, especially with young people, is extractive, where information is often fabricated and falsely attributed to children, and used to the researcher’s advantage (Petrie, Fiorelli & O’Donelle, 2006). In this regard, Clark (2005) mentions that when working with children or learners, it is important to remain cognisant of the following. In order to positively listen to the child, interviews need to be conducted at a time in the day when the child is active, and not tired, so that the child can give attentive concentration. Clark (2005) also highlights the importance of the “physical environment” and asserts that activities need to be interesting and exciting for the learner. In terms of ‘voice’ and working with learners who cannot always communicate or articulate their thoughts and feelings in words, it is important to vary activities to suit the participant (Ainscow & Kaplan, 2004; Fitzgerald, Jobling & Kirk, 2003).

2.5.4 Why use “voice” with children as a means of research?

Messiou (2006) states that more improved practices could be developed if a better understanding of the insider’s (the learner’s) voice is heard. In listening to the voices of children, the perspectives that are held to be the most important are those of the “insiders”, specifically the children themselves, as they are the ones who experience the impact of either inclusive or exclusive practices in the schooling system (Messiou, 2008).

Children are “experts in their own lives” (Clark, 2005, p. 143), and for this reason, it is imperative that learners have an opinion and contribute to decisions made about them, particularly pertaining to their placement. Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006) states that it is to “ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them” (no page) and this is pertinent especially to placement. The SIAS (2008, p. 96) document encourages that the voice of the learner be heard and it states that their “own perceptions about themselves and their learning are crucial when identifying the need for support”. This is true not only of learners’ needs, but as Rose, Fletcher and Goodwin (1999) observe, it makes learners more attentive and aware of other’s needs, as well as their own. Therefore it is clear that the voice of learners is not only valuable, but crucial, in terms of their development and school placement, and that “such decisions cannot be made without consulting the learners themselves” (SIAS, 2008, p. 96). It is imperative that learners are consulted and are afforded the opportunity for their voices to be heard, and also that they be valued and taken seriously.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This literature review chapter explored the various ways and means of exclusion and marginalisation in the context of educational. In exploring exclusion, issues of inclusion and what it means were reviewed. Because the focus of the study is placement, the ideas with regard to special education and how special education fits in with the ethos of inclusion were discussed. In looking at placement, international and local views were presented, to provide a basis for comparison for placement in the South African context. Lastly, the concept of voice was explored, with its

contestations and criticisms, with the focus on being on using learners as participants in research.

Chapter 3 will explore the method and ways in which the data will be collected and how the voices of the learners will be heard, in order to explore their experiences of their special school placement.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the literature review (the previous chapter), in learning more about the inclusionary and exclusionary practices in schools, it is paramount that learners' views be heard and taken seriously. With this in mind, in this chapter the main objectives and aims of the research, as well as the research design of phenomenography will be explained. The data-collection methods of focus group interviews and individual interviews will be discussed with an explanation of how the methods of using photo diaries and a message in a bottle can help as creative means to elicit information from participants in research. Lastly, the chapter looks at ethical considerations involved in the research, as well as how the data will be analysed and presented.

3.1.1 Research objectives

The key focus of this study is to listen to the voices of the learners in special schools, and their experiences of their placement. Along with the themes discussed in the literature review, through the use of focus group interviews and individual interviews the following questions will be addressed:

- How do learners express their perception of placement in terms of academic considerations, sociability, and their emotional state?
- What are the benefits and disadvantages of placement in a special school according to learners in that placement?
- How does a learner's placement in a special school affect the way they perceive themselves and the way others act towards them?

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Lauer and Sher (1998) as cited in Leedy and Ormond (2005, p. 134), "many researchers believe that all enquiry starts out in a qualitative form" as data is gathered on "naturally occurring phenomenon" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p.

23). This statement implies that qualitative research is concerned with the social aspects of real-life situations in which data can be analysed and interpreted, and conclusions can be drawn. Thus, for this research, I will use a qualitative research paradigm, as it "recognizes that the issues that are being studied have many dimensions and layers", and so I will try to portray the issue "in its multifaceted form" (Leedy & Ormond, 2005, p. 133). Quantitative research is concerned with amounts and percentages, and not relationships and the intricacies thereof, as it uses "techniques that are likely to produce quantified and, if possible generalisable conclusions… while qualitative research seeks insights, rather than statistical perceptions of the world" (Bell, 2005, p. 1). For this reason, a quantitative approach is not viable for this research, as it is not "large sample sizes, standardized test scores" (Ross-Fisher, 2008, p. 163) or the number of learners that is of value to this study, but the genuineness of hearing what learners have to say about their perceptions and their experiences of their placement in a special school.

In order to listen to different voices and to obtain not only individual perceptions but also an understanding of the group, phenomenography will inform the research methodology of this study. Phenomenography is a fairly new approach, which was first introduced by a group of researchers at Gothenberg University, who were studying the experience of learning (Barnard, McCoster & Gerber, 1999). One of the distinct aspects of phenomenography is experience and the broad range of phenomena that can relate to experience (Akerlind, 2005). Therefore, although phenomenography began with experiences of learning, it is relevant to a range of other different topics as well.

One of the most commonly used definitions of phenomenography is that of Marton (1986, p. 31) who defines phenomenography as "a method adapted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them". In relating Marton's (1986) definition of phenomenography to the current research, it can be said that the various feelings and experiences that learners have regarding their special school placement can be seen and perceived differently, yet all the learners are speaking of experiences with regard to their special school placement. Akerlind (2007) speaks of variation in the way things are perceived, and states that

phenomenography is based on and stems from empirical studies where the "qualitatively different ways" (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997, p. 192) in which a researcher explores an individual's meanings, understandings, and ideas concerning a specific phenomenon (Booth, 1997). Phenomenographic studies describe the "meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). The fact that the voices of many learners are being heard about the same topic, namely, special school placement, is pertinent to this study. Phenomenography should not be confused with phenomenology, which have very similar terms, but differ in their underlying concepts.

Larson and Holmström (2007, p. 55) explain how both phenomenography and phenomenology share the commonality of being derived from the word "phenomenon" which means "to manifest or bring to light". But these two words have different suffixes. With the word "phenomenography", the suffix is "graphy" which refers to the different ways a members of a group experience the same phenomenon (Entwisle, 2006). With the word "phenomenology" on the other hand, the suffix is "logos". Phenomenology refers to the meanings of the lived experience of a single phenomenon. Therefore, phenomenology focuses on the individual experience, with the aim being "to clarify experiential foundations", while phenomenography is concerned with collective meaning, with the aim being "to describe variations in understanding" (Larson & Holmström, 2007, p. 55) of a phenomenon and the meaning people ascribe to that understanding (Saljo, 1979). What makes this research a phenomenographic study rather than a phenomenological study, is that the focus is on the experiences of learners in relation to the various ways in which they experience school with regard to inclusion, exclusion, and marginalisation. It must, however, be stated that experience in this research is not related to that of schooling, as such, as this implies that the phenomenon being investigated is related to the school system. It is not the teachers' and principals' views or experiences which are important in this study; what is important, and the phenomenon that is being researched, is learners' experiences in special schools. Thus the aim of this study is to describe how the phenomenon of learners' perceptions of placement in a special school can be heard, with "focused attention on the experience of the learner" (Entwistle, 2006, p. 193), and not the school as a whole.

Akerlind (2007) proposes that the views of individuals in fact, have a relationship to one other through the shared phenomenon, or the *collective experience*. But in order to see the collective experience, the researcher has to 'step back' from his or her "own experiences" and be able to allow other interpretations and understandings of the topic to come to light (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997, p. 192). It is important to be able to identify individual commonalities, as well as variations in understandings (Marton & Pong, 2007), and in that way find logical relationships (Booth, 2006) between experiences. This means that the researcher needs to find common threads between not only the experiences of the individuals, but also between the shared experiences of the group (Svenson, 1997). Akerlind (2007, p. 323) describes these threads as "categories" which should "emerge from the data". The researcher needs to be careful in categories that he or she selects, so that the categories truly reflect the meanings of the participants (Entwistle, 2006). A category can be described as "a description of what is the common meaning of the meanings of a phenomenon grouped" (Swenson, 2006. p. 168). From the categories, a platform will emerge, from which one can then extract the lived experiences of the learners in a particular special school regarding their placement, and take those experiences and try to find common threads between the experiences that can help to give meaning to the study.

3.3 DATA-COLLECTION METHODS

The voice research data was elicited through the use of a variety of data-collection strategies. Greene and Caracelli (2003) who prefer to use mixed-method approaches, assert that using a single methodological paradigm will cause one to have a narrow view of the world. Although it must be stated that this research is purely qualitative, Greene and Caracelli's (2003) idea of using more than one instrument to elicit data has truth for this research, as the use of a variety of data-collection strategies is not only helpful in terms of eliciting data creatively, but also in terms of the underlying philosophy of being inclusive and inclusivity. Children with disabilities are often marginalized as their strongest means of communication is not always verbal, therefore, providing other means for them to express themselves makes research more inclusive (Cock, 2012). Not only does using a variety of data-

collection strategies allow inclusivity, it allows the participants to express themselves through ways that best relate to their experiences concerning their placement.

Reavey and Johnson (2008) and Cock (2008) assert that the use of various forms of data-collection strategies is a positive means in combating cultural conflict and creating understandings between participant and researcher. Remembering that this research is focused on learners, Christensen and James (2000) as cited in (Messiou, 2008), state that research with children does not need to be adapted from research conducted with adults, but that certain techniques that are used may need to be. In a study by Mitchell (2012), demographic books were used for younger children, and children with disability and poor verbal skills received adapted sheets that made use of cartoons to extract the same information, but in a different form. In this research, the questions in the interview have been adapted, so that the language is age-appropriate and at a level that the learners can comprehend.

This research makes use of focus groups and individual interviews as data-collection methods, while photo diaries and a written message in a bottle are used as data-collection instruments to elicit information during the interviews. In the following section, focus groups and interviews will be discussed, with their advantages, and disadvantages as well as the benefits of using creative means to elicit data.

3.3.1 Focus groups

3.3.1.1 What are focus groups?

A focus group is “a small group interview of selected individuals to assess a problem, concern, new product, program or idea” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 487). For the purposes of this study, three focus groups were conducted per school (15 in total), where all the learners had the opportunity to discuss their experiences around special school placement. The first focus group acted as an introduction to the theme of placement, where learners were we asked simple closed questions, where they could respond either “yes”, “no”, “sometimes”, or “always”. Time was given after each question in case the learners wanted to clarify their answers in anyway (see Appendix F for the interview schedule). The second and third focus groups used the

instruments of photo elicitation and message in a bottle to elicit information from the participants. These instruments are discussed in depth in section 3.4.

The focus groups were based on set questions, which were open-ended and prepared in advance (Ashworth & Lucas, 2010). This made the focus groups conducive to promoting conversation among the participants. Clark (2005, p. 493) describes group interviews as “conversational encounters with a research purpose”. Although the questions in the first focus group solicited simple introductory responses (see Appendix H), the questions were posed in such a way that they prompted conversation among the participants.Through the focus group interviews participants were able to share their ideas, as well as discuss the common interest of special school placement.

3.3.1.2 What are the benefits and disadvantages of focus groups?

Focus groups not only encourage interaction around a common interest, but they also ensure interaction among students, as well as create an environment in which learners can interact (Zion, 2009). Although focus group interviews have certain disadvantages, such as the fact that information that is shared could be harmful to other group members (Nind et al., 2011), or “less articulate or shy young children may not have the confidence to contribute” (Clark, 2005, p. 493), they generally encourage stimulation of the group through participants’ ways of thinking, and they promote the generation of new ideas (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 363). For group discussions to be successful, it is vital that each person has adequate time to contribute what they want to say, and that the group not be dominated by a few individual participants (Clark et al., 2003). Participants (learners, in the case of this study) need to feel that they are in a safe environment, to be able to share their ideas, and the researcher must avoid intimidating participants.

3.3.2 Individual interviews

3.3.2.1 What is an individual interview?

After completion of the three focus groups, each participant participated in an individual interview, where questions were asked in an open-ended manner. The questions that were asked were semi-structured, and they revolved around a few

central questions (Leedy & Ormond, 2005) (see Appendix H for the individual interview schedule). Using a semi-structured questioning style meant that the interviews were guided by a common interview schedule, yet there was freedom to pursue interesting avenues that emerged if the conversation lent itself to that. This form of "conversation with a purpose" availed the interviewer the opportunity to explore avenues of conversation that were unexpected or previously unknown by the interviewer (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

3.3.2.2 What kind of questions are asked in an individual interview?

When asking questions it is important that what is being asked is clear, concise, and that there is no means of misinterpretation by the participant (Leedy & Ormond, 2005). This is especially true when interviewing children. Questions need to be constructed in such a way that they do not confuse the learner and the learner also needs to know how to answer it. Questions should not be confrontational or threatening in any way (Clark, 2005), where a learner is made to feel uncomfortable because of what has been asked. The researcher should avoid bias by being non-judgemental and prejudiced in his or her responses to questions. In repeating the fact that this research involves children, as well as a subject matter that is often very personal, the kind of responses that learners may produce to certain questions may be accompanied with strong emotion. For this reason, the researcher needs to be cognizant of this as well as be sensitive towards the learners' responses, and assure the learners that their voice is being heard, as well as taken seriously (Messiou, 2008).

3.3.2.3 How are individual interviews beneficial/ disadvantageous?

Silverman (1993), as cited in Leedy and Ormond (2005) asserts that interviews are very helpful for obtaining information on a certain event, phenomenon, or occurrence while observations are merely a validation of what occurs, with little interactive meaning. Individual interviews can often provide rich, in-depth data if interview questions are constructed in an open-ended manner. Because this research involves minors, Gollop (2000), as cited in Clark (2005, p. 493), warns against interviewing children individually, as for many cultural groups this is seen as an inappropriate practice, and therefore "careful preparation for interviewing children is important". In conducting research with children, it is also important that the learners are praised

and thanked for their involvement in the research (Clark et al., 2003), as the acknowledgement shows the sense of purpose that the learners had in contributing to the data for the research. Although individual interviews are beneficial, in that they provide in-depth responses from participants, there is always the chance that the day or time at which an interview takes place is not a good one for the participant. In other words, contextual factors outside of the researcher's control, such as the participant's emotions at the time, what happened to the participant during the day, as well as circumstances that the participant may be going through at the time, may lead to the interview being un-fruitful. This is a factor that the researcher needs to be aware of as well as work in a way that is respectful to the participant.

3.4 DATA-COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

3.4.1 Photo elicitation

In the third focus group, the data-collection strategy of photo diaries (Benjamin, 2002; Clark, 2005; Messiou, 2006; Clark, McQuail & Moss, 2003; Messiou, 2011) was used. Steyn (2009, p. 608) describes how participants are "prompted to take pictures of people or things which have an intimate connotation with the research topic". Reavey and Johnson (2008) use the term "enduring visual aids" as the media is produced solely for the purpose of the research. The use of photographs in research is a means of showing how the participant engaged in the process of the research. Fiske (1989) as cited in Mitchell (2008, p. 367), calls this "production texts".

3.4.1.1 How is photo elicitation used?

Photographs are used in many different and creative ways to elicit information in research. In a study by Ainscow and Kaplan (2004), learners took photos of places in the school that they perceived as welcoming, as well as places that they perceived as unwelcoming. The photographs then formed part of a poster project, and the learners' conversations were recorded, while photographs were taken. Lewis (2008), in a discussion of the Young Voices Project, related how learners were given photos and asked to respond in terms of how they felt. Lewis (2008, p. 5) terms this "photo elicitation" where the pictures themselves formed the talking point for the interview. In other studies such as that by Steyn (2009), an initiative to make a university more

inclusive, photo elicitation was used, where black learners were asked to take pictures of the barriers to their learning at the university. The pictures were displayed at an exhibition, where the learners had the opportunity to discuss what the pictures symbolised. The pictures and conversations formed the means for the researcher to write field notes. Molettsane, Mitchell, de Lange, Stuart, Buthelezi and Taylor (2007) used disposable cameras as a means of educating people about the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, as well as about the disease itself. In the research, they describe this means of eliciting information as not only a way to educate people and to learn, but a way of incorporating fun into research with children.

For the purposes of this study, each learner was given a disposable camera and asked to take pictures of places, situations or objects in the school which made the learners feel included, on the one hand, and excluded, on the other hand. Once the photographs were collected from the participants at the end of the second focus group, the pictures were printed and given back to the learners, and they formed the basis for the discussion for the third and final focus group (see Appendix H). Because the learners in the focus groups were from the same school, it gave them the opportunity to informally discuss, not only their pictures, but their peers' pictures as well. The use of photographs in this study can be likened to Ainscow and Kaplan's (2004, p. 7) study, who described their photographs as a "photo-voice".

3.4.1.2 How are photographs beneficial in eliciting information?

Willig and Stainton- Rogers (2008) recommend the use of images in research and promote the use of mixed media. With the media consisting of a large part of our modern society using images to elicit information through creative means in research is advantageous. Brown (2005) as cited in Willig and Stainton-Rogers (2008, p. 299), expresses the same sentiments and states that "individuals not only speak" but experience and view the world in different and dynamic ways. Therefore the use of images as prompts in the focus groups forms an interesting way of eliciting information. Not only are photographs devoid of the conventional means of eliciting information, but they are a creative means of meaning making, which makes for data with richer and deeper meaning (Reavey & Johnson, 2008). Because this research involves learners, the photo elicitation forms a relaxed activity in the capturing of the

data as well as a mutual platform for communication between adult and child (Clark, 2005).

Although photographs are an enjoyable and a creative way of eliciting information, they are seen as an instrument to which a lot of time and effort has to be given (Karlsson, 2007 as cited in Mitchell, 2008), not only by the participants, but by the researcher as well. Photos are seen from the perspective of the participant taking them, and for this reason. Mitchell (2008, p. 367) warns that photographs "must always be considered a selective account of reality" where generalisation cannot be made from a single shot. For this reason, it is important that photographs not be used by others to find their own interpretations in them, which Fielding (2007, p. 304) refers to as "traps", but that they be used as a means of eliciting information from participants. Therefore, it must be explicitly stated that the photographs in this research were not used as a data-collection instrument, such as, but as a data source, to draw information from and encourage learners to converse through a creative means. The photographs were subsequently returned to the participants on completion of the third focus group.

Although this creative way of eliciting data was beneficial, it was often difficult for the participants to remember why they took the picture or what significance the picture had in relation to the task which often limited the learners who took fewer pictures. Many of the learners were excited about the prospect of receiving a disposable camera when they received it in the first focus group where it was explained what the camera had to be used for. However, a few learners forgot about the task (although they were reminded), resulting in their photos being minimal or having little meaning, as they snapped hastily to complete the task. This meant that during the third focus group, some of the learners had rich data (pictures) to talk about, while others had to improvise and say what pictures they would have taken, had they had more time.

3.4.2 Written responses

Another creative way of eliciting information is through the use of a written response. During the second focus group, participants were given a "message in a bottle" (Messiou, 2011) activity, where they were given a particular topic and they had to give a written response. Learners were asked to write on: *If you could write to your*

fairy godmother about the school you could choose, what advice would you give her? (see Appendix H). Once the learners had written their responses, each participant was given an opportunity to orally communicate their response to the rest of the group. Learners chose to either read what they had written in response to the task, or they used their written response as prompts for how they were going to answer the question. After each learner had given their feedback, other participants were given the option to respond, agree, disagree, or comment on what their peer/s had said, often affirming the participant's experience.

3.4.2.1 How is a written response useful/not useful in eliciting data?

The written response as a means of data gathering encourages the learner to answer a question in a more thorough, in-depth manner, and it allows the participant to voice their thoughts in a safe and controlled environment. In this regard, Clark (2005) contends that often listening to what learners say while they are involved in writing or participating in an activity is more valuable than actual feedback after the task is completed. Another advantage of a written response is that learners are given time to think through a response and to deal with how they will answer the question when writing their response. Although this is positive, the converse is true for learners who struggle to write and apply their thoughts on paper. This form of eliciting data was liked by learners who enjoyed writing, to respond to the task. Many of the learners during the interview expressed that they had felt intimidated by their peers, who had greater strengths when it came to thinking and giving oral feedback. Many of the learners described the task as a speech, while other learners saw the feedback as informal and as a casual discussion.

3.5 SCHOOL SELECTION

Once ethics clearance had been obtained from the Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities as well as from the GDE (General Education Department), schools were purposefully selected based on:

- ✓ Their special needs orientation
- ✓ The age group of the learners that is between 13-18 years old; and
- ✓ The school's willingness to participate.

Eleven principals from special schools within the Johannesburg area were telephoned and asked whether they would allow the research study to be conducted at their school. If interest was shown, an information letter was delivered (via e-mail, or delivered by hand), and a formal meeting took place between the principal and me, often accompanied by the school psychologist or the educator who would liaise with me throughout the project. Once the principal had been satisfactorily informed about the research project, a letter of acknowledgement served as receipt that the research could be conducted and continued at the school (see Appendix C).

Eleven schools were telephoned that fell within an hour's travelling distance from my home. Eight schools responded, indicating that they were wiling for the research to take place at their schools but only five of those schools were selected to participate in the research, as the other schools were geographically too remote, particularly given the time constraints of conducting interviews after school hours so as not to disrupt the learners' academic work. The remaining three schools were not willing for the research to take place. It was thought that five schools was a manageable number, as multiple focus groups, as well as individual interviews, were to be conducted. Because I only chose to conduct research within five schools, the number of schools used in this study is minimal, which means that generalisations based on the findings of this study will not be possible. Not only is the number of schools minimal, but the schools are all located in similar demographic areas which means that they will not be generalizable to areas with different circumstances and resources. Two of the schools that I chose to conduct my research at, were schools for learners with physical and learning difficulties, while the other three schools were for learners with learning difficulties only.

3.6 THE DATA-COLLECTION PROCESS

Once the five special schools were formally selected, and informed consent had been received from the principals, class lists from each school's Senior Phase were obtained, and based on the total number of learners in the Senior Phase; this total number of learners was divided to get a total of 5 participants per school. This ensured that selection of the participants was random and that no bias or prejudice was shown towards any of the learners. It was requested of the principal that a short

information session be arranged with the five randomly selected learners to brief them about the research and to distribute information letters and consent letters for them and their parents (as the learners are minors, under the age of 18) (see Appendix A and B). Once consent had been received in the form of signed consent letters from the participants and their parents, the data-collection process began. It was thought that five learners from each school was a sufficient amount as it was a manageable number for the purpose of focus groups and it was a large enough number that sufficient information could be produced from which "conclusions can be drawn and generalized to other contexts" (Leedy & Ormond, 2005, p.99). The number of learners chosen was also a sufficient number, which would not be overwhelming, considering the time constraints, as well as the demands of the analysis of the data. However, having said this, the number of learners used may not be representative of the experience of all learners in special schools.

3.6.1 Participants

Participants for this study were randomly selected from the schools' class lists. Random selection was important for this study, as the learners were not selected for the study based on "classifications" or disability labels, as to avoid stereotyping based on a particular classification or disability in the data analysis. It was thought that random selection was an equitable method of sampling learners, based on their school placement, and not on what was "wrong with them". Although the benefits of random selection are that it allows data to be unbiased, as participants are not "hand selected", it does create an aporia in the research on "all learners", as defined in policy definitions of inclusion, and not on specific groups. Preference of gender (male or female) was also avoided so that the sampling could be truly random. The only criteria according to which learners were selected were:

- ✓ Their age (they had to be 13-18 years old);
- ✓ Their placement in a special school; and
- ✓ The learner's willingness to participate

One of the schools randomly selected learners from their hostel who fitted the above criteria, so that interviewing could be more convenient. This was because most of the learners used public transport to go home after school and as a result could not

stay for the interview sessions. Other schools randomly selected learners from the school's class lists. Five learners were selected from each school.

3.6.2 The interview process

Table 1 - The time frame for the interviews.

Time frame 2013	Research activity	Data collected
April	First focus group interview per school	Transcribed audio-recordings of introductory questions (see Appendix F)
May	Second focus group interview per school	Transcribed audio-recordings of written responses and "message in a bottle" (see Appendix F)
July	Third focus group interview per school	Transcribed audio-recordings of written response, "photo elicitation" (see Appendix F)
August	Individual interview	Transcribed audio-recordings of individual interviews (see Appendix F)

The table above shows the time frame in which each activity occurred and what data was collected during each activity. Each learner participated in three focus groups and one individual interview. Three focus group interviews were conducted. The first focus group served as an introductory interview, the second focus group used written responses as the data instrument of choice, while the third and final focus group used photo elicitation as a means of data collection. The individual interview was based on a set of pre-planned, open-ended questions.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Because the process of data analysis is informed by phenomenography, it begins by searching for meaning within individual transcripts and marking them as codes. From a variation of codes, themes are derived and grouped. I made use of the technique of "open coding" (Creswell, 2007, p. 156), where interrelated categories can be grouped and meaning can be deduced. This method of analysis fits the

phenomenographic approach, where Akerlind (2007) maintains that an open mind needs to be kept when analysing data. Once the data has been coded, Akerlind (2007) describes the next step of the process by stating how quotes on transcripts are grouped and or rearranged according to the similarities and the differences of the various themes. Simply put, Marton (1986, p. 42) states that “quotes are arranged and rearranged, are narrowed into categories, and, finally, are redefined”. In this way, the individual similarities and differences were found in the commonality of the group experience of placement in special schools. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) state that this form of analysis is inductive, as codes and themes are directed by the content of the data and not by the theoretical underpinning of it. The findings of the data will be reported according to categories, as well as through an illustration of the outcomes space. The outcomes space in phenomenographic research refers to the different ways in which people experience a phenomenon or aspect of reality. Yates, Partridge and Bruce (2012) describe the outcomes space as not only representing the phenomenon, but also the different ways that it can be experienced. Therefore the ways in which the learners experience their special school placement will be represented diagrammatically, showing how the different categories or aspects of the experiences relate to each other.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As noted in section 3.6, learners gave consent to participate in this research study. Importantly, it was not just the learners that gave consent, but the parents as well, as the learners were still minors, that is, they were under the age of 18. Informed consent was therefore given by both participant and parent. An information letter was given to both participant and parent informing them of the study and what it entails (see Appendix A). It must be noted that the consent letter of the participant and parent contain the same information, but are slightly different in the language that is used in each. The consent letter of the participant contains language that is at a level that is easier to understand, based on the learner’s age and cognitive level. Explicitly stated in the informed consent letter is the learner’s right to confidentiality, as well as the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without any negative repercussions for the participant (see Appendix A).

Due to the nature of the study being sensitive, in that it was interested specifically in learners that attend special schools, participants were assured that anonymity would be ensured, through the use of pseudonyms, which would protect the identity of the participants and their schools. Clark (2005) proposes that if the participants in the study are children, they should be allowed to choose their own pseudonyms, as this is seen as a fun way of integrating ethical considerations into the research. Because focus groups were conducted, confidentiality in this research is not only the responsibility of the researcher, but the participants themselves. A "confidentiality agreement" (see Appendix F) was signed by participants, in which they agreed not to share names or information that was generated in their focus group interviews. Researchers thus have duel responsibility, in that "they are responsible to protect the individual's confidentiality from other persons, and to protect the information from the general reading public" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 339). Assurance of confidentiality is given by the researcher in the consent forms, which both the participant and the participant's parents (as the participants are still minors) signed (Cameron & Murphy, 2006), as well as the principal of school (see Appendices A and B). Consent was sought and granted by the Wits Ethics Board (see Appendix E), as well as by the GDE (see Appendix D).

In the interests of being fair and having a transparent relationship with the participants, participants were informed that the information obtained in the interview process would be explicit and open. This means that the participants were informed that the dialogue would be recorded, and consent for this was obtained in separate consent forms (see Appendix F). In line with being fair and just, I did not hold back any information, and I was not deceptive in the use of the data in the results and the findings. This aspect is important when transcribing text verbatim and ensuring that words and phrases have not been taken out of context. Recording the interviews enabled me to listen more carefully to the participants' responses and enabled better interaction between the participants and the researcher (Clark, 2005) during the interviews.

3.9 STANDARDS OF ADEQUACY

3.9.1 Validity

Angen (2000) as cited in Creswell (2007, p. 205), states that validation is a "judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a pieces of research". This goodness of a piece of research depends very much on the participants. According to Creswell (2007), this gives phenomenographic research its validity, as the researcher works closely with the participants over an extended period of time. In-depth interviews over a period of time ensure accurate reflections of the experiences of the learners as well as the opportunity to "refine ideas and to ensure a match between evidence based categories and participant reality" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 331).

Due to the fact that data-collection methods in this study were varied and used multimethod strategies to obtain data, "triangulation" allowed the researcher to compare data from multiple sources, so as to "corroborate evidence" and support the cohesion of each source (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Not only did the multimodal approach to this research allow the researcher the opportunity to corroborate evidence, it added depth and richness to the data that was gathered.

Validity was ensured through the "participant language and verbatim accounts" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 331) of the participants. The language that was used in the interviews (group and individual) was appropriate for the age and maturity level of the leaners, as to not confuse, infer meaning or offend the participant. The language the researcher used was of importance with regard to this research, given the sensitive nature of the topic of special schools.

Validity was maintained through the use of a supervisor. Creswell (2007, p. 208) refers to this as "peer review", where the supervisor plays an important role in guiding the researcher in debating and clarifying the credibility of the data and the findings. According to Creswell (2007, p. 208), the supervisor acts as "Devil's advocate", by maintaining honesty and integrity throughout the research. Not only does the supervisor maintain honesty in the research, but in this study the participants were given the opportunity to have a debriefing after their individual interview, where they communicated their likes and their dislikes regarding the

research process, as well as whether they would like to change any of the information they supplied in the transcribed notes, and how they would like to change it. Not only did this allow for transparency between researcher and participant, as well as adherence to, the ethical consideration that people may change their opinions and their feelings after they have said something, but it also allowed the participants to verify that their words had not been misconstrued or taken out of context. While this step of "member checking" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) is important in validly of the research, it is not necessary for this research as within phenomenographic research it is not the individual meaning that is of importance but that of the group (Creswell, 2007). During the debriefing, many of the learners gave valuable insights into what they thought had worked and what had not worked during the research, as well as the personal value that they had derived from the research. Many of the comments that the learners gave concerning the interviews and the use of creative methods for eliciting information have been discussed in section 3.4. Many of the learners were grateful to have someone listen to them, and many participants expressed a sense of relief that they could talk about their exclusion, marginalisation, and inclusion. With that said, validly overall needed to maintain the integrity of the research and that the research appropriately reflects the experiences of the learners in special schools. Appropriate reflection was addressed by reflecting precise and accurate accounts and descriptions of the meaning that was collected from the group (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 331)

3.9.2 Reliability

All the focus groups and the interviews were transcribed verbatim, providing the researcher with information that is correct and reliable (Creswell, 2007). Not only does this allow the researcher to obtain data that is unflawed, but it affords the researcher the opportunity to actively participate with the participants and not be preoccupied with note-taking and writing during the interviews. The fact that the data was recorded verbatim, as well as the fact that it is on hard copy, allows for a close account of all data analysis decisions, so that transparent practices are ensured. Data that is recorded also allows the data to be easily accessible to use and affords the researcher the opportunity to take note of any interferences that could have affected the data in any way.

3.10 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, “qualitative research is authentically sufficient when it fulfills three conditions: represents multiple voices, enhances moral discernment, and promotes social transformation” (Christians, 2000 as cited in McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 339). This summary by Christians (2000) encompasses the key elements that this phenomenographic study aims to achieve. The first element is that the multiple voices of the learners will be heard, in that both focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with the learners. The second element is that moral discernment will be practiced, in that learners’ experiences in special school placement will not only be heard, but their views will be taken seriously. The third and final element is that social transformation will occur through the voices of learners and their first-hand experiences in special schools. The learner’s experiences will shed light on what is currently happening with regard to inclusion, exclusion, and marginalization, and the data that the learners have produced will provide impetus for change to occur. This having been said, however, this research is not intended to “fix” or eradicate, exclusion and marginalisation in special schools but to heighten awareness of how learners in special schools perceive their placement.

The chapter that follows records the findings of the data that was collected, and pertinent points from the literature are discussed.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the findings of the recurrent categories that emerged during the focus groups and the individual interviews in this phenomenographic study. Table 2 below provides a summary of the biographical information of the participants (the learners).

Table 2: Biographical information of the participants

	Age	Grade	Gender
School A	15	8	Male
	15	8	Female
	16	9	Female
School B	14	8	Male
	15	9	Male
	16	10	Male
School C	18	12	Male
	18	12	Female
	16	10	Female
	19	12	Female
School D	15	9	Female
	14	9	Female
	18	12	Male
School E	15	10	Male
	14	9	Male
	16	10	Male
	16	10	Female

The biographical information shows that each school had a different number of participants. Schools A, B and D had three participants each, while Schools C and E, had four each. Although five participants were invited to participate from each school, a few of the participants did not want to participate or withdrew from the study. Schools A, B, C, D and E were all government special schools in the Gauteng region. Learners ranged between the ages of 14 and19 years, which complied with the criterion of learners being of high school-going age. All learners had been in a special school placement for between 3 and 10 years with the exception of one

learner, who had been *placed* in a special school less than a year ago due to illness. This is significant to the study, as the learners had experienced placement for quite a number of years, and so, school placement is familiar to them. Interestingly, all the learners had previously been in a mainstream setting and had moved to a special school at different grades for various reasons. It must be noted that although the learners have a special school placement, they were not selected for the study based on a "classification" but were selected randomly, to avoid stereotyping based on a specific classification. The numbers of male and female learners differ by 1, as they are 9 boys and 8 girls.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, inclusive education in South Africa recognises special schools as part of inclusion, as they cater for learners with medium to high support needs. This is an important service, as many mainstream schools do not accommodate learners with intensive needs, and so, learners with higher support needs are placed in special schools. This having been said, although mainstream schools and special schools are part of the same inclusive structure, they are often seen as distant and separate through the eyes of the learners. During the interviews, the learners make clear distinctions between their school (the special school that they are in) and special schools in general, while often referring back to mainstream schools and their experiences there. Mainstream placement is used to compare the learners' experiences in a special school placement, and it also acts as a norm on which learners' base many of their experiences. For this reason, the metaphor of a maypole will be used throughout the chapter to analyse and make sense of the data through the voices of the learners.

A maypole is a pole that is usually made of wood, and it is erected with many ribbons that flow down from a central point. The pole was traditionally used for folk dances and festivals, where people used the ribbons to dance around the pole and sing. The maypole can be seen as a representation of the relationship that mainstream schools and special schools have to each other, according to the learners' perspective, with mainstream education seen as the "standard" or "benchmark" on which learners in special schools base their comparisons.

As has already been mentioned, learners' experiences of their special school placement, are continually compared with their experiences in their previous

placement in a mainstream school. For this reason, in the maypole metaphor the central pole represents mainstream schools, and the ribbons that flow down from the central pole represent, the different experiences that learners have of their special school placement, namely their perceptions concerning their placement, their peers, their teachers, their academic considerations and sport. Although each ribbon represents a distinct experience, the ribbons are all woven around the central pole, which represents mainstream schools, as well as interwoven around each other. Because this research report follows a phenomenographic approach, the collective and shared experiences of the learners within each interwoven ribbon will form the categories for presenting and analysing the findings of the study. Through the collective experiences of the learners, variations within these experiences will help to give meaning and depth to the study. Table 3 below shows the various categories and sub categories in which the research findings have been divided.

Table 3: Categories and sub categories

Categories	Subcategories			
1. School placement	Learners' perceptions of their placement	The names used to refer to the schools	The reasons learners attribute for their placement	Involvement in the consultation of placement
2. Peers	Learners' perceptions from their peers	Learners' perceptions from others		
3. Teachers	Attitude towards school work	Attitude towards the learners		
4. Academics	Pace	Quality	Subject choice	
5. Sport	Access	Perceptions regarding sport		

The categories in Table 3 represent the ribbons that are woven around the maypole and each other. Within each ribbon (category) are smaller sub categories.

4.2 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the five main categories will be discussed, namely placement, peers, teachers, academic considerations, and sport. As an introduction to each category, the sub themes or categories will be outlined. In the tradition of much qualitative research, the findings and reference to the literature will occur simultaneously. At the

end of the discussion of each category is a table that summarises the learners' positive and negative perceptions.

4.2.1 School placement

As discussed in Chapter 2, school placement in South Africa has three main avenues, namely mainstream schools, the recently introduced full-service schools and special schools. Although the focus of this study is special schools, it is common for learners to be referred back to mainstream schools.

The category of school placement was deemed (by the learners) to be one of the most interesting ribbons of the maypole as the information from the learners gave rich data with comparisons between their school, special schools and the "bench mark", namely mainstream school. In the first subcategory of "**learners' perceptions of their placement"**, learners were honest when they spoke about their placement, and whether or not it was a positive experience for them. The second subcategory under learners' experience of their placement is the "**the names used for schools",** and how either the words "special school*"* in the name of the school, or the actual name of the school, often affected learners' experiences, as well as their perceptions of their school placement. The learners repeatedly mentioned that the names used for special schools emphasises the difference between the different kinds of schools. This was evident in the way the learners spoke about their own school. Although the learners are often not even aware of the names that they give to the different kinds of schools, which will be further discussed in the findings, it is interesting to note that difference is expressed through the terminology that the learners use.

The participants (the learners) often spoke about why they had been placed in a special school, or they attributed reasons for their placement. Although many of the learners did not know the reasons for their placement in a special school, many of them had heard phrases or things that their parents, their teachers, or education practitioners had said, with a few learners relating their medical diagnosis as a reason for their placement. This forms the third subcategory, namely "**the reasons learners attribute for their placement"**. While learners were sometimes unsure of the reasons for their placement, most of the learners were never consulted about their placement before they were moved to a special school. This subcategory of

"**involvement in the consultation of placement"** often contributed to the learners' perceptions regarding their placement.

4.2.1.1 Learners' perceptions of their placement

While there were mixed feelings regarding their placement, the majority of the learners were happy with the fact that they were in a special school. Learners expressed that they enjoyed being in a special school. Some of the responses from learners were "*I love my school*", "*I am proud of my school" and I enjoy every minute being here*". However, there were two learners that expressed unhappiness about being placed in a special school. One of the two learners had been placed in a special school due to his illness, and he hated the fact that he had few friends at his special school, and, as a result he had become quite depressed. He said that his lack of friends and opportunities to socialise with people that he liked had made him lose interest in his schoolwork and most aspects of school itself which made him see his placement in a special school quite negatively. The second other learner that perceived her placement as negative saw her placement as unnecessary, as she claimed that she was happy in her previous mainstream school and did not see the need to move to a special school. As a result, the learner often compared her experience in a special school with her experience in mainstream school, finding fault with the way things were done in her special school compared to her previous mainstream placement.

Although there were two learners that perceived their special school placement negatively, all the learners, even the learners that were unhappy in their placement, stated that their school placement had contributed in a positive way to their education. Many of the learners cited their school placement as a contributing factor in the improvement in their academic performance, not only in the increase in their marks, but also in their understanding of the work. Other learners felt a sense of belonging and acceptance in their special school, a feeling that many of them had not felt before, while many of the learners expressed that they had experienced personal growth and development. In this regard, one of the learners said, "W*hen you come to a special school, it just helps you as an individual*". In Pillay and Di Terlizzi's (2009) study of the transition of learners from mainstream schools to special schools, many similar findings were found. In Pillay and Di Terlizzi's (2009)

study it was found that learners' self-esteem had increased and that learners' success in their academic work was due to their receiving praise for their academic progress.

Although the majority of the learners were happy with their placement in a special school, they were conscious of the fact that they had been placed in a special school, and not a mainstream school. Many learners used words such as *"different*" and "*unintelligent"* to describe their placement in relation to that of their peers in mainstream schools. One of the learners described how she would not be truthful when people asked her which school she went to. In explaining this, she said "*So I would rather lie and say I go to a boarding school. Boarding schools don't have to be special*". Learners said that they felt *"embarrassed"* and *"ashamed"* when they had to tell people which school they went to. Some learners mentioned that they often used to reply by giving the name of their previous school (which was often the mainstream school that they had attended), or they sometimes said that they attended a private school, so that they did not have to explain further.

These "cover ups" suggest that the learners are aware of the difference that their placement creates in people's minds, and although the learners see their placement positively, and most of them are happy in their school, the learners' cognisance of the fact that people outside of a special school see them as different, often changes their perception concerning their placement. This relates to Messiou's (2006) conceptualisation of exclusion where a learner is marginalised but others do not recognise this. In other words, a parent or education practitioner thinks that special school placement is the best option for a learner, and although the learner is happy, the learner is often "trapped" in a placement that he or she is embarrassed about or ashamed of. The way the learner perceives the school is often related to the name of the school or the connotations of the name.

4.2.1.2. The names used to refer to the schools

The majority of the learners expressed that people have negative reactions when they hear the name of their special school. In this regard, one learner responded as follows:

> "*You know when people say "special school", they thinking these people are mentally disturbed, there is something wrong with them, and they don't have legs or something. You know they want to distance themselves from such things".*

One of the learners said that *"Some of the people think you are poor because you are here*", while another learner said that "*The school name has the word Doctor in, so straight away people think you are mad*". One of the learners stated that he used the English name to refer to his school, and not the Afrikaans name, as he claimed that the English name for the school made the school sound less like a special school than the Afrikaans name did.

The word "*retard*" was frequently used by the learners when they related how others (outside of and inside the school) referred to them when they heard that they went to a special school. Therefore, the fact that some special schools have the words of "special school" in their name marks them as different. Many people outside of the school judge and perceive the learners based on the name of the school and the connotations that school's name has. One of the learners puts it very poignantly: "*It's like others are perceiving me with the wrong point of view*". In other words, the school's name, determines how people see the learners that attend that school. Gold and Richards (2012, p. 144) assert that the fact that educational labels are associated with "deficit" and "baggage", where a learner's label automatically interpreted to mean that the learner has baggage as they attend a particular kind of school.

In both the focus group and the interviews, the words *"disabled school*", *"school for the dumb", "school for special kids" and "crazy school"* were used when learners referred to their own school. When learners referred to themselves and their friends, they used the words "*LSEN kids*", "*specials*" and "*LSEN friends"*. This is interesting to note, as the way the learners described their school is not as positive as the way in which they described their placement. The learners continually referred back to mainstream schools and used terms such as "*normal schools"* or "*schools without disabled's"*. The learners not only referred to the mainstream schools as "*normal"* but they also referred to the learners as "*normal students*", and they referred to special schools as "*abnormal"* and having "*disabled's",* or "*kids that are slow"*. These words

were used very loosely in the interviews, and it was evident that many of the learners were not even conscious of the fact that they were using such label to describe not only themselves who attend special schools, but also the learners in mainstream schools. This relates to the findings in Walton and Lloyd's (2011) study, which shows how learners with special needs are often seen as guests in inclusion. Instead of being automatically included in the system, they are seen as different due to the label given to them, and, in this case, the label of the name of the school.

The naming of the various schools has a clear impact on the learners and how they see *themselves,* as well as *others*. It is intuitive that including the word "special" in the name of the school emphasises the difference between learners that attend mainstream schools and those that do not. This is consistent with Slee's (2011) assertion that the language that is used in inclusive education perpetuates difference.

The school's name and the words "special school" in the school's name were cause of concern for the learners, in that the name of the school often suggested that the school was a school with "difference". When the learners were asked what their preference would be in terms of the name used for the school, the responses were very mixed.

There was a strong feeling among the majority of the learners that there should not be a distinction in the name of the school between the names of mainstream schools and the names of special schools. One of the learners articulated that there should be "*no special school, no mainstream school"* while another learner asserted that "*People shouldn't label people at schools, like 'mainstream' or 'remedial*'. The general feeling among the participants was that there should be no distinction in the name of the school, although a few learners suggested that there should be a difference in the name of the school, as they claimed that the learners that attend special schools *are* different. Some of the learners also agreed that the distinction in the name of the school should be based on the degree of difference in the learners. For example, they claimed that if a learner has very high support needs, use of the words "special school" in the name of the school is necessary. These responses seem to contradict what the learners said about not wanting to be perceived as different. However, it could point to the fact that the learners are aware of their

differences, as one learner said "*being different isn't that bad",* but they want others not to judge them based on the fact that attend go to a school with the word "special" in its name.

Florian (2008) supports the placement of learners in special schools, as he claims that placements in mainstream settings often do not support the learner's needs. Although this is true, and learners confirm the benefits of their special school placement, the dominant perception is that learners that attend special schools are different because of their placement. Slee (2011, p. 70) refers to this as "a reflection of a natural order of human difference", where learners who are seen as different, or "deviant from the norm" are catered for in specialised settings. During the interviews, learners mentioned this difference by saying that although the majority of them were happy in their placement, the perceptions and the connotations regarding the name of the school often made them feel differently about their placement.

4.2.1.3 The reasons learners attribute for their placement

When learners were asked about the reason for their placement in a special school, the majority of them did not know the reason. Only five learners were aware of the reason for their placement, while many of the others made whimsical assumptions as to why they were there. One of the learners who used a wheelchair said that her placement was due to her disability, while two of the learners attributed their placement to medical reasons, namely epilepsy and a diagnosis of childhood diabetes, respectively. Other learners communicated that they were there because they were struggling in one or other subject. One of the learners described how maths was like "*alphabet soup"* to him, while another learner stated that had failed maths at his previous school.

One learner was genuinely confused as to the reason for her placement, as she said "*I don't drink any medication. I would understand if I drank medication"*. This shows that the learners have preconceived ideas about the "kind" of learner that should attend a special school. Other learners gave general reasons for their placement, by saying that "*kids like* ***us,*** *who can't concentrate for long hours and struggle with learning and can't sit still for long*". Many of the learners attributed their placement to ADHD or ADD, but in citing the reason for their placement, they said "*I am ADD*", thereby using the diagnosis that they had been given, or their label, as their identity.

The use of language that the learners choose implies that language "thinks" what is socially constructed. Terms such as "ADHD", "ADD", "dyslexic" and "dyscalculia" become common terms which the learners use as the norm when speaking about themselves. Slee (2011, p. 104) explains this by stating that "how we describe the world reflects certain understandings and it determines how we reproduce that world". In other words, the learners accept their label, which then becomes part of their identity.

When listening to the learners cited reasons for their special school placement, many of the learners spoke of mainstream schools as the "norm". Mainstream were seen as the standard, compared to which special schools were seen as different, often resulting in the learner feeling different as well. The learner who used a wheelchair said, "*I know I am here for my disability reasons. The other school [the mainstream school] didn't cater for me*". The difference is evident where a learner stated that she wanted to be in a mainstream school, as she explained *"cause I am not crazy". This school is for people with problems and I don't have that kind of problem*". Although the learners were sometimes aware of why they had been placed in a special school, they did not state the reason directly, but in relation to why they were not in a mainstream school. The way in which the learners responded shows a system that defines what is wrong with the learner, and their difference, rather than a system that accommodates their individual needs. The South African policy documents, such as the WP6 (2001), state that mainstream schools should cater for each individual's unique needs, yet the fact that the majority of learners with unique needs are placed in special schools is incongruent with the philosophies underpinning inclusion, making learners with unique needs appear different.

With the institution of a democratic government in 1994, and the consequent focus on human rights and equality, came the shift from a medical model to a social model of education, which saw the problem as being in the system, and not the child. In this regard, two of the learner participants suggested that they could be the problem. This was evident when one learner asked "*Is it a problem with me, and what else do I need to fix?*" Another learner described the way the mainstream school that he had attended before had not responded to his needs" "*In my other school they tried to change the child to suit them*". This was why the learner was now in a special school. The learners thus regarded mainstream schools as the ideal, a place where learners

without problems can cope, while they see special schools as a place where one goes to be “fixed” if one cannot cope in the “normal” setting of mainstream schools.

4.2.1.4 Involvement in the consultation of placement

Although many of the learners had an idea as to why had been placed in a special school, only seven of the 17 learners had had a conversation with a relevant adult about their placement in a special school. Furthermore, only one of the learners said that they had been given a choice or a say in the choice of a new school for them. The seven learners that had been consulted regarding their placement said that they were quite young when they changed schools, so, although they had been consulted, they were not old enough to make an informed decision. One of the participants expressed that he felt that the learner should be consulted about placement when they reach an age where a mature and informed decision can be made, and that their comments and concerns should be taken seriously.

The 10 learners claimed that they had not been consulted described their placement in ways that expressed their lack of agency. For example, one learner stated “*I was placed here”*, while another learner said “*My parents dumped me at the special school*”. In looking at the language that the learners used, their use of the passive voice describes the way they were *“placed here”*. Although the word that the learner used was not necessarily deliberate, it does reinforce the fact that the decision was made for him without him being consulted, which is a direct violation of Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights on People with Disabilities (2006), which states that “children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them” (no page), as well as the SIAS document, that states that “decisions cannot be made without consulting the learners themselves” (SIAS, 2008, p. 96). Two of the learners were only aware of their change of schools on the day that they had changed schools. Placement is often seen as a decision made by parents and teachers with little consideration of what learners, the individuals who are ultimately affected by the placement, think. O’Keeffe’s (2011) study provided an opportunity for learners with SEN in a mainstream school to voice their feelings regarding their placement. Although the study was based on learners’ views of placement in a mainstream setting, one of the key findings was that the learners (the participants in the study) were happy to have been heard. For this reason, it is

imperative that learners in special school placements be heard regarding their views on their own placement.

Relating these findings to the previous subcategory, as discussed in section 4.2.1, the lack of understanding of many of the learners of their reason for their placement in a special school could be linked to lack of consultation with the learners and a lack of involvement in the decision making regarding which school they will attend and why.

Table 4 below presents the positive and the negative perceptions of the learners for this section. Throughout the discussion of the findings, a table will be given at the end of a section, in an attempt to provide a balanced view of the learners' perceptions. Although this form of polarisation of the learners' perceptions places a definite value judgement on their perceptions for each section, it explicitly shows the learners' views in clear form. The summary tables are not an attempt to take sides with or against the value of a special, school but are a way of unambiguously presenting the findings with regard to the learners' perceptions.

Table 4: A summary of the positive and the negative perceptions regarding placement in a special school

4.2.1 School placement		
Subcategories	**Positive perceptions**	**Negative perceptions**
4.2.1.1 Learners' perceptions of their placement	• The majority of the learners were happy in their special school placement. Reasons for this were an improvement in their academic performance and the experience of a sense of belonging, acceptance, self-development, and growth.	• Placement often made the learners feel different.
4.2.1.2. The names used to refer to the schools		• The name of the school created the perception that the learners attended a "mad", "crazy", "poor" or "retarded" school. • Labels such as "disabled school", "school for the dumb", "crazy school" were given to learners in special schools. • Mainstream schools were associated with labels such as "normal school" with "normal learners".

		• The name of the school accentuated the difference between mainstream schools and special schools.
4.2.1.3 The reasons learners attribute for their placement		• Most learners did not know the reason for their placement. • Learners in special schools used their diagnosis to label themselves, for example, "*I am* ADD/ADHD". • Learners in special schools labelled themselves in terms of their disability or what was wrong with them.
4.2.1.4 Involvement in the consultation of placement	• Some learners were consulted about their placement, but they were too young to make an informed decision.	• The majority of the learners were not consulted. • Learners used the passive voice when describing their placement, which shows their lack of agency.

Table 4 provides a summary of the positive and the negative perceptions of the first ribbon (category) of the maypole, namely school placement.

4.2.2 Peers

Friends form an integral part of any teenager's life, as acceptance and belonging forms part of the development of relationships. In special school placement the bond that is formed between peers is often very close, as many learners come from mainstream schools, where they were not seen as equals. The first subcategory, namely, "**peers in special school placement"**, looks at the relationships that peers have in their placement, and whether the relationship is positive or negative. Extending the peer circle, learners relate how **making and keeping friends and meeting new people** (the second subcategory) is often very difficult, as learners are judged based on the school that they attend and not on who they are as people. This practice of judging is evident in the form of **teasing and bullying** (the third subcategory), which many of the learners cite as one of their experiences in their special school placement.

4.2.2.1 Peers in special school placement

In the introductory questions in each of the first focus groups, the question was asked whether the learners come to school because of their peers (see Appendix F). All but one of the learners responded "yes", indicating that peers are a very important part of schooling. There were mixed feelings concerning peers in the learner's

special school. Friendships typically form an integral part of a teenager's life. In this regard, the majority of the learners in special schools asserted that the friendships that they had made at their special school were closer than the friendships that they had made at their previous mainstream schools. Similar findings have been reported by Nind et al. (2012), namely that when learners (the participants in their study) described their peers in special schools, it was in terms of friendship and close bonds, while when they described their peers in mainstream schools, it was in terms of rejection.

One of the learners stated that since attending a special school, his self-esteem had increased. He asserted that it was "*thanks to the kids in my class",* and that *"they are always there for me*". Another learner expressed the same sentiments when he said "*in a school like* ***ours,*** *the classes are so small, and everyone has such a good bond"*. Several times the learners responded by saying that the learners in their class were "*like my family".* Indeed, one learner responded, "*They are more of a family than my own family is" and "Actually the reason that I come to school every day is my friends*", and "*It's nice at school. I fit in*".

Fordham and Stevenson-Hindle (1999) noted that friendship has a positive effect on a person and the way in which they perceive themselves. If learners' self-esteem increases they will be more motivated to improve their academic performances. This is an important factor, as although peers are not related to education itself, peers can be a factor that can either make or break a learner's placement, as relations with peers can affect factors such as academic performance, concentration in class, performance in extracurricular activities, as well as learners' general frame of mind at school. A study by Warrington and Younger (2011) states that a sense of being included in a friendship circle with peers can lead to a definite increase in a learner's self-esteem. Not only is self-esteem affected, but, conversely, if a learner does not "fit in", and is socially isolated, the effects can be seen in the learner's behaviour and mood as well as in their schoolwork and academic performance.

While the majority of the learners reported having a positive experience with peers in their special schools, two of the learners struggled to find peers to form friendships with. One of the learners related how he struggled to make friends in a special

school, as he said that the school was "*like, so small, and hardly anyone interacts with us".* One of the learners (who was unhappy about his school placement) said that the learners his the school were not his "type" and that for this reason he struggled to find peers that he had things in common with.

One of the learners even brought up the fact that learners of different colour do not mix and become friends, due to race issues. She called this "*to have apartheid in the school*". Although education has changed a considerably since the years of apartheid, the effects of apartheid can still be seen to a certain degree today. Pendlebury and Enslin (2004) mention that the inequalities of the past are often carried through the system. This is evidently still happening today. Many of the learners mentioned the fact that they felt excluded in terms of "peers" as they had fewer friends in their special school, as there were fewer learners in their special school than in their former mainstream school. One of the learners explained how in her former mainstream school she had many friends, but in her current special school she had only one or two friends. This was because she couldn't connect with most of her peers as she was the only English speaking black person in her school.

Interestingly, both of the learners that found it difficult to maintain peer relations in their special school placement were the learners who were unhappy about being placed in a special school. One of these learners was the learner who had been placed in the school during the course of the year and who had been given a medical diagnosis of childhood diabetes. The learner often mentioned that he wished he had "hundreds of friends", as he claimed was the case in his mainstream school placement. It could therefore said that the learner felt that he had a peer group at his former mainstream school, where he felt accepted and felt that he belonged, and he believed he would never find the same in his new (special school) placement. The converse of this could also be said to be true, the learners that were not accepted and who felt as though they did not belong in their mainstream placement formed strong relationships with their peers in their special school placement.

4.2.2.2 Making and keeping friends and meeting new people

As mentioned in the previous section, section 4.2.2.1, learners spoke about the positive or negative relationships that they formed with peers in their special school. All of the learners expressed how making and keeping friends from outside of their

placement was often very difficult. One of the learners related how difficult it was just to make friends outside of her special school"

> "*When people from outside hear that I am from the school, they like you must be so mentally disturbed, and you act like a child". 'Cause that's why people think we are here. They hear we from this school and they like "Don't come near me. I don't wanna have you as a friend." And it hurts a lot, 'cause I want friends too. It's hard to get friends.*

The learner's response above illustrates the phenomenon that people often have preconceived ideas about the *kind,* or *type,* of learner who attends a special school. Because of these preconceived ideas, learners in special schools often battle to make friends with peers outside of their placement. As described in Chapter 2, South African policy documents often distinguish learners that attend special schools as having some sort of *disability* or *impairment*, which reduces children to what is wrong with *them*. Therefore, many of the preconceived ideas that people have about children in special schools are partly created by the way *these* learners are "described". Cefai and Cooper's (2010) research identified that learners with SEBD are often excluded due to their "labels". In this case, a learner's placement in a special school is a factor which causes the learner to be excluded when they try to make new friends outside of their school.

Strangers that met the learners for the first time would often react negatively towards the learners when they found out which school they attended. One of the learners said, "*One of my family members told me if I am smarter than you, it's just that I am better than you, 'cause I am in a mainstream school".* Other learners recounted stories about how their friends' parents reacted when they went on a play date, and how the parent condescendingly said that it's alright to have problems and to go to schools like "that". Another learner told of her aunts that said "*Shame!*" when they heard that she had a special school placement.

The majority of the learners found it difficult to maintain friendships that they had formed before their placement in a special school. The natural progression of learners losing touch with their friends was evident, and most of the learners said that they lost their friends because their friends saw them differently once when they were in a special school. One of the learners described this phenomenon as follows:

"Most my friends come from outside the school; they all come from mainstream schools. I start to lose them, because they, like, tease you. Why are you in that school?" Learners often described how their friends in mainstream schools seemed "different" once they had moved to a special school, and they claimed that their interests and the things that they used to have in common before, had changed. One of the learners said "*I have friends outside of the school in mainstream [schools], but they are not the same. My LSEN school friends, they the same as me".*

It must be stated that although the learners' experience of peers outside of the school, as well as in mainstream schools, was generally negative, a few of the learners related how their friends in mainstream schools were often curious about their placement and wanted to know and find out more. Many of the learners had also developed ways of dealing with people or peers from outside of the school. For example, one learner said, "*When I walk home, they like, You in a special school, but it doesn't bother me, 'cause I always say, "Have you been in a school like that?"* Other learners admitted that they make a joke themselves about their placement, which often takes the edge off the awkwardness when meeting new people.

4.2.2.3 Teasing and bullying due to special school placement

All the learners except one had been teased or bullied at some stage because of their placement in a special school. Teasing accounted for by various different reasons, with the most frequently cited reasons being that they were teased because of the mere fact that they had a special school placement, or the fact that the name of their school made the school sound like a "*crazy school*".

"Peers" was the category where most of the differences were cited between mainstream schools and special schools. It must be noted that in this category the terms, "peers" and "friends" are used, with the term "peers" referring to others in the same age cohort, not necessarily friends, while the term "friends" refers to those companions with whom you have something in common with whom you have a close bond. Although a few learners claimed to have been teased in their special school, most of the teasing and bullying behaviour came from the friends that they had made in the mainstream school that they had attended before they were transferred to their special school.

While Norwich and Kelly (2004) suggest that learners with SEN that are integrated into mainstream schools could experience rejection and bullying, the current study indicates that learners are not only teased and bullied by those outside of their placement, but that they are rejected and bullied by learners in their own special school placements as well.

One of the learners explained that she moved to a special school in Grade 3 as her father had died, and she was not coping in the mainstream school that she was attending. To help her cope, she received counselling, which resulted in her being teased in her special school. She related her experience by stating that "*my whole primary school life I was bullied, 'cause I was the only one getting therapy and psychology. People thought I was sick*". Learners are thus teased and bullied in special schools because of the additional services that are provided. Learners are often removed from their classes to attend "therapy" in a separate venue. This makes the learner seem "different" as they are receiving a "service" that not all the other learners have been offered, which creates basis or ammunition for learners to be teased.

Two other learners said that if they achieve well (academically) in a special school, and this often forms the basis for being teased, as they were seen as different from the majority of the learners in their placement. Another learner said that "*they will tease you 'cause they think you did like too well*". This comment is interesting to note, as a common perception is that special school placement is only for learners that are "dumb" or "slow". This mentality that a special school is a "dumb" school is evident from the way learners are teased in their own school. One of the learners related that "*the one girl, one of my own friends, called me a retard*" when she was doing well in school. In their discussion about non-conformity in adolescence, Warrington and Younger (2011) assert that learners are seen as "uncool" and that they do not fit in if they achieve well academically. This insight is valuable for this study, and instances that the learners cite of doing well academically can be interpreted as non-conformity, conforming to the normal standard of their peers.

Only a minority of the learners were bullied in their own placement by peers and learners in their school, while most of the teasing and bullying was committed by peers or others outside of the school. As was explained in section 4.2.2.2, learners

who had had friends or had tried to make new friends in mainstream schools, were often bullied or teased when their peers heard which school they had attended. Learners several times expressed the way that they were saddened that people outside of their school bullied and or teased them based on their placement identity, before getting to know them. This links with Hayden's (2000), research which claims that learners with SEN are six times more likely to be excluded. Learners with SEN who are bullied and teased are often made to feel different, and so, marginalisation of these learners takes place, as making friends outside of their special school placement often leads to their being teased.

The learners told stories of how they were bullied and teased in their previous mainstream placement because they were seen as different. One of the learners stated that if she got an answer wrong in class, people would bully her. She said "*so other kids would hit you and call you freak*". While the learner that uses a wheelchair said that *"in **that** school, you don't really fit in, just because you are in a wheelchair, and they laugh at you for not doing what they do".* These instances of learners being teased and bullied in their mainstream settings could relate to Florian (2008) and Slee's (2011) assertions that mainstream placement often leads to learners being placed special schools.

Table 5: A summary of the positive and the negative perceptions regarding peers

4.2.2 Peers		
Subcategories	**Positive perceptions**	**Negative perceptions**
4.2.2.1 Peers in special school placement	• The majority of learners form a close bond with peers in their special school, as they feel that they are accepted and that they belong.	• A few of the learners' battle to make friends in their special school, as there are fewer learners. • Learners struggle to make friends due to race issues.
4.2.2.2 Making and keeping friends and meeting new people		• The majority of the learners found it difficult to make friends outside of the school, as they were judged based on their placement. • Friends in mainstream placement saw them differently once they had moved to a special school.

4.2.2.3 Teasing and bullying due to special school placement		• All the learners except one had been teased or bullied because of their placement. • Learners were teased in a special school because of additional services and higher achievements than their peers.

Table 5 provides a summary of the positive and the negative perceptions regarding of peers.

4.2.3 Teachers

In the "teachers" ribbon of the maypole, there are two main subcategories, namely "**teachers' attitude towards the work"** and "**teachers' attitude towards the learners"**. These two topics are seemingly different, while being interlinked, as often a teacher's attitude towards the work will be similar to the way he or she responds to and interacts with his or her learners.

4.2.3.1 Teachers' attitude towards their work

Most of the learners in the special schools related that their teachers had a positive effect on their academic performance. A common response among the learners was that their teachers explained the work in a way that made sense to them. One of the learners stated that "*they just explain better",* while another said that "*it's like they really help you here they don't just give you the work and then walk away*". Learners mentioned the fact that because the teachers explained more, it made the academic work easier for them. One learner acknowledged that "*they make the subjects easier for us".* Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development refers to the area of development that lies just beyond a child's present understanding. With the help of a wiser individual, a child can construct a new level of understanding (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). In mainstream education, learners often miss pertinent concepts, for various reasons, and so they struggle to grasp new concepts. However, the advantage of the individual attention given in special schools is that learners can often attain or construct a new level of understanding. Woolfson and Brady (2009, p. 222) assert that if learners with special needs are to achieve positive outcomes in education, they need to be taught by teachers that "believe they can produce

positive educational outcomes". Not only do teachers need to convey their belief in learners with barriers to learning but teachers also need to provide an environment which is conducive to positive teaching practices and "instructional environments" (Woolfson & Brady, 2009, p. 223) that will enable the learners to achieve.

All of the learners, in different ways, explained how the teachers in their special school used techniques that helped the learners to understand in a way that did not seem overwhelming to them. One of the learners stated that when new concepts were explained, they were taught the work gradually. "*They* (teachers) *mostly start easy and then rise, rise, rise, without the kids noticing*". Not only was it reported, that teachers explain more, as well as in a more comprehensive way, but learners were also very aware of the fact that a teacher would not put pressurised a learner on account of the fact that he or she worked at a slower pace. "A *teacher won't discriminate if you are fast or slow in your work*". To cite Woolfson and Brady (2009) again, not only do teachers need to provide positive teaching environments, but positive teaching practices as well.

Another one of the inclusive attributes of teachers at special schools that the majority of the learners mentioned was the fact that they gave much individual attention to learners. Many of the learners said that they felt included when individual attention was given to them. The teacher would do this is such a way that they did not exclusively single out one particular learner, but would rather re-explain a concept to the entire class when they realise that a few learners did not understand. This is consistent with Florian's (2008) assertion that special schools should cater for individual needs, individual attention being a type of individual need.

Out of group of 17 learners, only one learner found teachers in the special schools to be excluding. This learner felt that teachers in her special school did not challenge the learners in terms of the work, but expected only the very basics from them. The learner found this frustrating, as she was a curious and "hungry" learner. This learner mentioned that "*if I want to prove how smart I am to the teachers, some teachers here take it like I am trying to outsmart the whole class*". From the learner's experience, it seemed to her that teachers in her school accepted what the learners needed to learn, and taught them only that and no more. This learner's thinking can be linked to previous studies, which suggest that teachers expect learners with

special needs to perform poorly in class. While teachers expect that learners with barriers to learning will not achieve academically, it is also felt that teachers have little control to change this (Clark, 1997; Clark & Artiles, 2000).

In relating perceptions about teachers, the learners referred back to their mainstream school placement, again drawing comparisons from the "bench mark" or what the learners were used to. Among the learners there seemed to be an understanding that teachers in mainstream schools did not "teach", as such, but were more deliverers of worksheets and learning materials. All of the learners mentioned the fact that in mainstream settings the work was often not explained but just handed out. As one learner explained, "*I knew I was going to fail in Grade 5. I knew it 'cause all that was in my books was dates and empty worksheets 'cause they [the teachers] never explained*". Many of the other learners reported that teachers did not explain the work, and if they did, it was only once. Many of the learners said *"You couldn't ask for help",* and if they (the learners) did ask for help, they would not be helped. In describing the difference between mainstream schools and special schools in terms of explanations, a learner mentioned that

> *in a mainstream school, they give you your work, and then you ask "What do I do? and it's like "I told you what to do!" And you are like "You didn't tell us what to do". But here you ask over and over and over again if you don't understand*.

It is thus clear from the comparisons that the learners provided between mainstream school placement and special school placement that teachers in special schools make a concerted effort to make sure that learners understand their learning material. This is evident from the teacher's use of individual attention, better explanation of the work, and in a manner that suits the learners' individual needs. By contrast, one learner explained how this was not the case in mainstream schools: "*In a mainstream school, if you don't understand something, the teacher won't explain it to you differently. Eventually the teacher will just start ignoring you, discriminating against you*". Wolfson, Grant and Campbell (2007) state that the difference between teachers in mainstream school and special schools are that teachers in mainstream schools have less expectation that the learner can and will change. This may

account for why teachers in special schools are more willing to explain and find alternative ways and means for learners to work more effectively.

4.2.3.2 Teachers' attitude towards the learners

As far as teachers' attitude towards the learners is concerned, the attribute that most of the learners in the study claimed was needed was patience. The learners said that many of the teachers in their school were patient, but that in their "ideal schools" it was a must or a prerequisite that teachers show patience to their learners. One of the learners even specified who the teacher should be patient towards when he said that "*teachers should actually just be patient with all the students".* With this said, there were some learners that felt their teachers did not exhibit the same level of patience. Kagan (1992) states that teachers' beliefs are likely to influence their behaviours, and, as previously suggested, teachers in special schools believe in the learner's potential more than do teachers in mainstream schools. This assertion could be contested because of the mixed responses from the learners, as the learners had very different perceptions of the way teachers reacted to them.

The learners stated that although teachers in special schools are generally more patient, this is not always the case. One of the girl learners, who has one functional eye, said that she often battled in her drawing class because she struggled to see the whole picture. She said that she felt that the teacher could have done a lot more in her capacity to help her, but instead, the teacher referred her to a school for the blind. She described the experience as "*heart-breaking*".

Most of the learners felt that teachers in their special school took a lot more interest in their learners. While some teachers took a strong interest in the learners personally, the majority of the learners simply said that the teachers cared a lot more about their achievements than in the case with teachers in mainstream schools. One of the learners related how a teacher at his special school had given him the opportunity to be the presenter at their school's talent show. The learner acknowledged that the teacher had got to know him and had come to see his talent, and he had then provided the learner with an opportunity to showcase his talent. Other ways that the learners mentioned that teachers showed interest was the way that they did follow-ups and enquire about homework that had not been handed in on

time or projects that were overdue. The learners claimed that this made them learners feel included.

Cook, Tankersley and Landrum (2000) found that learners who had special needs realised that the teachers who worked with them often showed a deeper interest in them. The findings of this study confirm this where most of the learners said that teachers in their special school were just "*nicer*" than teachers that they had had in mainstream schools. One learner said that "*they treat you like a person*" while another explained that one of her teachers "*takes you with open arms. She makes you feel comfortable*" and "*he listens to you. If you need extra help, he will come and help you. He doesn't shout*". A study by Nind et al. (2012) recorded similar findings from their participants in a private special school, where the learners (the participants in the study) regarded their teachers as open and helpful.

Table 6: A summary of the positive and the negative perceptions regarding teachers

4.2.3 Teachers		
Subcategories	**Positive perceptions**	**Negative perceptions**
4.2.3.1 Teachers' attitude towards their work	• Teachers had a positive effect on learners' academic performance. • Teachers explained the work, so it was easier to understand, which made academic work easier for the learners. • Teaching happened at a gradual pace, so as to not to overwhelm the learners. • Teachers were accepting of learners who worked at a slower pace.	• Some teacher's expectations of learners were often low, and they did not expect more than what was required of the learner.
4.2.3.2 Teachers' attitude towards the learners	• Teachers gave learners individual attention, which made learners felt included. • Teachers seemed more patient than mainstream teachers. • Most teachers took more interest in their learners, academically and personally.	• Not all learners experience the same degree of patience from their teachers.

	• Most teachers in special schools seemed “nicer” than those in mainstream schools.	

Table 6 provides a summary of the positive and the negative perceptions regarding teachers.

4.2.4 Academic considerations

Many learners are referred from mainstream schools to special schools when they do not meet the academic requirements set for them. In this section, learners describe the “**pace”** (the first subcategory), “**the quality of the work”** (the second subcategory) and “**the subject choice”** (the third subcategory) in special schools as being different from those in mainstream schools and they explain how these various factors have either a positive or a negative impact on learners in a special school placement.

4.2.4.1 Pace

In terms of pace, the tempo of the teaching or the lessons, many of the learners spoke of the pace of the work in their special school placement as “*manageable*”. The word “*pressure*” was used several times to describe the pace at their former mainstream school, which shows that the learners felt that they could not keep up with the expected pace. One of the learners explained this by saying that “*mainstream is for kids that can cope by themselves, well not by themselves, but better than people in special schools*”. It was interesting that one of the learners even distinguished the pace at which they worked, stating that “*here [in special schools] you work at our pace, and not the pace of the teacher*”. The previous response implies that in a mainstream school, learners work to the teacher’s pace and have to keep up, while in a special school, learners work to their own pace. In Walton and Rusznyak’s (2013) article titled “*Pre-service teachers’ pedagogical learning during practicum Placements in special schools”*, many of the pre-service teachers commented about the slow pace at which the learners worked. One of the participants of the study acknowledged that “content mastery rather than curriculum coverage determined pacing” (Walton & Rusznyak, 2013, p. 18) in special schools.

As discussed in the previous category, in section 4.2.3, one of the learners stated that "*a teacher won't discriminate if you are fast or slow in your work"*. It was expressed that this made the learners feel like they could cope with the academic work as they felt that there was not the constant pressure to finish their work, but rather that they could complete their work and understand what they were learning. The learners felt that the pace of the work was determined by them, and not by the teacher or the prescribed curriculum that had to be covered over a set period. Bernstein (2000, p. 13) describes pacing in terms of framing, and whether the framing is strong or weak. Framing is about "who controls what". If framing is strong, the teacher is in control, while pace that is framed weakly is controlled by the learner (Bernstein, 2000). Therefore it can be said that in a special school, pace is not as strongly framed, as it is based on the individual's needs, and the assurance that a learner gains knowledge (Walton & Rusznyak, 2013) and does not just get through the work.

Although most of the learners felt that the pace in their special school was suited to their particular needs, two of the learners disliked their placement and felt differently from the others about the pace of the teaching. While one of the learners said that he was bored at the pace that the teachers worked at, as it was far too slow for him, the other learner said that she worked much faster than the learners in her class. "*I am the fastest writer in class and as soon as I am finished, I have to wait a half a period for everyone else to finish, 'cause they all write too slow. So what do I do? I twiddle my thumbs*". The facts that both learners were bored made them and ultimately question the reason behind their placement in a special school. This point may lead to the fact that even in a special school, differentiated tasks are necessary for learners who work at a different pace.

4.2.4.2 Quality

In discussing the second subcategory, namely quality, it must be noted that in this section, little commonality was found among learners in special schools and only a few learners gave input in this area. With this said, a few of the learners stated that before they came to a special school, they often had the misconception that because they were failing in their previous placement in a mainstream school, they would come to a special school and do well, without making much effort. This sentiment

created the impression that the quality and the standard of the work in a special school is seen to be lower than that of a mainstream school. "*There is no special school. There is no mainstream school. You basically do the same work*". This is interesting to note that many learners thought that academic work at a special school would be of a "watered-down" or an easier standard to that at a mainstream school. Although the study focuses on how learners in special schools feel, a similar sentiment that special schools follow a different or easier, curriculum is shared by people outside of special schools. In Walton and Rusznyak's (2013) study, participants commented on how they were surprised when they saw that special schools used the same text books as mainstream schools. The pre-service teachers expected that learning materials would be different as the learners' levels are different.

Learners described other aspects of the quality of academic work at a special school as advantageous and inclusive. Many learners described additional facilities, such as having occupational therapists, a psychologist, and counselling as ways that could help them to focus on their academic work. Many learners had emotional problems that clouded their mind when they worked, but use of the additional services at a special school often caused the quality of their work to improve as the underlying problems were dealt with. Pillay and Di Terlizzi (2009) mention that one of the students that moved from a mainstream school to a special school reached his academic potential, as support was given to him, while in the mainstream school where he was before, support was always something that he expected but never received. This is incongruent with what is stated in the Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (2010, p. 13), which say that learners need the "necessary support, in order that they may achieve their full potential". In demonstrating the advantage of support in special schools, one of the participants (the learners) shared how his sessions with the school psychologist had taught him new study techniques. "*Even though my marks were good and higher [at the mainstream school] there than here, I think I am learning much better, and new techniques, like, how to study"*.

With most of the learners speaking positively about the quality of the work at a special school, one of the learners stated that a disadvantage was that there was so much help from the teachers, and she criticised the manner in which they taught.

She said that "*you can't cope in the real life, 'cause you are so being spoon-fed and everything is explained, whereas there [in real life mainstream] you just do it*". This is interesting, as although this learner was very happy about her school placement and the advantages that her placement had for the quality of her work, she compared the placements and concluded that too much help can be disadvantageous.

4.2.4.3 Subject choice

The final subcategory, namely subject choice, was one where all the learners were in agreement, and it was not in favour of their special school placement. All the learners felt that their placement put them at a disadvantage, as they often only had a select few subjects to choose from, and in some cases they had no choice at all. Not only did learners mention the limited choice of subjects, but they thought it was unfair, as the subjects that were offered were not everyone's strength, which ultimately led to the learners not achieving well. Learners responded "*In this school the subject choice is small. And what I have picked up is that not everyone can do the stuff*" and "*I feel excluded in EMS. It excludes me 'cause I am the only one that doesn't understand*".

Learners also expressed concern that learners with different abilities were not taken into consideration. One of the learners that had only one functional eye told how she had to take a subject, but she could not do it. This learner said that she could not understand why in a school where accommodations and adaptions were made, learners had to take a subject that they were failing in their previous mainstream school and relive the feelings of failing again. This again highlighted the differences between learners' special school. This was articulated where learners said "*In a mainstream school there is a lot of opportunities in terms of choosing subjects"*. Although all the learners responded that the subjects choice was negative, one of the learners said that they had the opportunity to experience a different kind of subject for example Hospitality, which has to do with the hotel and food industry. She related that these kinds of subjects bring the learners closer, and "*it makes us hyped up about being together as a group and working as a team*".

Table 7: A summary of the positive and the negative perceptions regarding academic considerations

4.2.4 ACADEMICS		
Subcategories	**Positive perceptions**	**Negative perceptions**
4.2.4.1 Pace	• The pace was according to the learners' understanding, and not the teachers pace or the curriculum.	• Some learners were bored and frustrated that the pace was so slow.
4.2.4.2 Quality	• Additional services of support, such as occupational therapy, psychology and a nurse and were cited as advantages of special school placement.	• There is a preconception that special school academic work is a watered-down version of mainstream schools academic work.
4.2.4.3 Subject choice		• Subject choice is limited, and often there is no choice in the subjects that the learner can take.

Table 7 provides a summary of the positive and the negative perceptions regarding academic considerations.

4.2.5 Sport

Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk (2003) acknowledge that physical education and sport pose inequalities in that learners with disabilities are often unable to do as much sport or the same number of sports as learners without disabilities. This links with the first subcategory, namely "**access"**, and whether or not all learners can take part in sport or some sort of extra-curricular activity. Related to access, participants stated that sport in the special school was exclusionary, in that it was based on who was and who was not included.

4.2.5.1 Access

All the learners participated in sport at their special school, with the exception of one learner, who could not participate in sport due to her "*disability*". Therefore, although learners are exposed to sport, their access to it is sometimes restricted. One learner explained this: "*The school needs to make improvements that need to do with sports. They would, like, let them [learners with different abilities] partake and try make it in*

the school". One of the learners advocated for the learners who were excluded from sport in their school: "*In this school, the disabled school, they are not treated fairly. And it would be nice to give them a chance*".

Although the majority of the learners enjoyed sport for its qualities such as teamwork and competitiveness, and the extramural facilities it provides, many of the learners complained about the limited choice of sport offered in a special school. As in the previous section, where subject choice was discussed, learners felt that they had a very limited choice of sports to choose from. One of the learners said "*The rugby field, it makes me feel excluded, 'cause I'm a soccer fan I don't like rugby*". Another area of concern for the learners was the fact that sport was often not competitive, and the season was often over within a few weeks, with little effort being made to play matches or competitions against other schools. Many of the learners acknowledged that their school (a special school) was not the only special school, and they implied that for this reason there was no "excuse" for not having any competitions. "*We have, like, a volley ball team, but we don't even play matches"*.

4.2.5.2 Sport in special schools

In looking at the learners' perception of sport at a special school, learners often felt excluded because of the recognition that some sports get, as well as the differences between sport in mainstream schools and sport in special schools.

One of the largest areas of concern for the learners was the fact that although there was a limited choice of sports at their special school, there were only select sports that were recognised. Learners stated that participation in popular sports such as netball, swimming, and rugby was encouraged, yet learners that participated in less popular sports such as chess, were not recognised, even when their achievements were good. The learners explained that learners that participate in popular sports are called onto stage and "*glorified"*, yet their chess team, which won the league, was not even recognised. Bourdieu (1991) mentions that sport carries with it value and status. Participation in sports that are seen as "exclusive" brings about social positioning with the people who participate in those sports. Similarly, schools place emphasis on certain sports and encourage competition in those sports. This is interesting, as in special schools it would be expected that different abilities among learners would cause sports co-ordinators to place equal emphasis on all the sports

offered at the school, yet social order and value still reign in the exclusivity of popular sports. Fitzgerald (2005) explains that even in special schools, some sports hold "elite" power, even among sports for the disabled. Similar to the findings of this study, Fitzgerald (2005) found that learners were frustrated at the lack of recognition in some sports, as well as the emphasis that was placed on some sports.

As in the first category, namely school placement, discussed in section 4.2.1, learners were often made to feel different just because of the school they attended. This same sentiment was felt when the learners expressed their associations with other schools and their sports. As one of the learners explains,

> *"Because we are LSEN school, we play against LSEN schools in our sports, and then my friend in a mainstream school plays against mainstream schools, and they think our sport is like playing against deaf and blind people. The problem is that they do not want to know about our school. They are not interested. They don't care*".

This learner goes on to explain about the names that are associated with the learners because they play sport in an "LSEN" school, "*It's like on one of our rugby tours, they called us "outside normal schools. And it makes you feel outside*". Fitzgerald (2005, p. 44) uses the quote "we all have bodies, but not all bodies are equal, some matter more than others" to explain how society places value on what people can and cannot do. The learners that spoke about rugby were placed in a special school for learners with learning difficulties, and not for learners with physical disabilities. Therefore, instead of playing against learners that had similar abilities to them, the boy rugby players were playing against teams that had learners that were not equal to them. Therefore, the sports that the learners played were based on their placement, and not on the ability that they exhibited in the sport.

Table 8: A summary of the positive and the negative perceptions regarding sport

4.2.5 Sports		
Subcategories	**Positive perceptions**	**Negative perceptions**
4.2.5.1 Access		• There was a limited choice of sports in most special

		schools. • Learners with disabilities were often left out of sport as they were not included due to their “impairments”.
4.2.5.2 Sport in special schools		• Sport was often exclusive and importance and recognition were placed on certain sports. • Sport was often based on the learners’ placement and not their abilities.

Table 8 provides a summary of the positive and the negative perceptions regarding sport.

4.3 CONCLUSION

In reflecting back on the Maypole metaphor, it is clear how Figure 1 below forms a diagrammatic illustration of the outcomes space.

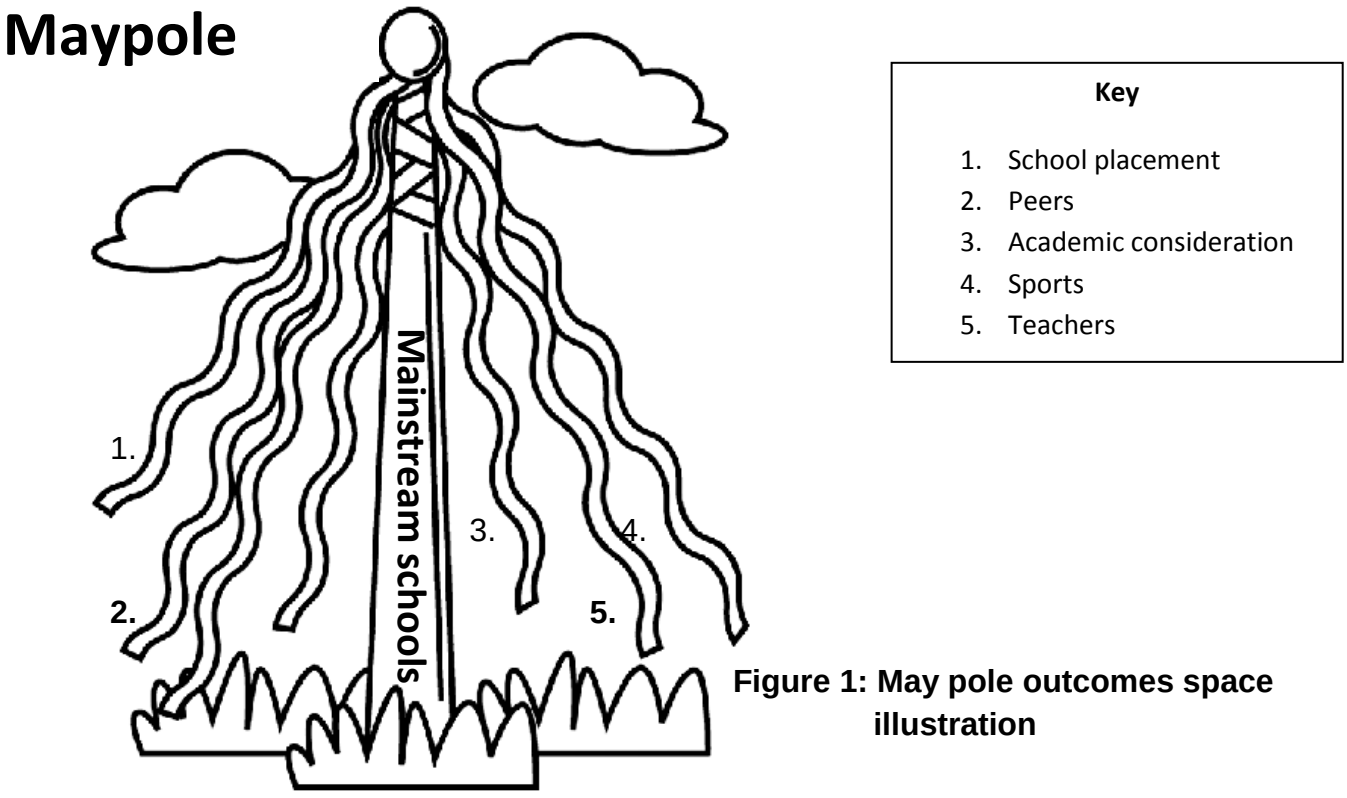

Figure 1: May pole outcomes space illustration

As each ribbon (category) of the maypole is entwined around the central pole representing mainstream schools, the ribbons are also interwoven and interact with each other. Through the collective experiences of the learners, the variations within the five categories of school placement, friends, teachers, academic considerations and sport clearly show how each experience is separate, but they interact with one another to form the areas in which the learners feel or perceive that they are included, excluded, or marginalised in terms of their special school placement. For this reason, the findings of each ribbon of the maypole (category) will be summarised in terms of inclusion, exclusion, and marginalisation.

4.3.1 Inclusion

The majority of the learners felt that their placement in a special school helped their personal and academic abilities, which made them feel included. Learners felt that the bonds formed between friends in a special school were close, and as a result, most of the learners felt a sense of belonging.

The learners felt included, as the teachers taught at a pace that the learners could cope with, and the work was taught at a level that the learners could understand, which contributed to the learners feeling in control of their learning. The teachers were said to be more understanding of the learners' differences, and the learners claimed that much individual support was given to learners with higher support needs. This contributed to the learners feeling included, as they were not left behind when they did not understand or grasp a new concept. The teachers were described as being generally "nicer" in special schools, and, as a result, the learners felt a sense of warmth and acceptance from their teachers, which meant that the learners felt included.

Two of the learners with disabilities felt included due to the additional services offered at special schools, in particular counselling as the learners felt that their specific individual needs were catered for, unlike the case in many mainstream schools.

4.3.2 Exclusion

The two areas in which learners communicated that they felt most excluded were exclusion from their friendship circles outside of their special school placement and

exclusion through not being in a mainstream school. The majority of the learners articulated that their friends treated them differently and excluded them as soon as their placement changed to that of a special school. The participants (the learners) also expressed that their previous friends judged them based on their placement, and not on who they were as people, which made them feel excluded. The second greatest reason that the participants felt excluded was the fact that they attended a special school, and not a mainstream school. Learners were acutely aware of the fact that their attendance of a special school (and not a mainstream school) meant that they were different, or that they had something wrong with them.

Learners generally felt excluded in the consultation process when a new school was chosen for their special school placement. Many of the learners shared the fact that the decision making concerning their new school was done exclusively by their parents or by education practitioners', and not theirs. Consequently, learners felt excluded from the very decisions that affected them, namely which school they should attend.

Learners with disabilities expressed that they felt excluded from the sports that were offered in their special school, as many of the sports that were offered did not accommodate learners with physical impairments.

4.3.3 Marginalisation

Participants (the learners) reported that the name of the school, as well as the fact that it had the words "special school" in its name, made learners feel that they attended a "crazy school". The learners' placement in a special school meant that labels were attached to the learners that attended the special schools, and that this marginalised learners that attend special schools from learners that attend mainstream schools.

Participants expressed that friends and peers in mainstream schools saw them differently as a result of their placement in a special school, and that they felt marginalised because of this.

Some learners (participants) felt that teacher expectations of the learners were very low, which made certain learners that were high achievers feel bored, and as a result, marginalised.

Subject choice in the five special schools investigated in the study, was very limited, which had negative implications for the learners' future career prospects.

Learners expressed that the choice of sports offered in a special school favoured certain "popular sports", which marginalised learners who did not like that sport who did not have the ability to play that sport. Not only did the limited choice of sport in a special school marginalise the learners, but when competing against learners in mainstream schools, the sports skills or abilities of learners in special schools were often questioned, based on their placement.

4.3.4 Conclusion

The main findings of the research will be presented in Chapter 5, which summarises the key findings, together with pertinent points from the literature. The chapter explains the limitations of the research, and it offers recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to revisit the foundations of the study, while looking again at the reasons behind the study, the research methodology used as well as the research questions, with the focus being on how learners perceive their placement in their special schools. In answering the main question of the study, as well as the sub questions, relevant points from the literature review will be revisited which will indicate whether the findings are consistent with the findings or previous research. Recommendations for the field of special education and future research will be given, and limitations in the research design and the execution of the study will be explained. Lastly, a brief reflection on the researcher's "journey" in the research will be presented, with final concluding remarks.

5.2 FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.2.1 Why was this research conducted?

The core objective of this research study was to ascertain how high school learners in five Johannesburg schools perceive their placement in special school settings. There is a gap in the literature, not only with regard to the use of learners as participants in research, but also with regard to the way learners in special schools perceive their placement. Thus, this research aimed to discover learners' perceptions regarding their placement.

5.2.2 How was the research conducted?

Five special state schools in the greater Johannesburg area consented that learners from their schools could participate in the research study. Participants from the study were randomly selected, so as to avoid stereotyping based on disability or classification. Participants were each involved in three focus group interviews,

making use of photo diaries and a written response to elicit information from the group. On completion of the three focus group interviews, each learner took part in an individual interview, so that more in-depth responses could be obtained from participants.

The research followed a phenomenographic approach, where the experiences of the learners were described through the collective experiences of the group, and the similarities and differences in experience were also described. Data was analysed phenomenogically, where codes and categories were derived from the meanings within the data. The findings of the research were presented in accordance with phenomenography, where the collective responses of the learners in terms of the separate categories were shown, underpinned by the similarities and differences that exist between participants.

5.2.3 Main points from the literature

In this section the main points from the literature review chapter will be revisited.

5.2.3.1 Marginalisation and exclusion

Marginalisation and exclusion occur in many ways in the South African context, through culture, race, religion, and status (see section 2.2.2), but learners with barriers to learning (including those with disabilities) are often the most affected by marginalisation and exclusion in the field of education. Messiou (2006) suggests four ways of conceptualising marginalisation. Messiou's (2006) first way of conceptualising marginalisation is where a child is marginalised and others recognise this. The second way is where a child is marginalised and others do not see it, while the third way is where a child is marginalised and the child does not recognise this. The last way is where a child is marginalised, but the child does not admit to this.

5.2.3.2 Inclusion

Inclusion is seen differently by different people. Ainscow and Dyson (2006) propose six ways of conceptualising and framing inclusion (see section 2.3.1), while Ainscow et al. (2011) define inclusion from a broad as well as a narrow perspective. This study adopted the narrow view of inclusion.

Inclusion was described in terms of progression from a medical model to a social or rights discourse model. Through the changes from a medical model to a social model, inclusion evolved internationally (see section 2.3.2), as did the South African approach to inclusion, which was informed by the WP6 (2001) and many other relevant policy documents (see section 2.3.3). Although the policy documents are based on inclusive principles, the documents are often seen as a contested issue. Some contested issues include the distinction that is made between different groups (namely, learners and learners without barriers to learning), and different schools (placements) for learners with higher support requirements (that is, special schools, and mainstream schools).

Human rights have to do with respecting diversity and difference in learners, and inclusion is concerned with human rights and social justice. Pertinent to human rights in education is the fact that learners are to be treated fairly and not equally (see section 2.3.3.2).

Language has an undeniable power in the way inclusion is conceptualised and understood. Through language, difference is noted in the way learners are described, labelled, or categorised, which makes the divide between learners with barriers to learning and “normal” learners prevalent. Another area in which language exemplifies difference is through the tone that is used when describing learners who are different (see section 2.3.3.3) and who are placed in special schools.

5.2.3.3 Placement

Historically, placement in South Africa saw separate schools for learners of colour and learners with disability, where separate curricula and training for teachers that taught in special schools were provided.

Today an inclusive model of education is being implemented in South Africa, consisting of mainstream schools, which accommodate learners with low support needs, and special schools and the newly introduced full-service schools, which accommodate learners with medium to high support needs. Special schools are still seen as controversial, as they highlight a deficit model (Slee, 2011) and they use teaching strategies that are not that different to those used in mainstream schools (Florian, 2008). By contrast, special schools are seen as havens of access for

learners with barriers to learning and are regarded as preferred alternatives to mainstream schools, which generally do not cater for individual needs.

Pertinent to placement are the learners' views and perceptions thereof. Although there is a gap in the literature with regard to placement, especially with regard to special schools, studies by Nind et al. and (2012) and O'Keeffe (2011) shed light on issues surrounding special school placement (see section 2.4.5).

5.2.3.4 Using the "voice" of learners to elicit information

Using a learner's "voice" in research to elicit data is based on using a person's specific thoughts and feelings regarding their own experiences. Although using voice in research is not a new phenomenon, the use of voice in research can be seen as controversial, in that experience is not accepted as scientific and credible (Arnot & Reay, 2007). Yet, challenging to these beliefs is the fact that experience is socially derived, which shows people's thoughts and feelings (see section 2.5.2). In using voice to elicit information, children are pivotal in exploring education issues, as children (learners) are at the heart of inclusion and exclusion, and should be afforded the opportunity to be heard (see section 2.5.4).

5.3 ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

5.3.1 How do learners express their perception of placement in terms of academic considerations, sport and sociability?

5.3.1.1 Academic considerations

In terms of pace, the majority of the learners stated that they were able to work at their own pace, and not that of the teacher. There was no pressure from teachers in terms of pace, which led to the rate of curriculum coverage being determined by the learners, and not by teachers or other contextual factors. The learners (the participants) reported that they were not discriminated against if they were slower than the other learners when it came to writing or grasping new concepts, or if they did not understand or ask questions in class, and that this made them feel included. Nevertheless, a minority of the learners criticised the pace as being too slow and complained about having to wait for the other learners to finish their work.

A misconception that many of the learners had when moving from a mainstream school to a special school was that the curriculum would be not only different, but easier than the curriculum in the former mainstream school (that is, a “watered-down” version of the curriculum), and that they would not have to work hard to achieve in a special school.

The majority of the learners reported that they found academic work inclusive, as there was extra support through individual attention, as well as additional support services, such as occupational therapy, counselling and psychology. Although most of the learners spoke positively about the quality of the academic work at special schools, the minority of the learners felt that too much help was detrimental to coping in life outside of their placement.

5.3.1.2 Sport

All of the learners found that access to sport in a special school was limited, as the learners were restricted to the sports that were offered at their respective special schools. Many of the learners reported that several of the sports offered at their special school did not accommodate and cater for learners with physical barriers, which they (the participants) found to be exclusionary.

In terms of sport in special schools, all of the learners explained that there was a definite status attached to certain sports, which the learners termed the “popular sports”, being swimming, netball, and rugby. The learners felt excluded, as most of them were not participating in the sports that received the most praise and recognition.

Learners mentioned that they were made to feel different when they played against teams from mainstream schools, as the learners from these schools (“normal learners”) often looked down on their sporting skills or talent because of the fact that they attended a special school.

5.3.1.3 Sociability

As in the lives of most teenagers friends formed an integral part of the school life of the learners (participants). Learners said that they made friends easily in special schools and that they formed very close bonds, almost like family bonds, which

made the learners feel included and made them feel that they belonged. It was reported that having friends increases learners' self-esteem, and has as well as have an impact on their academic performance. While the majority of learners responded that they found it easy to make friends in a special school, a minority of the learners reported that race issues often prevented them from making friends with learners of other races.

While it was reported that making friends in a special school was easier than making friends in mainstream schools, as the learners shared common interests, all the learners commented that making and keeping friends outside of their school was difficult. One reason mentioned for the difficulty in making and keeping friends outside of their school was that people seemed to feel sorry for them (learners in special schools) and said things like "Shame!" when they heard about their placement. Other reasons cited were that people outside of the learners' placement often looked down on them because of the school that they attended, that is, a special school. It was claimed that friends in mainstream school placements perceive learners that attend special schools differently when they change schools (that is, move from a mainstream to a special school).

Learners commented that they were often teased by peers outside of their special school placement because of the type of school that they attended, the connotations that the name of the school had, as well as their physical disabilities. While teasing occurred outside of their special school, learners were also teased in their special schools. Reasons that learners cited for teasing were the additional services that were rendered to certain learners, where some received these services and others did not, and instances where learners were much stronger than their peers academically.

5.3.2 What are the benefits and disadvantages of placement in a special school, according to learners in that placement?

In this section the benefits and the disadvantages of placement in a special school will be discussed.

In terms of friends, learners found that the friendships formed between friends in special schools were closer than those in mainstream schools, which made their school feel more like a family.

Learners liked their placement in a special school, stating that their placement contributed positively to their education. Learners said that their academic performance improved, not necessarily in their marks, but in their overall understanding of the work. Not only did learners experience a positive change in their academic performance but also within themselves through their own personal growth and an increased in their self-esteem.

In terms of the academic aspects of special school, one of the positive perceptions of the learners was that teachers explained a lot better than the teachers in their former mainstream school, so that subjects made sense to the learners. Not only was the work easier to comprehend for the learners, but teachers used techniques to teach the learners new concepts that the learners did not feel overwhelmed. Teachers worked to the learners' pace and they were more accepting of learners that took a longer time to complete work.

The learners often mentioned how most teachers in special schools were mindful of the learners' needs and adapted work accordingly, and they generally took more of an interest in the learners, both academically and personally. Most teachers were described as "nicer" in special schools, and a lot more patient.

The last benefit of special schools that learners mentioned was that special schools offer additional services such as occupational therapy, counselling, and psychology which all contribute to the learners' growth, academically and personally.

Although many disadvantages were attributed to the learners' special schools, one of the most cited disadvantages was the fact that a special school accentuates difference between learners that attend special schools and those that attend mainstream schools. This difference was evident thorough the many examples that the learners gave. The majority of the learners stated that the name of the school, as well as the fact that the school had the words "special school" in its name, made them feel different to "normal" learners. Not only did the name of the school make the learners feel different, but the labels that people associate with learners in a

special school, such as “LSEN kids”, “stupid”, “dumb” and “retard” were often attributed to the learners themselves. Although these names were names that others associated with a special school and the learners in it, learners often saw themselves like this as well and described or labelled themselves using derogatory names, such as “abnormal” and “disabled”. Special school placement was frequently compared to mainstream placement, where the latter was seen as the benchmark or ideal placement, implying that their school (their special school) was not good enough, or was only second best. The participants were also victims of bullying and teasing because of their placement and many learners were rejected from their friends and peers that attended mainstream schools, as the perception was that participants were somehow different because of their placement.

Other disadvantages that learners mentioned were the number of learners in special schools, which are much fewer than the number of learners in mainstream schools, which means that the prospects for making friends are limited. In terms of school-related issues, learners voiced the fact that teachers often did not challenge them sufficiently and teachers’ expectations of the learners were quite low. Learners often believed the misconception that academic work in special schools was easier than academic work in mainstream schools and that they consequently did not have to work in order to achieve. The fact that only a limited choice of subjects was offered, was seen as a disadvantage of special schools. Not only was the limited subject choice a problem for the learners, but another problem was the limited choices of sports and the fact that the sports offered, often did not cater for or take the needs of learners with disabilities into consideration.

Another concern for many learners was that they were not consulted regarding the school that they would like to attend. The choice was made for them by an adult, that is, the parent, an education specialist, or a teacher. Thus learners often did not have a say in their own placement.

5.3.3 How does a learner's placement in a special school affect the way they perceive themselves and the way others act towards them?

In this section the way learners perceive themselves will be addressed first, and then the way others act towards them.

The way the learners perceived themselves was closely related to their placement. Although the majority of the learners liked their school (their special school) and felt included, the way the learners perceived their placement and the way they saw themselves often did not correspond. Although the learners were happy in their respective special schools, they were ashamed to tell others about their special school placement. The learners were very aware of the fact that they were in a special school, and not a mainstream school, which resulted in the learners feeling marginalised and "second best". The learners' feelings of inferiority to their peers in mainstream schools were evident in the way they referred to themselves as "abnormal" or "disabled" (even if they did not have a physical impairment). The feelings of difference were translated into the labels that the learners applied to themselves and the way they attributed their placement to something that was wrong with them, evidently seeing themselves as "broken" and in need of being "fixed".

In terms of how others perceived learners that attend special schools, most of the perceptions were based on the school that the learners attended, and not on the learners themselves or who they were as people. Learners were called names and labelled because of their placement, and were generally seen as inferior because they attended a special school.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of this study pertain to constraints of this study. The limitations are discussed in two sections, namely **"Limitations in the design of the study"** (see section 5.4.1) and **"Limitations in the execution of the study"** (see section 5.4.2). The limitations of whose voices are and are not included in the study, the sample size, and my own involvement in the study form the subheadings of the discussion of the design of the study, while the limitations pertaining to the location of the interviews and time constraints from the subheadings in the discussion of the execution of the study.

5.4.1 Limitations in the design of the study

5.4.1.1 Whose voices are or are not included

One of the main limitations of the study is that data was only collected from five government special schools in Gauteng. Had information been collected from other special schools, results may have been different. Because the scope of the research was limited, interesting data could have emerged if other special schools had been included, be they private or government schools, as well as special schools from other provinces.

The voices in the study were heard from state schools in demographic areas where resources and support were available. Different data could be generated if state special schools in lower socio-economic areas, such as rural areas and townships had to be researched.

In availing the opportunity for high school learners to share their perceptions and experiences of special school placement, others have been left out, such as younger learners, principals, management, teachers, therapists, and other school staff. In singling out a specific population, a biased and narrow view of placement is produced. The findings from one particular angle, so an aporia is created.

Because learners were chosen to participate in the research study based on random selection to ensure that there were no preconceived ideas relating to “disability” or “impairment labels”, the research looked at a general group, and not specific learners. Although this was useful in that the learners were not labelled, it could be beneficial to hear the voices of learners who experience the same or similar classification or disability and their specific experiences of special school placement. Furthermore, a distinction could be made with regard to the ways boys and girls experience placement, and whether or not there are similarities. Due to random sampling, race was not considered in the sampling. Therefore, an interesting avenue for future research could be learners of different colour, and how they perceive placement.

Lastly, with the metaphor of the maypole being used in the study, an interesting way of looking at experiences could be through an explicit comparison between the

experiences of placement in special schools, on the one hand, and mainstream schools, on the other hand.

5.4.1.2 Sample size

Although the sample size chosen was based on a manageable number of participants to handle, as well as a number which would elicit rich data, the sample size was too small to be able to make any generalisations from the findings. It must be noted that because the data was produced from a small sample, it was never intended to be generalised or conclusions to be drawn from it. The basic aim of the study was to listen to the voices of learners in special school placements, so that *others* can hear *their* experiences surrounding their placements and hopefully generate change.

5.4.1.3 Involvement in my own study

One of the schools that were selected for the study is a school where I not only teach, but have taught the specific learners that were randomly selected as part of the study. Although the positive attribute of this was that the learners knew me and were comfortable in my presence from the very beginning of the interviews, it was apparent that learners often held back responses, as there seemed to be a conflict of interests between my being the learners' teacher and my being a researcher. For this reason, the learners were assured that what was shared in the interviews would remain confidential, and that at any time they felt uncomfortable, they were free to decline to answer or withdraw from the study, without their suffering any negative repercussions.

5.4.2 Limitations in the execution of the study

5.4.2.1 Location of the interviews

Although the interviews all took place at the learners' schools, they mostly took place after school, when there were many distractions, from other learners. The locations in which the interviews took place were often noisy, which made it difficult to transcribe from the tape recorder. The impact of this was that learners were often

distracted in the interview, interviews were interrupted by curious learners, and the noise level often made many sections of the audio tape inaudible.

5.4.2.2 Time

Some of the interviews were arranged at the end of the school day in the last lesson as learners had to catch public transport to go home. This posed difficulties as interviews were often cut short and valuable information would be lost. Not only were interviews cut short because it was the end of the school day but, in some cases, parents or transport came early to fetch the learners and therefore interviews had to continue short of a participant. A few “catch up” interviews were arranged with learners that had missed out on previous interviews, which were often scheduled to take place before the following focus group. Having the interviews at the end of the day also meant that learners were tired and that they were not always enthusiastic in their participation. The fact that different methods of data collection were used made the interviews more interesting than the typical one-on-one question and answer interview, which stimulated the learners’ interest and potentially yielded more interesting responses.

5.5 RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

5.5.1 Recommendations for the field

A dilemma in South Africa is that learners with medium to high support needs are generally supported and their needs are accommodated at special schools (and also at private mainstream and special schools, yet this is beyond the scope of this study), thus learners are often not afforded the opportunity to choose their placement. Furthermore, this study reveals that learners, although happy in their placements in special schools, are not consulted before they are moved from mainstream schools to special schools. It is an important step in the process of change that a learner is consulted regarding their placement, and that they not only be listened to, but taken seriously. Consequently, the recommendation is that parents and education practitioners alike be aware of learners’ feelings when considering a change of placement, and that they listen to learners’ concerns and opinions concerning relevant topics such as bullying, teasing, sport, subject choice,

work pace, and quality and friendships. Not only should parents and education practitioners see the views of the prospective, special school learner as critical in the decision-making process regarding their choice of school, but listening to bring about change should be a priority.

5.5.2 Implications for future research

Further research could be conducted in a number of different avenues to gain a broader perspective on the issues relating to learners' perceptions and experiences of their special school placement.

The research could be replicated using larger sample of both schools and participants. This would reveal a truer reflection of learners' perceptions and experiences regarding their placement in special schools. Consistent with having a larger sample, a more varied demographic would generate findings that were not so isolated to a particular area or particular socio-economic status but they would be broader.

In changing the criteria for selection, variations in the findings could arise. In modifying the specific kind of participant selected for the study, comparisons in the findings could be made. In selecting a specific sex, age group, learners with a particular disability or classification, and both state and private special schools, varied results could emerge. In using comparisons, the experiences of both the learners in mainstream schools and learners in special schools could be discovered, and the experiences of placement in both types of schools, and even findings relating to the transition of placement from a mainstream school to a special school could be yielded.

5.6 REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH

As I, the researcher, have a vested interest in this research, the task of separating researcher and concerned listener often became clouded. Although the learners participated in the activities and answered the research questions, they often saw me (the researcher), as a confidante and confided within the group of the many concerns, as well as triumphs that they experience regarding their special school placement. For some learners, the focus group meetings were a safe place to

release their thoughts and feelings, where they could tell their stories and be heard. Although the learners' stories were often beyond the scope of the research, their words formed pockets of inspiration for change. For this reason, it was often tempting to stray from being completely impartial to consoling and siding with the learners, as the emotions that accompanied many of their experiences were not only moving, but genuine. For me as a researcher, this was an area where much discipline and focus was needed, as my main aim was to record data in a critical and objective manner, which would represent the learners' perceptions of their placement in the most honest and reliable way possible. Therefore, throughout the research, I (the researcher) had to take cognisance of the fact that I could not change all of the negative experiences that the learners had, but it is hoped that the findings of this research will stimulate investigation into the thoughts and feelings of learners regarding their placement. It is wished that adults and education professionals will consider the experiences of the "insiders" (the learners) before pertinent decisions regarding them are made.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This study has provided feedback from learners in special schools regarding the perceptions of their placement. Although the majority of the learners liked their placement in a special school and spoke of their experiences positively, it was evident that the separate schools that cater for learners with higher support needs accentuate difference between learners that attend mainstream schools and those that do not. In concluding the discussion about learners' experiences of special school placement, one of the participants stated that "*I would feel different if I was placed in a normal [mainstream] school. 'Cause normal schools don't really understand where you are coming from and how you cope with it. Here [in special schools] they try and make you feel like a person who should belong"*. Ending the report, the learner's quote resonates with the many positive attributes that a special school provides for the learners that attend these special schools, yet it cannot disregard the fact that separate schools for learners with barriers to learning accentuates difference between learners that attend special schools and those that attend mainstream school.

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APPENDIX A

Information Letters

(Participants and parents)

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Information sheet and invitation to participate in research:

PARENTS/GAURDIANS/CAREGIVER

Dear Mr and or Mrs [insert name] parents of [insert name]

My name is Tarryn Phillips and I am a Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand specialising in inclusive education. My research focus is 'voice research' which essentially gives a voice to excluded and or minority groups. The research at hand gives voice to learners in Special Schools and their perceptions around their placement. Voice research is aimed at listening to individuals and hearing their unique experiences around a given topic. I am interested in listening to learners' perceptions around special school placement and how they perceive themselves, how placement affects their academic, emotional and social ability and how they feel others perceive them because of their placement.

You are therefore receiving this letter as your child has been randomly selected from school class lists based on the fact that he/she meets the two criteria for the research being their placement in a Special School and he / she is between the age of 13 and 18 years old. I would therefore like to invite your son/daughter to take part in my research study.

If you choose to participate, please understand that participation is of an entirely voluntary nature, and although your child's participation is valued, non-participation will not be held against him/her in any way, should he/she wish to discontinue in the project, or withdrawing their consent. Refusal to participate in the study will not bring any penalty or negative consequence to you or your child. There are no material benefits for participation and there are no foreseeable risks.

Participation would entail the following:

- Being part of three separate focus groups of about 40 minutes to an hour long that will be audiotaped for correct transcription. A focus group is a meeting where thoughts and feelings and are jointly discussed with peers based on a set of constructed questions. Although the questions may ask about personal experiences and feelings regarding placement at a special school, I undertake to not ask questions that would violate your child's privacy. With this said if a learner feels uncomfortable at any stage, I will respect their right to not answer any of the questions and or leave the group at any stage of the discussion if they so wished. The first focus group will serve as an "ice breaker" where learners will get acquainted, be introduced to the topic as well as to the photo diaries concept. A photo diary is a method used where learners are equipped with a disposable camera and are asked to use the camera to take pictures capturing information relating to the given topic or questions. The first focus group will take place in the beginning of March 2013. The second focus group will be a presentation of the pictures taken by the learners as well as a report back and discussion on their experience. All expenses relating to the photo diary venture will be handled by the researcher and not the participants. Focus group two will take place in the middle of March 2013. The third focus group will involve a concept "message in a

bottle" where learners are given a writing task that will later be shared with the group. This will take place at the beginning of April 2013.

- An individual interview as well as debriefing will take place in the middle of April 2013. The individual interview allows for a more in-depth discussion with the participant about their placement while the debriefing gives the participant the opportunity to change anything they have previously said or amend information that they would not like added to the final research. Both focus groups and individual interviews will be arranged to take place at your child's school at a time that is mutually convenient for you, your child and the school. The research will in no way affect your child's academic timetable.

It must be stressed that confidentiality is of utmost importance and that your child's name, as well as their school's identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms. All data (electronic and material) will be kept in a securely locked room and would be destroyed between three to five years after completion of the project. It is envisaged that the results of this research will be used for academic purposes (including books, journals, conference proceedings and or any other writings) and a summary will be made available electronically to those interested. (see attached consent form).

If you would like a copy of any of the focus group or individual questions I will be asking, please do not hesitate to contact me using the information supplied below.

If you are willing to allow your child to participate in this research project, please would you complete and sign the attached consent forms and return them to me via your child's class teacher no later than 31 January 2013.

If you have any queries regarding any aspect of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Regards

T. Phillips

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PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Information sheet and invitation to participate in research:

PARTICIPANT (LEARNER)

Dear [insert participants name]

My name is Miss T. Phillips and I am a student at the University of the Witwatersrand specialising in inclusive education. My research focus is 'voice research' which gives a voice to excluded and or minority groups (that means people who are often not heard). The research at hand gives voice to learners in Special Schools and the way they see their placement. Voice research is aimed at listening to individuals and hearing their unique experiences around a given topic. I am interested in listening to the way learner's think about their special school placement and how they see themselves, how placement affects their academic, emotional and social ability and how they feel others see them because of their placement.

You are therefore receiving this letter as you have been randomly selected from school class lists based on the fact that you meet the two criteria for the research being their placement in a Special School and that you are between the ages of 13 and 18 years old. I would therefore like to invite you to take part in my research study.

If you choose to participate, please understand that participation is entirely voluntary, that means you can chose to say yes or no, and although I really would like it if you are involved, it will not be held against you in any way if you say no. If you decide not to continue with the research or want to stop at any time, it will not affect you negatively (in a bad way). You will not get paid for joining the research and you will not be put at harm in any way.

Being part of the study would mean the following:

- Being part of three separate focus groups of about 40 minutes to an hour long that will be audiotaped. A focus group is a meeting where thoughts and feelings and jointly discussed with other learners and is based on a set of questions. Although the questions may ask about personal experiences and feelings about placement at a special school, I will not ask questions that would violate your privacy. With this said if you feel uncomfortable at any stage, I will respect your right to not answer any of the questions and or leave the group at any stage of the discussion if you so wished. The first focus group will serve as an "ice breaker" where learners will get to know each other, be introduced to the topic (what we are going to talk about) as well as to the photo diaries concept. A photo diary is a method used where learners are equipped with a disposable camera and are asked to use the camera to take pictures capturing information relating to the given topic or questions. The first focus group will take place in the beginning of March 2013. The second focus group will be a presentation of the pictures you have taken. You and your friends will report back and have a discussion of your experience. You do not have to pay for the camera or printing of the pictures. The third focus group involves a concept "message in a bottle" where you are given a writing task that will later be shared with the group. This will take place at the beginning of April 2013.

- An individual interview and debriefing will take place in the middle of April 2013. An individual interview means that we will have a discussion between you and me (the researcher) and not the rest of the group. The individual interview allows for a more in-depth discussion with the participant about their placement while the debriefing gives the participant the opportunity to change anything they have previously said or amend information that they would not like added to the final research. Both focus groups and individual interviews will be arranged to take place at your school at a time that suits you, your parents and the school. The research will in no way interfere or affect your school work.

It must be stressed that confidentiality is of utmost importance and that your name, as well as your school's identity will remain anonymous. That means that no one will know it was you who gave the information and that your name will not appear on any of the. All data (electronic and material) will be kept in a securely locked room and would be destroyed between three to five years after completion of the project. It is hoped that the results of this research will be used for academic purposes (including books, journals, conference proceedings and or any other writings) and a summary will be made available electronically to those interested. (see attached consent form).

If you are willing to participate in this research project, please would you complete and sign the attached consent forms and return them to me via your class teacher no later than 31 January 2013.

If you have any questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Regards

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APPENDIX B

Consent Letters

(Participants and parents)

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Focus group and individual interview participation informed consent form:

PARENTS

Please fill in and return the reply slip below to your child's class teacher by 31 January 2013 and indicate your willingness to allow your child's participation in the voice research report.

Consenting to this research means my child being involved in:

- Three focus groups
  - Focus group one: introduction to the topic. Beginning March 2013
  - Focus group two: photo diary report back and discussion. End March 2013
  - Focus group three: message in a bottle writing task. Beginning April 2013
- One individual interview and debriefing
  - Middle of April 2013.

I acknowledge that:

- Participation is of a voluntary nature and that I am aware that my child can withdraw from the study at any time, without any negative consequences.
- I have read and understood the attached parent information sheet
- I understand that my child's privacy will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms in all writings, including research report and academic writings and publications such as journals, books and any conference papers.

I, _____ (parents name printed)

consent / do not consent

for my son/daughter to take part in this research.

……

Please indicate if you are interested in an electronic summary of the research and provide relevant details.

☐ I **am not** interested in the research summary.

☐ I **am** interested in a summary of the research.

My e mail address is: _____

Parent's signature: _____

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Focus group and individual interview participation informed consent form:

PARTICIPANT (LEARNER)

Please fill in and return the reply slip below to your class teacher by 31 January 2013 to show if you would like to be part of this voice research report.

Consenting (saying yes) to this research means being involved in:

- Three focus groups
  - Focus group one: introduction to the topic. Beginning March 2013
  - Focus group two: photo diary report back and discussion. End March 2013
  - Focus group three: message in a bottle writing task. Beginning April 2013
- One individual interview and debriefing
  - Middle of April 2013.

Circle YES or NO to the following sentences to show you understand.

- Participation is of a voluntary nature and I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without anything bad happening to me. **YES / NO**
- I have read and understood the attached information sheet. **YES / NO**
- I understand that that my information will be kept confidential through the research with use of pseudonyms (other names in the place of my name in all writings, including research report and academic writings and publications such as journals, books and any conference papers). **YES / NO**

I, _____ (my name)

consent / do not consent

to be part of this research study.

Participant's signature: _____

APPENDIX C

Information Letter

(Principal and SGB)

RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Information sheet PRINCIPAL of [insert schools name]

Dear Mr or Mrs [insert principals name]

My name is Tarryn Phillips and I am a Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand specialising in inclusive education. My research focus is 'voice research' which essentially gives a voice to excluded and or minority groups. The research at hand gives voice to learners in Special Schools and their perceptions around their placement. Voice research is aimed at listening to individuals and hearing their unique experiences around a given topic. I am interested in listening to learner's perceptions around special school placement and how they perceive themselves, how placement affects their academic, emotional and social ability and how they feel others perceive them because of their placement.

You are therefore receiving this letter, informing you of the research study as well as serving as permission to work with learners between the ages of 13-18 years old in your school.

Learner's participation is of an entirely voluntary nature, and although their participation is valued, non-participation will not be held against him/her in any way should they require discontinuing in the project, or withdrawing their consent. Refusal to participate in the study will not bring any penalty or negative consequence to the learners in your school. There are no material benefits for participation and there are no foreseeable risks.

It would be much appreciated if five learners could been randomly selected from your school based on the fact that he/she meets the two criteria for the research being their placement in a Special School and he / she is between the age of 13 and 18 years old. The principal will kindly be asked if he/she could allow me access to the class lists of the Senior Phase which include learners who are between the ages of 13 and 18 years old. From these class lists I will divide the total number of learners on all the given class lists by x amount depending on the total number of learners, to get a total of five randomly selected participants. Once the participants have been randomly selected based on the calculations, it would be appreciated if a brief meeting could be co-ordinated where the researcher invites the randomly selected learners to participate in the research study. This meeting will be at a time that is mutually convenient to the principal, the staff, the learners as well as the researcher and will serve as an information session for the learners outlining what the research is about as well as what it entail and what is required from the participants. Should one of the randomly selected learners choose not to participate, the next learner on the list will be given the opportunity to participate and invited to be part of the research study. Participation requires the learners to be involved in three separate focus groups that will be about 40-60 minutes long. The first focus group will serve as an introduction as well as an icebreaker. The photo diary concept will be introduced. A photo diary is a method used where learners are equipped with a disposable camera and are asked to use the camera to take pictures capturing information relating to the given topic or questions. The actual images/pictures used in the photo diary venture are not intended for use in the final research report. Yet if an image is of particular illustrative interest, consent from yourself will first be sought before the image will be considered for use in the final report. The first focus group will take place in the beginning of March 2013. The second focus group will be a presentation of the pictures taken by the

learners as well as a report back and discussion on their experience. All expenses relating to the photo diary venture will be handled by the researcher and not the participants. Focus group two will take place in the middle of March 2013. The third focus group will involve a concept "message in a bottle" where learners are given a writing task that will later be shared with the group. This will take place at the beginning of April 2013.

An individual interview and debriefing will take place in the middle of April 2013. The debriefing gives the participant the opportunity to change anything they have previously said or amend information that they would not like added to the final research. Both focus groups and individual interviews will be arranged to take place at the school at a time that is mutually convenient for you, the learner and their parents. The research will in no way affect the learner's academic timetable.

It must be stressed that confidentiality is of utmost importance and that your school's identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms. All data (electronic and material) will be kept in a securely locked room and would be destroyed between three to five years after completion of the project. It is envisaged that the results of this research will be used for academic purposes (including books, journals, conference proceedings and or any other writings) and a summary will be made available electronically to those interested. (see attached form).

If you would like a copy of any of the focus group or individual questions I will be asking, please do not hesitate to contact me using the information supplied below.

If you are willing to allow me to conduct my research project at your school, please would you complete and sign the attached forms and return them to me by mid-January 2013.

If you have any queries regarding any aspect of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Regards

T. Phillips

tarryn_taylor@yahoo.com

083 297 3496

(w) 011 683 3390

Supervisor Dr. Elizabeth Walton

Elizabeth.Walton@wits.ac.za

(w) 011 717 3768

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Principal's acknowledgment of research study

PRINCIPAL

Please fill in and return the reply slip by mid-January 2013 to indicate if the researcher can continue with the intended voice research study at your school.

I acknowledge that:

- Learner's participation is voluntary and he/she may withdraw from the research at any time with no negative consequences.
- I have read the above information and acknowledge the contents
- I understand that privacy and anonymity is important and will be maintained at all times through the use of pseudonyms so that the learners as well as the school cannot be identified at any time in the study, this will include all academic writings and publications such as books, journal articles and conference papers

I, _____ (principal's name printed) agree to the above points and allow T. Phillips to conduct her research at my school _____ (schools name).

……

….....

Please indicate if you are interested in an electronic summary of the research and provide relevant details.

☐ I **am not** interested in the research summary.

☐ I **am** interested in a summary of the research.

My e mail address is: _____

Principal's signature: _____

Date signed: _____

RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Information sheet SGB (school governing body) of [insert schools name]

Dear members of the SGB

My name is Tarryn Phillips and I am a Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand specialising in inclusive education. My research focus is 'voice research' which essentially gives a voice to excluded and or minority groups. The research at hand gives voice to learners in Special Schools and their perceptions around their placement. Voice research is aimed at listening to individuals and hearing their unique experiences around a given topic. I am interested in listening to learner's perceptions around special school placement and how they perceive themselves, how placement affects their academic, emotional and social ability and how they feel others perceive them because of their placement.

You are therefore receiving this letter, informing you of the research study as well as serving as permission to work with learners between the ages of 13-18 years old in your school.

Learner's participation is of an entirely voluntary nature, and although their participation is valued, non-participation will not be held against him/her in any way should they require discontinuing in the project, or withdrawing their consent. Refusal to participate in the study will not bring any penalty or negative consequence to the learners in your school. There are no material benefits for participation and there are no foreseeable risks.

It would be much appreciated if five learners could been randomly selected from your school based on the fact that he/she meets the two criteria for the research being their placement in a Special School and he / she is between the age of 13 and 18 years old. The principal will kindly be asked if he/she could allow me access to the class lists of the Senior Phase which include learners who are between the ages of 13 and 18 years old. From these class lists I will divide the total number of learners on all the given class lists by x amount depending on the total number of learners, to get a total of five randomly selected participants. Once the participants have been randomly selected based on the calculations, it would be appreciated if a brief meeting could be co-ordinated where the researcher invites the randomly selected learners to participate in the research study. This meeting will be at a time that is mutually convenient to the principal, the staff, the learners as well as the researcher and will serve as an information session for the learners outlining what the research is about as well as what it entail and what is required from the participants. Should one of the randomly selected learners choose not to participate, the next learner on the list will be given the opportunity to participate and invited to be part of the research study. Participation requires the learners to be involved in three separate focus groups that will be about 40-60 minutes long. The first focus group will serve as an introduction as well as an icebreaker. The photo diary concept will be introduced. A photo diary is a method used where learners are equipped with a disposable camera and are asked to use the camera to take pictures capturing information relating to the given topic or questions. The actual images/pictures used in the photo diary venture are not intended for use in the final research report. Yet if an image is of particular illustrative interest, consent from the principal as well as SGB members will first be sought

before the image will be considered for use in the final report. The first focus group will take place in the beginning of March 2013. The second focus group will be a presentation of the pictures taken by the learners as well as a report back and discussion on their experience. All expenses relating to the photo diary venture will be handled by the researcher and not the participants. Focus group two will take place in the middle of March 2013. The third focus group will involve a concept "message in a bottle" where learners are given a writing task that will later be shared with the group. This will take place at the beginning of April 2013.

An individual interview and debriefing will take place in the middle of April 2013. The debriefing gives the participant the opportunity to change anything they have previously said or amend information that they would not like added to the final research. Both focus groups and individual interviews will be arranged to take place at the school at a time that is mutually convenient for you, the learner and their parents. The research will in no way affect the learner's academic timetable.

It must be stressed that confidentiality is of utmost importance and that your school's identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms. All data (electronic and material) will be kept in a securely locked room and would be destroyed between three to five years after completion of the project. It is envisaged that the results of this research will be used for academic purposes (including books, journals, conference proceedings and or any other writings) and a summary will be made available electronically to those interested. (see attached form).

If you would like a copy of any of the focus group or individual questions I will be asking, please do not hesitate to contact me using the information supplied below.

If you are willing to allow me to conduct my research project at your school, please would you complete and sign the attached forms and return them to me by mid-January 2013.

If you have any queries regarding any aspect of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Regards

T. Phillips

tarryn_taylor@yahoo.com

083 297 3496

(w) 011 683 3390

Supervisor Dr. Elizabeth Walton

Elizabeth.Walton@wits.ac.za

(w) 011 717 3768

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Information sheet SGB (school governing body) of [insert schools name]

Please fill in and return the reply slip by mid-January 2013 to indicate if the researcher can continue with the intended voice research study.

I acknowledge that:

- Learner's participation is voluntary and he/she may withdraw from the research at any time with no negative consequences.
- I have read the above information and acknowledge the contents
- I understand that privacy and anonymity is important and will be maintained at all times through the use of pseudonyms so that the learners as well as the school cannot be identified at any time in the study, this will include all academic writings and publications such as books, journal articles and conference papers

I, _____ (chairperson of the SGB name printed) agree to the above points and allow for T. Phillips to conduct her research at my/our school _____ (schools name).

……
….....

Please indicate if you are interested in an electronic summary of the research and provide relevant details.

☐ I **am not** interested in the research summary.

☐ I **am** interested in a summary of the research.

My e mail address is: _____

Chairperson of the SGB signature: _____

Date signed: _____

APPENDIX D

GDE Consent Forms

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department of Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For administrative use:
Reference no. D2013/313

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**27 February 2013**
Validity of Research Approval:	**27 February 2013 to 20 September 2013**
Name of Researcher:	**Taylor T.**
Address of Researcher:	**P.O. Box 5234**
	Meyersdal
	1447
Telephone Number:	**083 297 3496**
Email address:	**tarryn_taylor@yahoo.com**
Research Topic:	**Listening to voices of learners in Special schools regarding their perceptions around their placement**
Number and type of schools:	**FIVE LSEN Schools**
District/s/HO	**Ekurhuleni North; Ekurhuleni South; Johannesburg East; Johannesburg South and Sedibeng East**

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research
9th Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506
Email: David.Makhasane@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

2013/03/01

1. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB), that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
4. *A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
5. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
6. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
7. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
8. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
9. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
10. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
11. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
12. *On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
13. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
14. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward in examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

.....

Dr David Makhado
Director: Knowledge Management and Research

DATE: 2013 / 03 / 01

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research

9th Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506
Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

APPENDIX E

Wits Ethics Clearance form

Faculty of Humanities: Education Campus

Room 208/9, Administration Block, 27 St. Andrews Road, Parktown **Tel**: +27 11 717-3021/18 · **Fax**: 0865533480 or +27 11 717-3219 E-mail: maropeng.maake@wits.ac.za

Mrs Phillips, Tarryn
P O Box 5234
Meyersdal
1447

PERSON NUMBER 0617299F

23 November 2012

Dear Mrs Phillips

CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION BY COURSEWORK (PART-TIME)

I am pleased to inform you that the Graduate Studies Committee in Education has approved Your research proposal entitled: **"Listening to voices of learners in special schools regarding their placements."**

You have been admitted to candidature subject to minor corrections made to the satisfaction of your supervisor.

Please note that a copy of the readers' report has been given to your supervisor.

I confirm that **Dr Elizabeth Walton** has been appointed as your supervisor.

Your attention is drawn to the Senate's requirement that all higher degree candidates submit brief written reports on their progress to the Faculty Office once a year.

Please note that higher degree candidates are required to renew their registration in January each year. Please keep us informed of any changes of address during the year.

Yours sincerely

N Maphanga
Ms. Nombulelo Maphanga
Deputy Faculty Registrar
Faculty of Humanities: Education
cc Supervisor

APPENDIX F

Consent Forms - Audiotaping

(Participants and parents)

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Informed consent form- audio recording of group and individual discussions:

PARENTS

Please fill in and return the reply slip below to your child's class teacher by 31 January 2013 and indicate your consent for the group as well as individual discussion to be audio taped.

I, _____ (parents name printed)

consent / do not consent

for my son/daughter to be audio taped in their group as well as individual discussion.

As a parent I understand that:

- My child's participation is voluntary and he/she may withdraw from the research at any time with no negative consequences.
- Audio recording allows for accurate transcription of data which provides validity and transparency
- All audio recording transcriptions and materials will be stored securely and will be destroyed between three to five years after completion of this study.
- My child's privacy is of utmost importance and pseudonyms will be used in place of their name as well as the schools name in all transcriptions and data including academic writings and publications such as books, journals and conference papers.

Parent's signature: _____

Date signed: _____

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Informed consent form- audio recording of group and individual discussions:

PARTICIPANT (LEARNER)

Please fill in and return the reply slip below to your class teacher by 31 January 2013 and indicate your consent for the group as well as individual discussion to be audio taped.

I, _____ (your name)

consent / do not consent

for my group as well as individual discussion to be audio taped.

I understand that:

- My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the research at any time with no negative consequences.
- Audio recording allows the researcher to get the exact words that you say
- All audio recording transcriptions and materials will be stored securely and will be destroyed between three to five years after completion of this study.
- My privacy is very important and the researcher will not use my name or the schools name in any transcriptions and data including academic writings and publications such as books, journals and conference papers, and will replace all names with pseudonyms.

Participant's signature: _____

Date signed: _____

APPENDIX G

Consent Forms – Document use

(Participants and parents)

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Informed consent form- document use:

PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVER

Please fill in and return the reply slip below to your child's class teacher by 31 January 2013 and indicate your consent for the use of documentation generated by your child to be used.

I, _____ (parents name printed)

consent / do not consent

for the documentation that my son/daughter generates to be used for the purpose of this research.

As a parent I understand that:

- I am allowing the researcher to use the writing piece of the "message in a bottle" exercise (see information sheet, focus group three) as part of the research study.
- All developed photos will be returned to the participant after completion of the research.

I acknowledge that:

- My child's participation is voluntary and he/she may withdraw from the research at any time with no negative consequences.
- I have read the above information and understand as to what I am consenting to
- I have read and understood the attached parent information sheet
- I understand that privacy and anonymity is important and will be maintained at all times through the use of pseudonyms in the final report as well as in all academic writings and publications such as books, journals and conference papers, so that my child's name and his/her school cannot be identified at any time in the study.

Parent's signature: _____

Date signed: _____

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Informed consent form- document use:

PARTICIPANT (LEARNER)

Please fill in and return the reply slip below to your class teacher by 31 January 2013 to show if the researcher can use the work that I have done.

I, _____ (my name)

consent / do not consent

for the documentation that I have made or written to be used for this research purpose.

As a participant I understand that:

- All developed photos will be returned to you (the participant) after completion of the research.
- I am allowing the researcher to use the writing piece of the "message in a bottle" exercise (see information sheet, focus group three) as part of the research study.

I understand that:

- My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the research at any time with no negative consequences.
- I have read the above information and understand what I am consenting to (saying yes to)
- My privacy is very important and the researcher will not use my name or the schools name in the research but will make use of pseudonyms in the final report as well as in all academic writings and publications such as books, journals and conference papers.

Participant's signature: _____

Date signed: _____

APPENDIX H

Interview Schedule with Confidentiality Agreement and Appropriate use of Technology Agreement

(Participants and parents)

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:

FOCUS GROUP MEETING ONE: CLOCK ICE BREAKER

Process for the focus group meeting:

1. Remind learners of interview protocols:

   The participant will also be assured that should they feel uncomfortable in answering any questions I will respect their right not to answer, or leave at any time, without any negative consequence or penalty of any sort.

   Participants will be assured that their name as well as their school's identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms. Participants will sign a "confidentiality agreement" for their focus groups, stating that all names of participants as well as information shared in the focus groups will not be shared with anyone else.

   Remind learners of Confidentiality agreement signed for focus group participants.

2. Explain that each learner in the group is assigned a number (1-5) and that every time before the learner speaks they should state their number and continue with what they would like to say or contribute to the meeting. Coding in this way allows for confidentiality as well as accurate transcription of data.
3. Explain the activity for the first focus group being the "ice breaker – clock game:

Each learner will receive their own hand made clock face. Learners answer the questions with the clock face that has an adjustable arm that says "sometimes", "always", "not at all", "yes" and "no" Each question will lead to the adjustable arm showing what the learners feels, which will inspire discussion around their choice of answer through the comparison of answers among participants.

4. Researcher to start the activity by asking the questions:

1. Do you enjoy being at *this* school? *DISCUSSION*
2. Do you enjoy coming to school because you have friends? *DISCUSSION*

3. Do you play sports? *DISCUSSION*
4. Do you feel that you achieve well at school? *DISCUSSION*
5. Do you know the reason for your placement in a special school? *DISCUSSION*
6. Did you have a choice as to which school you wanted to go to? *DISCUSSION*
7. Did your parents discuss why they placed you at a special school? *DISCUSSION*
8. Do you think you would feel differently about yourself if you were in a mainstream school? *DISCUSSION*
9. Have you ever been teased because you attend a special school? *DISCUSSION*

5. The photo diaries concept will be explained and each participant will be given a camera to take photos over the next three weeks. Learners will be given the instruction to take photos of:
   a.) Positive areas/things/situations in a special school
   b.) Areas in a special school that accentuate difference (that make you feel more different).
6. Learners will be reminded of the contract that they signed in agreement of "The appropriate use of technology" and verify any misunderstandings and allow for questions around the photo diaries venture.
7. Participants will be offered a light refreshment before leaving and be thanked for their participation in the first focus group meetings. The participant will be reminded that if they would like to change or amend something they said they are more than welcome to do that.

FOCUS GROUP MEETING TWO: PHOTO SESSION

Process for the focus group meeting:

1. Remind learners of interview protocols:

The participant will also be assured that should they feel uncomfortable in answering any questions I will respect their right not to answer, or leave at any time, without any negative consequence or penalty of any sort.

Participants will be assured that their name as well as their school's identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms. Participants will sign a "confidentiality agreement" for their focus groups, stating that all names of participants as well as information shared in the focus groups will not be shared with anyone else.

Remind learners of Confidentiality agreement signed for focus group participants.

2. Remind the participants of their assigned number (1-5) and that every time before the learner speaks they should state their number and continue with what they would like to say or contribute to the meeting. Coding in this way allows for confidentiality as well as accurate transcription of data.
3. Explain the activity for the second focus group session:

The participant's cameras will have been collected the week before and their 24 photos will have been developed, ready to use for focus group session two.

4. Participants will be given time to sort through their photos and then decide on **three** photos that best describe both:

a.) Positive areas/things/situations in a special school

b.) Areas in a special school that accentuate difference (that make you feel more different).

5. The learners will then be asked to present their six photos and then explain their choice for each one.
6. Participants will be offered a light refreshment.
7. Participants will then be issued with their "message in a bottle" topic that they need to prepare and write for focus group session three:

If you were writing to a fairy-god-mother and you could influence your school placement, what advice would you give to them?

The writing piece can be anything between a half a page to two pages long.

8. The participant will be thanked for their participation in the second focus group meeting. The participant will be reminded that if they would like to change or amend something they said they are more than welcome to do that.

FOCUS GROUP MEETING THREE: MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Process for the focus group meeting:

1. Remind learners of interview protocols:

The participant will also be assured that should they feel uncomfortable in answering any questions I will respect their right not to answer, or leave at any time, without any negative consequence or penalty of any sort.

Participants will be assured that their name as well as their school's identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms. Participants will sign a "confidentiality agreement" for their focus groups, stating that all names of participants as well as information shared in the focus groups will not be shared with anyone else.

Remind learners of Confidentiality agreement signed for focus group participants.

2. Remind the participants of their assigned number (1-5) and that every time before the learner speaks they should state their number and continue with what they would like to say or contribute to the meeting. Coding in this way allows for confidentiality as well as accurate transcription of data.
3. Explain the activity for the third focus group session:
   Participants were to prepare and write the message in a bottle topic.

If you were writing to you fairy god mother about your school placement, what advice would you give to her?

4. Participants will be given a few minutes to look over their writing pieces before they will read them to the group.
5. Each participant will have the opportunity to read their short writing task out to the group and after each child has had their turn, a discussion of what the learners have spoken about will take place.
6. Each participant will then be given their next meeting date for their individual interviews with a reply slip for the parents to confirm the date.
7. Participants will be offered a light refreshment before leaving and be thanked for their participation in the first focus group meetings. The participant will be reminded that if they would like to change or amend something they said they are more than welcome to do that.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW AND DEBRIEFING: SESSION FOUR

Process for individual interview:

1. Remind the participant of interview protocols:

The participant will also be assured that should they feel uncomfortable in answering any questions I will respect their right not to answer, or leave at any time, without any negative consequence or penalty of any sort.

Participants will be assured that their name as well as their school's identity will remain anonymous throughout the data collection and analysis process as well as in the final report through the use of pseudonyms which will ensure confidentiality.

Offer the participant a light refreshment before the interview starts to help the learner feel at ease in the environment.

2. Start with the interview process and questions:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. How would you describe your school experience?
   Prompt
   Are there aspects of school that you enjoy?
   Are there aspects of school that you do not enjoy?
   What is your general mood at school?
2. What is your understanding of the difference between a special school and a mainstream school?
3. Have you always been in this kind of school?
   Prompt

   Has your placement always been in a special school?

   If you moved from a mainstream school to a special school can you describe the reasons for the move/change?
   If you moved from a mainstream to a special school placement can you describe some of the differences between the two?
4. Are you aware of the reasons for being placed in a special school?
5. Does your placement affect the way you perceive yourself?
   Prompt

Would you see yourself differently if your school placement was different?

How do you think others perceive you because of your placement?

Do you think placement contributes to the way others perceive you?

6. How does placement affect your academic achievement?

   Prompt

   Are there any benefits or disadvantages that placement in a special school have on your academic achievement?

7. How does placement in a special school affect social aspects of a teenager's life?

   Prompt

   Does special school placement affect the kind of friends you have?

   Does bullying play a factor because of your placement, if yes, why?

   Can socialising extend outside of your school placement, or does placement restrict you friendship circle?

   Is it easy to make friends outside of your school placement and why?

8. How does placement affect the way you feel?

   Prompt

   Does placement have a direct correlation with how you feel every day and why?

   Does placement play a factor in your emotional state and how?

9. If you had to imagine that you could choose the school you wanted to go to, tell me a bit about which school it would be and why?
10. In general, and to wrap this interview up, how does your school placement affect you as a person?

    Prompt

    Does a special school placement change your outlook on life and how?

    Would you think you would be a different kind of person if your placement was different and why?

DEBRIEFING:

11. How have you found this experience as a whole?
12. What about this experienced have you liked or found valuable?
13. Is there anything that you would have changed about this research?

4. Learners will be shown the transcripts of the previous three focus group sessions and asked if there is anything that they would like to change, edit or discard from their previous conversations. A final date when their interview transcripts can be seen will be arranged.

5. Participants will be given their photos as well as their written piece of writing back at the final brief meeting.

6. The participant will be thanked for their participation throughout the research.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Confidentiality agreement- focus group participants

PARTICIPANT (LEARNER)

Throughout the information confidentiality has been stressed on behalf of the researcher. As you are working in groups with friends I ask that you sign this confidentiality agreement in which you promise not to tell anyone who else was in the focus group, or share any of the information any of the members share with one another.

I, _____ (print your name) agree to:

- Not to tell anyone who else was in my focus group
- Not share any information they may have said or shown in their pictures or in their writing with any other person.
- Keep all information confidential

Participant's signature: _____

Date signed: _____

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT:

Listening to voices of learners in special school placements.

Appropriate use of technology agreement

PARTICIPANT (LEARNER)

As this research makes use of a disposable camera it is important that you use this device for the purpose it is intended for. The camera given will have the opportunity to take 24 photos. This means that when the pictures are developed your researcher will give you the 24 pictures from which you can decide which pictures you would like to use. All pictures will be returned to you after completion of the research study.

This means that:

- You are responsible for the camera and you need to take care of and look after it.
- You need to take pictures only of images that are relevant to the question
- Do not abuse the privilege by taking pictures that will be considered inappropriate

I, _____ (print your name) agree to the above three points and will use the camera for research purposes only.

Participant's signature: _____

Date signed: _____