

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AT MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS ADMITTING LEARNERS WITH
MILD INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENT: A CASE OF SISONKE DISTRICT**

by

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ABSTRACT

The main assertion in this dissertation is that there is a lack of adequate and appropriate parental involvement in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment in mainstream schools in Sisonke District.

Empirical research was conducted to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers of the involvement of parents in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment in mainstream schools. The focus was on parents and teachers in an extreme poverty context in Sisonke District of KwaZulu-Natal. A qualitative investigation of parental involvement in five mainstream schools was conducted by collecting data through interview, observation and documents analysis with ten parents and five teachers.

The literature that was reviewed focused on the factors that increase and hinder parental involvement, prevalence of intellectual impairment, theories related to family, school and community partnership and inclusive education.

The research has revealed that the lack of adequate and appropriate parental involvement at mainstream schools admitting learners with mild intellectual impairment is influenced by factors such as poor socio-economic background, high illiteracy, cultural beliefs, and parents' denial of intellectual impairment, diversity, lack of teacher training in parental involvement, lack of healthy inclusive climate characteristics, parents' attitudes and perceptions. The investigation further found that there is an urgent need for teachers to acquire knowledge, skills and strategies for active involvement of parents in inclusive mainstream schools. Each School Management Team (SMT) should strive to create a climate of inclusion that displays healthy school characteristics in order to improve parental involvement in mainstream schools.

Key words:

Parental involvement; Mainstream schools; Perceptions; Attitude; Mild Intellectual Impairment; Parent; Inclusive education

[Student number: 46330070]

Declaration

I declare that **Parental involvement at mainstream schools admitting learners with mild intellectual impairment: A case of Sisonke District**, submitted as a research dissertation to the University of South Africa, is my own work.

All the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



T. E. XABA

02 July 2015

DATE

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and to God Almighty.

I Can Do All Things through Christ Who Strengthen Me.... (Philippians 4: 13)

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List of Acronyms

AAIDD	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
AAMD	American Association on Mental Deficiency
ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
CMC	Circuit Management Centre
FET	Further Education and Training
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
DoE	Department of Education
DBST	District Based Support Team
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual
IEP	Individual Education Plan
MID	Mild Intellectual Disability
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Educational Needs and Training
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SBST	School Based Support Team
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team

CHAPTER ONE

STUDY ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

This study represents an effort towards stimulating parental involvement, to enhance policy change, and to provide emancipatory perceptions towards the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment in Sisonke District. This chapter outlines the research problem and objectives which the study aspires to achieve, and the research questions and sub-questions addressed by the study. It presents a background and a brief overview of research design. It concludes by raising the issues the reader can expect in subsequent chapters, while defining terminology used in the study.

1.2 Study background

It has been increasingly recognised in the field of education that parents have a significant impact on learners' learning and developmental processes. The recognition of the valuable roles parents play is reflected in local and national education policies and current legislation such as the South African Schools Act of 1996 (Department of Education [DoE] 1996a) and the Education White Paper 6: Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system (DoE 2001a). These policies are informed by research and context related incidents that demand substantial influence of parental involvement in facilitating learners' academic achievement (Fan & Williams 2010: 54).

There are many benefits for learners when parents are actively involved in their education (Davis 2000: 1). According to Clark et al. (Davis 2000: 1) these benefits include:

- High grades and test scores;
- Better attendance and more homework completed;
- Fewer placements in special education;
- Improved positive attitude and behaviour; and
- Greater enrolment in post-secondary education.

Despite the crucial contribution of other stakeholders such as teachers, school managers and policy makers, the parents' active participation in the education of their children, especially learners with mild intellectual impairment, is crucial (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker &

Engelbrecht 1999: 55). Non-parental involvement in education is regarded as one of the major barriers to learning (DoE 1997: 18). Learners with mild intellectual impairment are at risk of being excluded from the education system if nothing is done with regard to parental involvement in education. Sisonke District, located in a rural area of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) is one of the twelve education districts of that province. It has structures such as a District Based Support Team (DBST) School Governing Body (SGB) in each school, School Based Support Teams (SBST) Teacher Assistants, Councillors, parents' bodies and school nurses in place. Parental involvement is through meetings, advocacy campaigns, workshops and committee structures. The school nurse visits schools and talks to the teachers and parents about their assessment findings and early intervention strategies. Parents are being assisted to take their intellectually impaired learners to the physiotherapist, psychologist and social workers. Although most of the schools in the district have the afore mentioned facilities, including Adult Basic Education Centres (ABETs), attendance is very poor.

The matter is exacerbated due to lack of proper networking and correspondence between the stakeholders, primarily due to the non-participation of the parents. The majority of the few working parents work in other provinces such as Gauteng, leaving their children with their grannies.

Masifundisane (adult literacy) Love Life campaigns and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) community libraries play a role in eradicating illiteracy, teenage pregnancy, learner drop-outs, alcohol and drug abuse in the area. According to the study conducted by Wilson et al. (Donkor, 2010: 27) teachers agree that they cannot educate alone and for effective educational processes to occur in classrooms, parental help, in partnership with educators, is needed. Epstein and Solinas (Donkor 2010: 27) state that a school learning community includes educators, students, parents and community partners who work together to improve the school and enhance students' learning opportunities. Donkor (2010: 270) affirms that to unlock proper and efficient learning all learners need the guidance and support of their teachers, families and communities. According to Desmond (2010: 70) the understanding that parents are the first teachers of their own children is one which is often not put into practice. The present study investigated ways in which learners with mild intellectual impairment in the mainstream schools receive parental assistance.

In the past mildly disabled learners were expected to master basic academic skills. From the age of approximately twelve they were generally channelled into occupational training

subjects such as panel beating, gardening, hairdressing and agricultural skills (Weeks 2003: 165).

Intellectually disabled learners play a far lesser role in their own development than learners of normal intelligence do. They do not learn spontaneously like other learners. They do not observe the relationship between cause and effect and cannot apply what they learn to new situations. The major consequence of this is that intellectually disabled learners have a special need for the teachers' attention, help and support in assisting them to learn. Teachers cannot do it alone they need the assistance of parents.

In general, some local experts estimate that approximately 3 percent of South African population experience an intellectual impairment (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel 2005: 381). The literature maintains that when abject poverty in communities such as that of Sisonke District occurs, the prevalence may even be double the estimated figure. Table 1 shows the employment status of Sisonke District:

Table 1: Sisonke District employment status (Source: Stats SA 2007)

Employment status	Ingwe	Kwasani	Kokstad	Ubuhlebezwe	Umzimkhulu
Employed	39.7%	47.8%	54.1%	27.6%	15.2%
Unemployed	19.8%	22.9%	17.3%	16.6%	22%
Not economically active	40.5%	29.3%	28.6%	55.6%	62.8%

Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education 2001a) states that more than 300 000 learners in South African schools can be expected to have an intellectual impairment. This is an important reason for this study. The mildly intellectually disabled form the biggest proportion of persons with intellectual disabilities, namely 83 percent of the total (Weeks 2003: 165). Sethosa (2001: 42) agrees with Artiles, Csapo and De Lorenzo (1995: 31) that children with mild disabilities comprise the majority of all special education populations. Prinsloo (2001: 347) states that a significant number of individuals in the developing world and especially in South Africa, suffer from mild intellectual disability. According to Prinsloo (2001: 347) these children, in poor communities such as Sisonke District, are especially vulnerable to biological and environmental stressors that cause disabling conditions such as mild intellectual disability. This issue is compounded by malnutrition, traffic accidents, diseases and socio-political conditions (UNICEF, 1993: 50). It is therefore of the utmost importance that teachers and

parents be prepared to work collaboratively and be empowered to assist mildly intellectually disabled (MID) learners to develop to their optimal potential. According to Weeks (2003: 165) in these children there is no presence of pathological organic condition that could have caused the disability. They function on a slightly below normal level for one of the following reasons according to the National Commission on Special Educational Needs and Training and National Support Services (NCSNET/NCESS) report (South Africa 1997):

- Genetic factors – one or both parents have lower level of intelligence. In these cases one that brothers or sisters or other family members have learning difficulties as well.
- Unfavourable environmental circumstances – in an environment where children’s intellectual development is not stimulated. Poor socio-economic environments such as that of Sisonke District are characterised by unfavourable circumstances such as:
 - Malnutrition;
 - Poor medical services;
 - A lack of stimulating conditions;
 - A lack of cognitive stimulation; and
 - Unmotivated parents.

Literature has documented the importance and centrality of parental involvement in school (Nyarko 2011: 378). In a study conducted by Shumow and Ampiah (2001) it was revealed that parental involvement at school has a positive impact on academic achievement. Literature, however, also highlights the role that schools play in the exclusion of parents from involvement in their child’s schooling via both practices and policy formulation (Smit & Liebenberg 2003). Delgado-Gaitan (1991: 21) is of the view that if parents are knowledgeable about the school and its operations, they may be able to act in a congruent fashion, thereby contributing to the ultimate success of children. Parents need to be involved in the schooling of their children in a pro-active manner (Smit & Liebenberg 2003: 1).

1.3 Rationale

Whether or not parents’ poor participation in their children’s schooling is a result of unawareness or perception is unclear. Parental socio-economic status (SES) and level of education are particularly relevant in South Africa. Sisonke District is affected by a poor socio-economic status (Sisonke District Profile 2013). Therefore, the effects of poverty, unemployment and high illiteracy should be considered when working with families and communities in Sisonke District. Extensive research has revealed that there are varied findings in the international literature on the relationship between SES and parental

involvement in education. Most findings suggest that overall family involvement is not related to SES, but the nature of involvement varies depending on the SES (Christenson & Sheridan 2001: 111). School-based family involvement, for example, is significantly related to SES, whereas home-based involvement is not. This means that some parents of MID may find it difficult to attend school activities but are still involved in their children's education (Christenson & Sheridan 2001: 111).

I am motivated by the existing knowledge gap in the theory of the level of economy and parental involvement in education, which needs further investigation (Landsberg et al. 2005: 24). I am also motivated by the expected outcome of the study towards the restoration of active parental involvement in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment. There has been increasing effort since 1994 to establish robust inclusive education in South Africa. I strongly believe that deeper understanding of parents' perceptions, values and attitudes towards their involvement in education of their children with mild intellectual impairment in mainstream schools would be a stepping stone to achieving this objective. The research findings are expected to provide plausible insights that may help educational planners and policy-makers to accommodate and advance parental involvement in their children's education, especially in rural parts of South Africa.

Understanding parents' perceptions and experiences of education is the key to developing sustained family-school partnerships.

1.4 Problem statement

Lack of parental involvement and support makes learners with mild intellectual impairments experience continuous failure, which results in an increase in the school drop-out rate. The lack of parental involvement in their children's education neutralises active co-operation between the school nurse, teachers and parents and leads to the failure of the referral process. Most parents seem to be more interested in getting social grants for their mildly intellectually impaired learners than getting good education for them. The manifestation of high learner failure rates, teenage pregnancy, learner drop-outs, alcohol and drug abuse show that the community of Sisonke District is not prioritising the education of their children (Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2013: 4). According to the Sisonke District Profile (2013: 4) most parents are not just unaware but also illiterate and cannot participate intellectually in their children's educational process, while at the same time

capable parents are often indifferent. Figure 1 indicates education levels of people in Sisonke District:

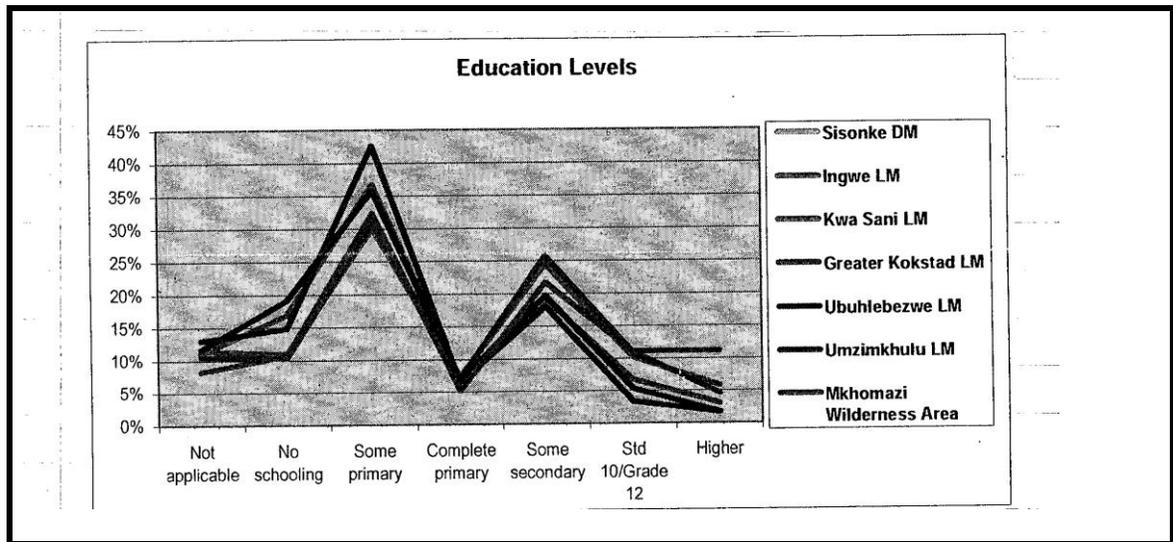


Figure 1: Education levels in Sisonke District (Source: Statistics SA 2007)

As can be seen from Figure 1 about 20% of people are illiterate and majority have some primary education (Grade 1 to 7) but less than 10% have completed primary education. At least 10% of the population has attained educational qualifications beyond Grade 12 (see Sisonke IDP 2012). According to educational levels of the people in Sisonke District, it is important to investigate why this inadequate education level is reflected in most parts of South Africa and especially in Sisonke District.

It is also unclear whether or not the parents' attitude to active participation in their children's education results from the effects of socio-cultural stigma of people with intellectual impairment or disability. This perception seems to have inherited the exclusionary and deficit-based assumption that abandoning these children to the hands of the teachers brings periods of relief to parents. The perception may also have created the impression of complacency and despair in parents that no matter how much input or effort they commit, the outcome would be the same. Improvement of parental involvement in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment is an anticipated outcome of this study. Smit and Liebenberg (2003: 1) emphasize that research relating to parental involvement in schooling, especially within South Africa, is very limited, as well as highly restricted to wealthier social groups.

1.5 The aim and objectives of the study

1.5.1 Main aim of the study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate how parents perceive their involvement in their mildly intellectual disabled (MID) children's education, the effects of this involvement, and how this can be improved.

1.5.2 Objectives

In order to achieve this aim the study explores the following objectives:

- To highlight parents' perceptions of their role and involvement in their children's education;
- To highlight the effects of parents' attitudes towards their involvement to their children's education; and
- To explore the effects of parental involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairment.

1.6 Research questions

1.6.1 Key research question

- How do parents perceive their involvement in their children's education in selected mainstream schools in the Sisonke District?

1.6.2 Sub-questions

The following sub-questions will be investigated:

- How do parents in mainstream schools perceive their involvement in the education of their children with mild intellectual impairment?
- What are the effects of parents' participation/non-participation in their children with mild intellectual impairment in education?
- How can parental involvement be used to enhance inclusive education among learners with mild intellectual impairment?

1.7 Research design and methodology

This study was qualitative in nature, using a phenomenological approach to investigate how parents' perceived their involvement in their children's education, the effects and possible

solutions. Phenomenology seeks clarification and understanding of people's perceptions and experiences, especially the meaning they give to events, concepts, and issues (LeCompte, Millroy & Preissle 1992: 850). De Vos, Strydom, Fouche' and Delport (2009: 207) emphasize that researchers using the phenomenological strategy of interpretive enquiry utilize participants' observations and individual interviews with identified multiple individuals who have experienced the particular phenomenon. This study adopts the phenomenal approach in order to emphasize the importance of transforming lived experience into description of its 'essence', allowing reflection and analysis (McMillan & Schumacher 2010: 270). Thus phenomenological approach aims to understand and interpret the meaning that subjects give to their everyday lives (De Vos et al. 2009; Creswell 1994).

To reinforce the study's rigour, trustworthiness and triangulation the researcher used interviews, observation and document analysis to collect the required data. Ten parents from five schools (two from each school) and five educators from five different schools within the Sisonke District were selected for individual interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted by means of semi-structured open-response questions to obtain data on participants' meaning, how individuals conceived their world and how they explained or made sense of the important events in their lives related to the topic under investigation (McMillan & Schumacher 2011: 355). According to De Vos et al. (2009: 283) observation enables the researcher to obtain people's perceptions of events and processes expressed in their actions, feelings, thoughts and beliefs. Five different classes and lessons were visited and observed by the researcher, irrespective of the teacher or subject. The school's official documents such as admission registers, attendance registers, cash books, children's exercise books and enrolment registers were inspected to obtain qualitative data, with little or no reciprocity during this exercise between the researcher and the participants. The data collected via these methods was analysed manually, using open coding and presented in themes and sub-themes as they arose.

During the study, ethical principles were strictly adhered to in order to guarantee the confidentiality, anonymity and privacy of the participants and their selected schools. Authorisation was secured from the Department of Education, school authorities, teachers, parents and from the University of South Africa Ethical Committee for approval and ethical clearance to conduct the study.

1.8 Study limitations

As the researcher I relied mostly on data collected directly from parents and teachers through interviews and observation, although this does not mean that data collected from learners could not have added value to the study. Alternatively, observation was used as an appropriate data collection method, considering the reasoning capacity (or lack of it) of the learners to substantially and effectively participate in the study at individual level. It is assumed that valid data was collected, but it is difficult to make generalisations in a qualitative study, given that the study was restricted to five mainstream schools in the same rural district within one province (KZN). The results obtained thus apply to five schools and cannot be generalised to others, although this study's findings can provide insight into similar situations in other schools with a similar context. The study relies only on qualitative methodology, as the researcher deemed it most appropriate for the study. The qualitative methodological approach allowed the researcher spontaneity and flexibility in carrying out the investigation.

1.9 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters.

Chapter One introduces the reader to the background and rationale of the study. It provides the problem statement, research objectives and questions which were to be addressed by the study and a brief study design. It outlines the sequence of chapters for the dissertation and clarifies concepts used in the study.

Chapter Two reviews international and local literature relevant to the study and presents the theoretical perspective adopted by the study.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodologies and associated ethical issues, highlighting the qualitative research methods and design used by the study. The chapter expands on the reasons for the choices of these methodologies.

Chapter Four presents the results and analyses and presents the interpretation and discussion of the findings.

Chapter Five presents a brief summary of the findings and makes conclusions and recommendations arising from the study.

1.10 Clarification of concepts

Learners – refers to all learners, ranging from early childhood education to adult education. The terms ‘pupils’, ‘children’ or ‘students’ at school and higher education levels are all referred to as ‘learners’ (Department of Education 1997: vii).

Intellectual impairment – Both the American Association on intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) define intelligence as “..generic mental ability that involves reasoning, problem solving, planning, thinking abstractly, comprehending complex ideas, judgement, academic learning, and learning from experience” (<http://www.psychiatry.org/dsm5>).

According to Quintero (2013: 32-33) DSM-5 list mild, moderate and severe severity levels of intellectual domains as follows:

- › Conceptual
 - Language, reading, writing, math, reasoning, knowledge, and memory, among others, used to solve problems.
- › Social
 - Awareness of others’ experiences, empathy, interpersonal communication skills, friendship abilities, social judgement, and self-regulation, among others.
- › Practical
 - Self management across life settings, including personal care, job responsibilities, money management, recreation, managing one’s behaviour, and organising school and work task, among others.

According to Landsberg et al. (2005: 381) the most recent definition of the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD) is the following:

Intellectual impairment refers to substantial limitation in present functioning. It is characterised by significantly sub average intellectual function, existing concurrently with related limitations in two or more of the following applicable skills areas: communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self-direction, health and safety, functional academics, leisure and work.

Perception – according to the Oxford Dictionary (2012) perception refers to a particular way of understanding or thinking about something at a particular time and context. It refers to intuitive understanding and insight.

Parent – the biological or adoptive or legal guardian of a learner (RSA Schools Act 1996).

Parental involvement – refers to an effort provided by the parents to be directly involved in the school's activities and school's functions, practically helping educators at school and at home, in order to increase educational outcomes of children (Avvisati, Besbas & Guyon 2010: 2). Bouffard and Weiss (2008: 2) add that parental involvement is broader, most authentic and effective when it is intentionally "linked to learning".

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the orientation of the study. The next chapter deals with the reviewed literature that draws attention to concepts that inform the study. This includes critical examination of the barriers that hinder parental involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairment. Chapter Two presents the conceptual framework and literature adopted by the study.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the background, focus and purpose of the study. Chapter Two reviews international and local literature relevant to the study. The literature review has two phases. Firstly it explores the frameworks upon which the study is conceptualised. The frameworks focus on the importance of parental involvement in education and its benefits and the description of relevant parental involvement models vis-a-vis their relevance to the South African context. Secondly the chapter draws on literature concerning the factors that affect parental involvement and perceptions, attitudes and values toward involvement in education.

2.2 Parental involvement in education

According to Holloway, Yamamoto, Suzuki and Mindwich (2008: 1) a great deal of research in the United States and other Western countries supports the notion that parental involvement generally has a positive effect on children's achievements. Parents who are more involved with their children's schooling become knowledgeable about schooling systems, communicate the importance of education to children, help children learn strategies to enhance their perceptions of competence, control over-achievement outcomes and structure learning experiences that result in the development of skills (Holloway et al. 2008: 1). The mode of operation of schools and teachers has been criticised or blamed as being a root cause of the impediments concerning parents' lack of involvement in the schooling of their children (Smit & Liebenberg 2003: 2). In other words, parents desire to be actively involved in schooling but they may experience the schooling system as intimidating and inaccessible. Parents' frustrations include limited access to school decisions. They often lack the platform and structure to contribute meaningfully to their children's education (Holloway et al. 2008: 2; Matheiw 1999: 3).

According to Avvisati, Besbas and Guyon (2010: 10) educational outcomes which are influenced by parental involvement include cognitive skills (especially through direct instruction, but also through modelling and reinforcement) and non-cognitive skills. Children whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to develop a strong, positive

sense of efficacy for successful achievement of school-related tasks than the children whose parents are not involved (Avvisati, Besbas & Guyon 2010).

In order to encourage active parent participation in their children's education Sileo, Sileo and Prater (Matheiw 1999: 8) recommend education programmes for training parents with limited formal education. The suggested programmes include teaching maths, language, reading skills, functional skills and methods for improving positive interaction with school professionals. According to Matheiw (1999: 9) there are higher learner academic achievement rates when parents are tutored on how to assist their children with academic assignments, thereby extending the learning environment for their children outside the formal school environment. Learners with mild intellectual impairment are able to improve their mathematical ability when parents are assisted through collaborative consultation (Matheiw 1999: 10). There are various roles that parents can play in supporting and promoting positive attitudes to learners with mild intellectual impairment. Parents can provide important contextual information to teachers about the development characteristics of their children with mild intellectual impairment (Mohsin et al. 2011: 78).

The theories of Bronfenbrenner and Epstein best explain the family-school-community partnership (Landsberg et al, 2005: 213). Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach to parent involvement provides a conceptual framework for understanding how parents, including those of mildly intellectual disabled (MID) learners, and schools, are embedded in the community (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998). His perspective as described in Landsberg et al. (2005: 215) is to explain the multidirectionality of relationships within families, schools and communities. This perspective emphasizes that schools influence families, families influence schools and both affect and are affected by communities in which they are located. Figure 2 is an illustration of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

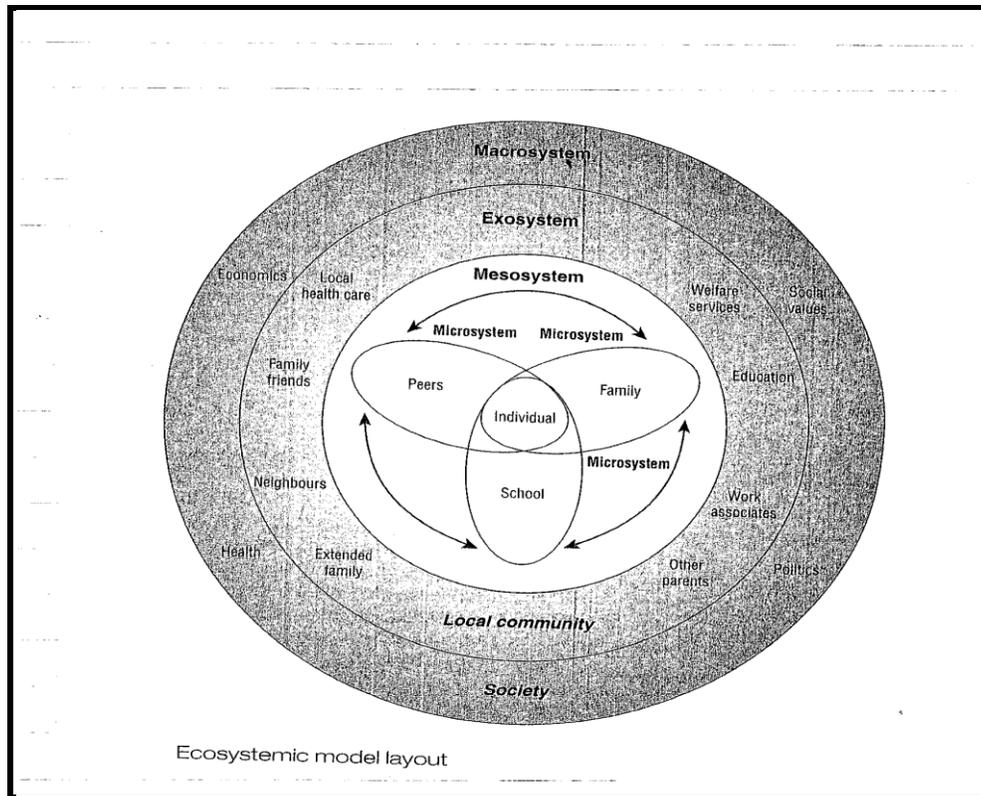


Figure 2: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory
 Source: (Landsberg et al. 2005: 215)

It is important to understand that the family, school and community are also influenced by larger social, political and economic realities (Seligman 2000: 62). Christenson and Sheridan 2001: 41) conclude that systems theory looks at things as a whole, rather than splitting things into parts, and encourages that the system perspective be prioritised.

The model illustrated in Figure 2 helps us to understand the complexity of the family as a system and the individual child, with mild intellectual impairment functions, within the context of the family and society (Landsberg et al. 2005: 216). Bronfenbrenner's theory has laid the foundation for this study which is understanding and analysing the influence of social factors such as poverty, discrimination and disability on children's learning and family functioning. Landsberg et al. (2005: 216) stated that "...although the other systems are not intimately linked to the family, they do impact on the family and the child". The researcher suggests that it is possible that things such as poor environment with very limited sources to stimulate and develop the cognitive thinking of the child can have huge impact on parental involvement in mainstream school. The researcher is motivated by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems

theory's representation of the family as a system, nested in a number of other societal systems and the effects of the family-school relation on children's learning and development.

Bronfenbrenner's theory also informed other theories which are also relevant to the current study such as Joyce Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence. This theory emphasizes the importance of the family-school relationship and mutual responsibility for children's learning and development (Epstein 2002). Figure 3 illustrates Joyce Epstein's model of overlapping spheres of influence:

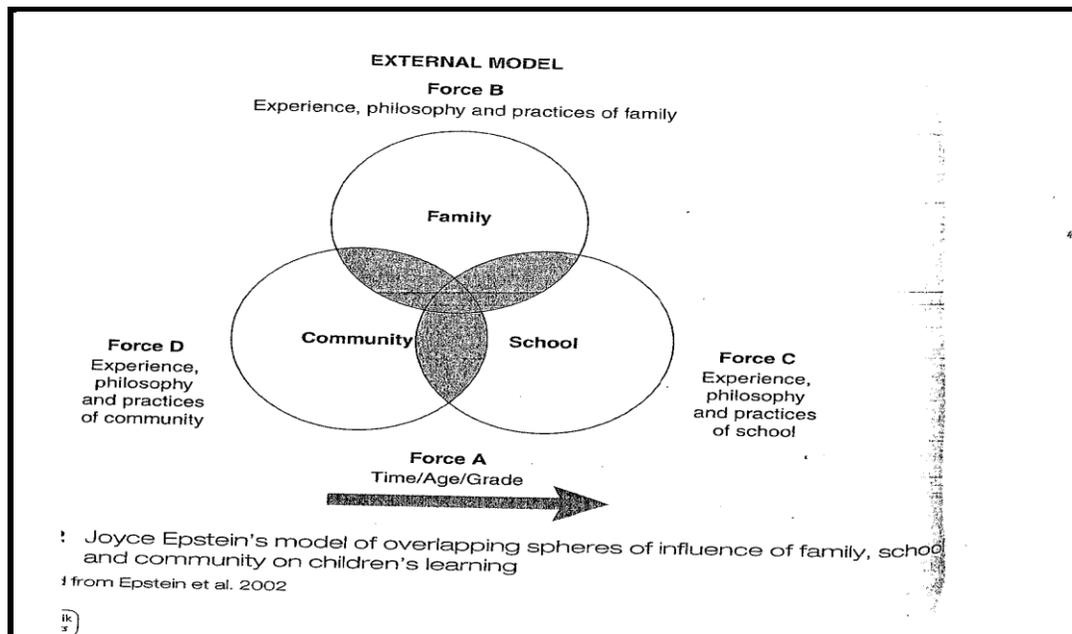


Figure 3: Epstein's model of overlapping spheres

Source: (Landsberg et al. 2005: 215)

Epstein's model illustrate that there are overlapping spheres of activity or influence between the families, schools and communities that can be pushed together to generate an area of partnership (Landsberg et al. 2005: 216). She distinguishes between an external and internal model of influence as illustrated in Figure 3. It is important to know that the external model of three spheres of influence demonstrates that the extent of overlap is in interaction with and affected by the forces of time and the forces associated with the experience, philosophy and practice of every sphere (Epstein et al. 2002). For the purpose of this study, Epstein's explanation of the forces of time in relation to the age and grade level of the child as well as the influence of historical change is of utmost importance. This theory guided the researcher in selecting the relevant sample of the population and in developing the semi-structured questions.

Landsberg et al. (2005: 217) refer to the three spheres as indicating areas of overlap signifying areas of interdependence and dependence. This means that some activities in families, schools and communities are performed independently. However, there are also activities conducted mutually by two or three spheres as indicated by the intersections in the Epstein's model illustrated in Figure 3. The shaded areas in the model represent spaces where families, schools and communities share the responsibility for children's learning and development. The current study is motivated by the emphasis in Epstein's theory that "...it depends on the perspectives and actions of educators, families [in this case: parents of learners with MID] and members of the community whether these spheres can be pushed together to increase overlap when schools work together, or are pushed apart when they do not" (Landsberg et al. 2005: 217).

Another relevant theory is the Human Capital and Social Capital theory. According to Goldin (Landsberg et al. 2005: 217) there is a general belief in the symbiotic relationship between the wealth of a nation and its people, which is human capital. In other words, proper education is supported by family, which, in return, is enriched on both the private and social benefit scale, causing the wealth of the nation to increase. Social Capital theories of education refer to connections within and between social networks and have become core concepts in business, organizational behaviour, political science, public health and sociology (Donkor 2010: 23). Social Capital theory contributes to ability enhancement of children in society through trust, networks and norms of reciprocity within a child's family, school, peer group and larger community. Social capital is also enhanced by the creation of healthy relations between parents and school personnel, as well as external networks, including other schools, community-based agencies, NGOs and private sector organizations. Social Justice Theories in relation to inclusive education incorporate principles of fair treatment, shared benefits and justice, and uniformity applied throughout society (Donkor 2010: 23). They convey the idea that every individual is entitled to basic human rights, regardless of such differences as economic disparity, class, gender, race, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability or health.

Human Capital theories of education refer to the stock of productive skills, technical and intellectual knowledge and psychological and judgmental abilities embodied in members of society. These assets cannot be separated from them like other capital assets (see Donkor 2010: 26). Donkor states that the acquisition of these skills and knowledge is often enhanced through education, study or apprenticeship programmes, which are considered as real

expenses and regarded as assets or types of capital fixed in the individual. Thus the Cultural Capital educational theories include competencies, skills or qualifications, and the right to be heard as a crucial source of power (Donkor 2010: 27).

2.2.1 Guidelines for parental involvement in education

Avvisati et al. (2010: 16) assert that even though parents may be aware that their involvement in their children's education is vital for the children's education success, how this involvement may occur is not clear to many parents. Educationists around the world have been trying for years to provide guidance on how parents can actively get involved. The following parental involvement activities have been suggested by Wallenn and Wallen (Govender 2007: 16):

- Parents should spend time talking with the child and sharing the child's activities;
- Parents should read with the child in a pleasant atmosphere and emphasis should be on reading for enjoyment; and
- The child should be a meaningful contributor in the home by having a reasonable set of work responsibilities.

Similarly, a more comprehensive list of priorities for home support for learning is provided by Oakes and Lipton (Govender 2007: 16). These priorities, described hereunder, offer parents practical ways of becoming involved in their children's education.

- **Developing language and ideas**

The development of language and ideas is important as children learn to think and use language in order to communicate with their family and peers. Parents' everyday interactions with their children with mild intellectual impairment influences their children's thinking and language development (Govender 2007: 16). Thus certain kinds of interaction are helpful in the intellectual development of children. Under this category of parent involvement, parents may ask for, and listen to, ideas that express relationships such as comparing, finding opposites, arranging items from highest to lowest, placing items in categories, locating items in space and time and identifying directions. Questions such as "What's happening?", "What happened?", "What will happen?" are important questions which parents may ask their children with mild intellectual disability. In this way children may put their perceptions and experiences into words. This will ensure that children are engaged in mental processes such as abstracting, predicting, categorising and reflecting.

- **Leisure time**

Children's best learning takes place when they act like scientists, examining the world around them and coming to conclusions about how things work and what things mean (Govender 2007). Exploration, discovery and play are the work of these children. In this way children with mild intellectual disability are able to learn fundamental concepts such as light and heavy, big and small, floating and sinking, shapes of colours and numbers of things. At this point, the intervention of parents remains unnecessary, except for ensuring that these children have access, or rather are exposed, to appropriate tools necessary for their discovery. Parents should make every effort to encourage their children and provide a safe environment and setting for such activities to prosper. Then parents should step back and watch their children in action.

- **Family routines that promote school success**

Families must have routines which are firmly established (Govender 2007). In this regard, the family must ensure that schoolwork takes precedence over other activities such as watching television and playing games. Experience has shown that while television may educate children, extensive television watching may diminish children's ability to be active learners. The violence on television can consume children and affect their learning in and out of school (Govender 2007). Watching television can take up so much time that activities such as homework are neglected. Parents should monitor the television viewing habits of their children. Some television watching should be a family activity, as this will make television a more analytical experience, rather than a passive one.

- **Keeping involved and enthusiastic**

According to Oakes and Lipton (Govender 2007) most new parents participate in their young children's learning. However, once children go to school, they shift from following their own learning timetables to following a school's rigid learning schedule. Parents of older children are very concerned about their youngsters' achievements, but tend to have little knowledge, control or expertise. Experience has shown that older children tend to shy away from reaching out to their parents and discourage their parents from asking questions. The parents too, avoid continuing their active involvement in their children's education, to evade complications that go with young adult development.

Govender (2007) stresses that the review of the child's day at school can help enhance the important connection between achievement and effort. Parents are encouraged to support and encourage their children by always reviewing their schedule at school. While it is reasonable for parents to know about their children's lessons and marks, there is much more that happens in school that children may want to talk about (Govender 2007). Keeping track of the many details of the school day helps parents stay involved and children feel in charge. Enthusiasm, encouragement and praise are as necessary for older children as for younger children. Children achieve more when parents expect more. High expectations are reinforced when parents take careful measures to be available to talk to their children. Oakes and Lipton (Govender 2007: 19) emphasize that when parents support learning at home their children are almost certain to do well at school. Children from such families are likely to attend school regularly, respect school rules and routines, take class work seriously and do their homework. More importantly, when parents encourage their children to learn at home the children are more likely to be intellectually ready to learn in school.

2.2.2 Overcoming problems of parental involvement

A study conducted by Matheiwis (1999: 6) indicated that a significant number of educators today have higher expectations of parents than they did a decade ago, given the current possible distractions that may arise from the effects of modern technology. The study found that the rapid restructuring and changes in the methods of teaching and curriculum in the present day education system are too overwhelming for some parents (Matheiwis 1999: 6). This implies that, while parents may desire to be involved and have every right to be involved, there are certain factors that discourage their involvement. In addition to the already mentioned factors militating against parents' involvement, Mbokodi, Singh and Msila (2003: 17) revealed some of the following factors that discourage parental involvement in education in South Africa:

- Unemployment, which leads to low socio-economic status such that parents are unable to provide books and other relevant learning materials which are necessary for successful study;
- the level of education of parents or low literacy levels discourage parents from helping their children with schoolwork;
- lack of support programmes that empower parents to participate fully and meaningfully in education;
- lack of guidance teachers' services that empower learners to enhance their skills; and

- lack of library facilities that would solve some of the learners' problems experienced at home.

There are other factors associated with parental reluctance to being involved in the education of children. Matheiw (1999: 3) identified the following obstacles to parent involvement: job schedules, transportation difficulties and lack of child care (Matheiw 1999: 3). In an attempt to rectify these problems Matheiw (1999) identified the following measures that can increase parental involvement in education for learners with special needs:

- Sending homework notes and daily report cards to keep parents informed about the progress of the pupil;
- Regular meetings with parents to discuss progress;
- Avoiding words and phrases that may give parents false or undesirable impressions of their children or their exceptionalism; and
- Avoiding professional jargon in communications.

While it is important to acknowledge the role of the parent in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairments, how this role is encouraged and developed is dependent on what the school's policy is and how parents perceive their involvement. Govender (2007: 22) is of the opinion that the school plays a pivotal role in encouraging parental involvement in education of learners with special needs.

Education level of the parent is a major factor that may hinder parental involvement in the education of their children. Regardless of race or culture, parental education is a useful indicator of the level of support for academic endeavour and is associated with student achievement. Parent's lack of education and/or low literacy level has a negative effect on involvement in the child's education (Wright 2009: 29). Wright is of the opinion that parents' literacy skills and attitudes about learning and formal education can have an immense impact on their children's education. A South African study in 2005 revealed a clear positive influence cross-nationally of parents' education in students' achievement (Govender 2007: 23). Children with parents who have received a high school education or higher are more likely to have parents who are highly involved in their schools (Wright 2009: 29). According to Govender (2007: 23) the Trait Meter Mood Study (TMMS) of 2003 in South Africa confirmed the association between high educational levels of parents and the achievement scores of children in mathematics and natural science. It must be noted that in the same study conducted across countries, learners with the same background characteristics often attained different achievements scores, suggesting that there may be other factors which influence

learners' achievements and parental involvement. In South Africa, illiterate and irresponsible parenthood is common and this has a lot to say about the country's basic education. Govender (2007: 23) also mentioned the study conducted by the UNESCO – UNICEF Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) project team in a number of African countries in 1999, which revealed that most parents had education up to the end of primary school. In that study parents were very positive about the value of schooling for their children, but could not academically support their children. In this regard, the study suggests that the presence of someone at home to assist learners with schoolwork was a key determinant of learner performance in many of the countries surveyed. According to this study, greater attention must be allocated to the improvement of adult and lifelong learning. Parents with a low level of education may not know how to support their children with mild intellectual impairment, but can encourage other family members who are capable of helping. Huetinck and Mausnshin (Govender 2007: 24) offer a solution to this problem by pointing out that "...older brothers and sisters or uncles and aunts can help and use the term 'parent(s)' more broadly as referring to the adult(s) who are assuming responsibility for the education of the children".

2.2.3 Triangle of effective school design

Bloomstran (Govender 2007: 24) identifies home, school and learners as part of a "triangle" of effective school design. In this regard, the three points of the triangle represent parents, teachers and learners. According to Govender (2007: 24) if one side of a triangle functions at less than maximum capacity, it may have a negative impact on the school environment. This implies that the stakeholders that make up each side of the triangle must work together to keep the balance. This is usually true for learners with intellectual impairment, where parents may be involved in giving support in homework, reading and co-operation with the teacher. The literature suggests that, together with enabling legislation, schools can develop valuable initiatives to make parents more actively involved in education and equal partners in this "triangle" of effective school design. The South African Schools' Act (1996: 14), which introduced to reform schooling in a democratic South Africa, highlights the rights and responsibilities of parents as empowered stakeholders in education. Therefore parents should receive the necessary information, guidance and support from the school to prepare them for co-operation and participation (Majola 2008: 26). This, however, implies that without empowerment, the parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment will find it difficult to contribute fruitfully to the welfare of the school and education of their children. According to Malepo (Majola 2008: 26) the parties involved in education (parents, teachers and learners)

should be empowered in order to work as a “three-legged pot”. If one of the legs breaks the pot will be unable to function properly (Majola 2008: 26). In other words, the “triangle” of effective school design is sustained by a strong relationship of its stakeholders. Therefore it is necessary that all parties are empowered and then the partnership will be effective because they are interdependent. Johnson (Majola 2008: 26) emphasizes that one of the basic features of this partnership is that it involves more than one person. This means the parties have to work together, with their varying interests, different ideas, abilities, attitudes, skills and experiences, for the sake of more effective cooperation and common goal achievement at school.

Parental empowerment is crucial for educating children with mild intellectual impairment. Parents should be informed so they know what they are supposed to do and at what time so that they can, for instance, spend at least 10 minutes daily listening to their children read, and be informed enough to guide the children’s reading performance, which will then improve drastically (Majola 2008: 26). Malepo (2000) confirms that all children, irrespective of learning difficulties, can benefit from extra practice and extra motivation, especially when assisted by the parent(s). Parents also benefit from increased confidence and self-esteem at being given a valid part to play in their child’s learning.

2.2.4 Parental involvement models

There are different models of parental involvement in education; for the purpose of this study a few, most relevant models had been selected. Kirkbride (2012: 22) recommends Arnstein’s ladder of participation model, Epstein’s family-school-community involvement model, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’ model and ecologies of parental engagement model. The present study also adopts the renowned three models of parental involvement in education as propounded by Springdale and Stegelin (1999: 40). These three models include the protective model, the school-to-home model and the curriculum-enrichment model.

2.2.4.1 Protective model

According to Swap (Springdale and Stegelin 1999: 45) the protective model is designed to separate the functions of school and home. The assumptions that characterise this model are:

- Parents delegate to teachers all the responsibilities of educating their children;
- Parents expect school personnel to be accountable for good results; and
- School personnel accept this delegation of responsibility.

This model tends to undermine the notion that parents are children's first and most important teachers (Desmond 2010: 70). It also undermines the idea that parents know their children better than anyone else. Most of the illiterate parents in rural schools willingly abdicate this aspect of their parenting duties (Landsberg et al. 2005: 22). Parents may adopt this model simply because they are not properly empowered on how to take full responsibility for their children or they are ignorant of their duties as parents towards their children's education (Mbokodi et al. 2003: 17).

2.2.4.2 School-to-home transition model

According to Swap (Springdale & Stegelin 1999: 45) the efforts of parents in supporting the objectives of the school are encouraged and sought in a school-to-home transition model. The assumptions that characterise this model are:

- Children's achievements are fostered by continuity of expectations and values between home and the school;
- Teachers should identify the values and practices outside school that contribute to school success; and
- Parents should endorse the importance of schooling, reinforce school expectations at home, provide conditions at home that nurture development and support school success and ensure that children meet minimum academic and social requirements.

This model is in line with Bronfenbrenner and Epstein's theories discussed above, which explain extensively the forces of ecological systems influencing children's education and development (see Section 2.2).

2.2.4.3 Curriculum-enrichment model

According to Govender (2007: 28) this is a model that is a representative of many early childhood development programmes in the USA. In this model, parents are viewed as the children's first and most important teachers. The assumptions guiding this model include the following:

- Parents and educators should work together to enrich curriculum objectives and content; and
- Relationships between home and school are based on mutual respect and parents and teachers are seen as experts and resources in the process of delivery.

This model is good for supporting learners with mild intellectual impairment as parents can serve as volunteers within the classroom, reading to children and assisting children with school work. This model offers parents and community the opportunity to share their expertise with children, under the guidance of the schools. It is not only a way of sensitising the parents, but if the parents and community are brought on board, they will realise that ‘it takes the whole village to raise a child’. Thus the children, irrespective of their impairments, can gain much academic improvement in a collaborative effort by teachers and parents.

2.2.5.4 The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (HDS) model

According to Kirkbride (2012: 25) an alternative model to parental involvement was proposed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997). This model outlines levels that need to be considered in order to understand parental motivations for involvement. According to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model, successful parental involvement requires an understanding of psychological variables that form the basis of parental decisions to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1997, 2005). Although this model outlined the nexus between influencing variables and highlighting conditions of successful parental involvement, it was revised in 2005 with a model which consists of two elements of parental involvement. The revised model places greater emphasis on parental involvement in relation to their child’s learning behaviour (see Kirkbride 2012: 26). Table 2 shows the revised model:

Table 2: Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s revised model of parental involvement (2005)

Welcoming and honouring parents	Level 1: Helping in motivating parents to be involved, helping parents feel invited to participate and honouring factors that affect parent participation.
Connecting parent involvement to increased student learning	Level 2: Where parents can influence their children’s learning behaviour and beliefs.
	Level 3: What parents can do to influence their children’s learning behaviour and beliefs.
	Level 4: Checking to see what children are learning from their parents.
	Level 5: The learning attributes students need to possess that have a direct connection to increased learning and achievement.
	Level 6: Increased student learning and achievement.

According to the revised model, the frequency of parental involvement can be influenced by the parent-school relationship, family dynamics and the parents' perceptions of the use or relevance of the support offered (Kirkbride 2012: 27).

The models discussed here highlight several themes related to parental involvement, with a variety of material and psychological elements which link home and school communication, and support collaboration, understanding and interaction, as well as the frequency and quality of these aspects.

2.3 Review of local and international literature

2.3.1 Learners with mild intellectual impairments: signs and symptoms

Intellectual impairment or learning disability is a generalized disorder appearing before adulthood (18 years) and is characterized by significantly impaired cognitive functioning and deficits in two or more adaptive behaviours (Landsberg et al. 2005: 381). Although intellectual disability is the official term used in South Africa, Adnams (2010: 346) cautions that a wide variation in understanding and lack of agreement on definitions and terminologies has contributed to problems in accurate collection and interpretation of epidemiological data. Intellectual disability is also known as mental retardation. However, this older term has been eliminated in most parts of the world. Landsberg et al. (2005: 380) explain that the definition of intellectual impairment now includes both a component relating to mental functioning and one relating to individuals' functioning skills in their environment. According to Adnams (2010: 346) intellectual disability is subdivided into syndromic intellectual disability (medical and behavioural symptoms) and non-syndromic intellectual disability (without other abnormalities).

The signs and symptoms of intellectual disability are all behaviourally inclined (Landsberg et al. 2005: 381). Experience has shown that in some cases most people with intellectual disability do not look like they are afflicted, especially if the disability is caused by environmental factors such as malnutrition. According to Daily, Ardinger & Holmes (2000: 2) and Landsberg et al. (2005: 387), children with intellectual disability may learn to sit up, to crawl, or talk later. Adults and children with intellectual disability may exhibit some or all of the following characteristics:

- Delays in oral language development;
- Deficits in memory skills;

- Difficulty learning social rules;
- Difficulty with problem-solving skills;
- Delays in the development of adaptive behaviours such as self-help or self-care skills; and
- Lack of social inhibitors (Daily et al. 2000: 2).

Children with intellectual disability learn more slowly than a typical child. They may take longer to learn language, develop social skills and take care of their personal needs, such as dressing or eating. Learning takes them longer and they require more repetition or reinforcement. Skills may need to be adapted to their level (Landsberg et al. 2005: 386). Daily et al. (2000: 1) state that in early childhood, mild intellectual disability may not be identified until they begin school. Even when poor academic performance is recognized, it may take expert assessment to distinguish mild intellectual disability from learning disability or emotional disability/ behavioural disorder (Carulla 2011). People with mild intellectual disability are capable of learning, reading and displaying mathematical skills to approximately the level of a typical child aged nine to 12. They can learn self-care and practical skills such as cooking or using the local mass transit system. As individuals with intellectual disability reach adulthood, many learn to live independently and maintain good employment (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10706158>). Orrell-Valente et al. (1999), Izzo et al. (1999), Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) and Sandler (2005) (Kirkbride 2012: 27) concur that virtually every child is able and can learn, develop and become a participating member of the community. In order for that to be possible there must be a concerted, collaborative effort of all the interested parties.

2.3.2 Prevalence of intellectual disability

Intellectual disability affects about two to three percent of the general population, such that over 75% to 90% of affected people have mild intellectual impairment, while non-syndromic or idiopathic intellectual impairment accounts for 30% to 50% of cases. About a quarter of cases are caused by genetic disorder (Emarson 2007: 319). Three local studies were conducted to describe the epidemiology of intellectual disability in South Africa (Adnams 2010: 436). The 1999 National Disability Survey (Adnams 2010: 436) yielded prevalence for all disabilities of 5.9% and that of intellectual disability as 1.1%. The second study was a survey in 2001 which revealed the prevalence of intellectual disability to be 5.0%, while the overall disability prevalence was 5.0% (Census SA 2001). Adnams (2010: 437) points out that in the population with disability that was surveyed; only 30% had any formal education. The third

survey was in 2007. It examined severe intellectual disability and a prevalence of 0.27% was yielded. According to Adnams (2010: 437) there are other smaller South African studies focused on localized populations of children. Couper 2002 (Adnams 2010: 437) used the internationally validated 10 questions screen for childhood disability in developing countries to screen 2,036 children aged two to nine years in rural areas. On the basis of the screen used by Couper, the study reported a prevalence rate of 1.7% for mild intellectual disability. In eight villages in another rural area, Kromberg et al. (Adnams 2010: 437) screened a total of 6,692 children of two to nine years with the same questions tool, on a house-to-house basis, and in a second phase the 722 children (10.8%) who screened positive were clinically examined and assessed neuron-developmentally by a paediatrician. Overall, 4.3% of the children had one or more of five disabilities (intellectual, visual, hearing, movement disorder and epilepsy). Intellectual disability occurred in 3.6% of the children. The prevalence of mild [general intelligent quotient (GIQ) 56 – 80] and severe (GIQ < 56) intellectual disability was 2.9% and 0.64%, respectively. Adnams (2010: 434) stated that there was a male predominance of intellectual disability (ratio 3:2) discovered in the study.

2.4 Perceptions of mild intellectual disability; labelling, definition and classifications

It is important to examine the problematic nature of the concept of intellectual disability and how responses to intellectual disability are influenced by the changing political, social and economic context. As the transformative paradigm subscribes to the socio-cultural view of disability, dilemmas associated with intellectual disability must be framed as problems belonging to society and not problems associated with an individual. It is also important to comprehend the perceptions of society to mild intellectual disability. Intellectual disability (South Africa, Australia) mental retardation (America) or learning disability (United Kingdom) all represent names which communities use to draw some sort of line between normal and subnormal intellectual function (Oliver 1996: 31). According to Meekosha (2004: 729) intellectual disability is a social construct within common geographic areas. It is also a social construct that has reflected changing attitudes and beliefs about differences throughout human experience, which, in turn, have been mediated through associated political, economic and cultural hierarchies and practices. The acceptance that intellectual disability exists in certain individuals in society as an objective reality has been expressed in various ways of naming this perceived difference. Its implication is the complicity of language used in exclusion of the individual (Chapell, Goodley & Lawthorn 2001: 47).

According to Chapell et al. (2001: 47) language functions both to express our ideas and to shape them. Therefore the negatively couched language associated with intellectual disability has the power to assign value, define relationships and prejudice attitude behaviour. For instance, Landsberg et al. (2005: 248) points out that before and during the 20th century the term 'idiot', 'imbecile' and 'moron' were perceived to be apparent among the 'feeble-minded'. During the 20th century, and up to this day, the labels of 'mental retardation', 'mental handicap', 'mental dishonesty' and 'developmental delay' are being used. These labels, through their negative formulations, continue to reflect the implicit disapproval and associated unworthiness which illustrates society's judgement of intellectual disability as deviance from what is considered to be acceptable and normal (Department of Education 2001: 14, 15).

2.5 Models used to understand intellectual disability

Different models have been identified as informing the perception behind particular understandings of intellectual disability (Ripley 2004: 30). Many models have been used by many people, depending on the paradigm of perceptual approach. The main models are:

- Moral;
- Medical or scientific; and
- Socio-cultural.

2.5.1 Moral model

The moral model of disability is implicated in the view that a disability has a moral or religious significance and that people become disabled either as a punishment or curse for personal or inherited sins, or as a means for the redemption or inspiration of others (Gill 1999: 281). According to Madlala (Engelbrecht et al. 1999: 187) when parents are confronted with educational problems, including special educational needs, most of them regard traditional healing as an important resource to turn to, over and above education. Shapiro (1999: 163) points out those individuals with disabilities are viewed as unproductive members of society who need to be pitied, helped and uplifted. Individuals who give of their time to these charitable organisations are praised for their selflessness and dedication to the service of the less fortunate in society. Shapiro (1999: 164) points out that the power of the moral model of disability to shape attitudes is perhaps most evident in the ways in which many children are socialised into interacting with disability. The means through which a child is exposed to disability is most often transmitted through strong cultural influence such as media, language

and literature. Thus the power of language to shape our thoughts, and not merely to express them, is evident in the many representatives of evil in children's traditional stories.

2.5.2 Medical model

Rapley (2004: 31) points out that the most influential model of viewing disability is the one provided by the medical model. This model serves to make disability seem more understandable and more amenable to human control. In this model, disability is routinely represented as a problem or a defect that can be measured that is able to be located within an individual that has the effect of diminishing the quality of life of an afflicted person, that needs cure or some curative efforts which need to be provided by medical and other professional experts (Gill 1999: 281). According to Skirtic (Mackenze 2010: 40) the medical model of disability directly influenced the official sanctioning of the institution of special education in South Africa, which was originally enacted through the 1948 Special Schools' Act. The enactment of this view of disability within the education system in South Africa had the effect of legitimising exclusionary practices towards learners with intellectual disability, affirming the status and power of the emerging professions and creating a mind-set of ordinary teachers who felt that teaching learners described as having intellectual disability was beyond their scope of duty and their area of expertise.

2.5.3 Social or socio-cultural model of disability

According to Lorenzo, Toni and Priestley (2006: 20) the social model of disability is seen to derive its particular cultural meanings through society's responses to individuals who are seen to deviate from particular cultural standards or norms. Oliver (Mackenze 2010: 29) points out that within the social model the 'problem' of disability resides within a society that approves constraints and restrictions on people with disabilities. The social model of disability is the relevant model to focus on the classification of mild intellectual disability, as most scholars in the field acknowledge the central role of context (i.e. the society and the environment) in determining whether or not an individual is considered to have the socially ascribed status of mild intellectual disability. The child who is developing slowly might not be seen as intellectually disabled in an agricultural society, but would more likely be considered so in a technically sophisticated society, in which the demand for mastery of language and mathematical skills would more likely lead to educational and social difficulties. Therefore, a child can become intellectually disabled merely by moving from a community where expectations for the display of certain competencies are low, to a community where

expectations are high. Thus, according to the social model, a child can lose the status of intellectual disability by leaving a social system such as school (McKenzie 2010: 30). According to McKenzie (2010: 26) mild intellectual disability can be understood in terms of the interaction between "...a child's cognitive inefficiencies and the environmental demands for problem solving". Researchers believe that the condition of mild intellectual disability is highly contextual and relative to the environment, a dynamic feature which is absent in other forms of intellectual disability.

The social model is based on the belief that the circumstances of people with disabilities and the discrimination they face are socially created phenomena and have little to do with the impairment of disabled people. The disability rights movement believes that the 'cure' to the 'problem' of disability lies in restructuring society. The social model therefore emphasises two things: the short-comings of society in respect of disability and the abilities of people with disabilities themselves (see Office of the Deputy President 1997: 11).

2.6 Inclusive Education

Inclusive education can be defined as a system of education that is responsive to the needs of learners (Engelbrecht et al. 1999: 19). In a wide sense, inclusion is about developing inclusive community and education system which is based on a value system that invites and celebrates diversity arising from gender, nationality, race, language, socio-economic background, cultural origin and level of educational achievement or disability (Landsberg et al. 2005: 4). The driving force for inclusive education was realised in the resolution that came to be known as the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education. This statement was endorsed by 92 countries and 25 international organisations (Engelbrecht et al. 1999:14). On the 4th of March 1994 United Nations General Assembly adopted a standard rules on the equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities (UN, 1994: 15).

2.6.1 The history of inclusive education in South Africa

In 1996 the government of South Africa amalgamated 17 Departments of Education which had been designated along racial lines into one Department of Education with one curriculum for all South African learners. Prior to 1996, learners experiencing barriers to learning and development were catered for in Special Schools which were designated according to categories of disability (NCSNET/NCESS 1997: 27). Where learners who experienced barriers to learning did attend ordinary schools it was largely by default, and very little was done by

these schools to adapt teaching methods, the learning environment and assessment procedures to accommodate them. Learners were expected to adapt to the school. The majority of learners experiencing barriers to learning and development were unable to access education (DoE, 2005:7).

In July 2001 the Ministry of Education launched the Education White Paper 6 Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System. White Paper 6 (EWP6) reminds us that our constitution challenges us to ensure that all learners pursue their learning potential to the fullest (DoE 2001: 11). It commits the state to the achievement of equality and non-discrimination (RSA Constitution Act 108 of 1996 section 9 (2; 3; 4; 5). The policy framework outlined in White Paper 6 outlines the ministry's commitment to "the provision of education opportunities, in particular for those learners who experience or have experienced barriers to learning and development or who have dropped out of learning because of the inability of the education system to accommodate the diversity needs, and those learners who continue to be excluded from it" (DoE 2001: 11).

Education White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education sets out to address the needs of all learners in one undivided education system. It moves from the categorisation of learners according to disability (medical model) to assessing the needs and levels of support required by individual learners to facilitate their maximum participation in the education system as a whole. The focus is on ensuring that there is sufficient differentiation in curriculum delivery to accommodate learner needs and to making the support systems available for learners and schools, but permits all schools to offer the same curriculum to learners while simultaneously ensuring variations in mode of delivery and assessment processes to accommodate all learners (DoE: 2005).

2.6.2 The objective and goal of the White Paper 6

The central objective of the White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System "...is to extend the policy foundations, frameworks and programmes of existing policy for all bands of education and training so that education and training system would recognise and accommodate the diverse range of need" (DoE: 2001). The long term goal of the policy is to develop an inclusive system of education and training which uncovers and addresses barriers to learning, recognises and accommodates the diverse needs of learners (DoE, 2001: 45). The main purpose is to build an open, equal, lifelong and high quality education and training system for the twenty-first century. The system

should include a range of different institutions, such as special schools, resource centres, mainstream schools, full service schools and centres for further and high education and training (DoE, 2001: 45). The short and medium term goals should immediately focus on addressing weaknesses and deficiencies within the system, both past and present. The expansion of access and provision to children of compulsory school-going age, who are not yet accommodated within the education and training system, should be addressed. The implementation of these goals was envisaged for a period of 20 years (DoE, 2001: 38).

The following statements from White Paper 6 emphasise the fact that inclusion is centrally a curriculum issue:

- The policy outlines how the education and training system must change to accommodate the full range of learning needs with particular attention to strategies for instructional and curriculum transformation.
- Inclusive Education and Training are about acknowledging that all children and youth can learn provided they receive support.
- Inclusive Education and Training are about enabling teaching and learning methodologies and curricular and the maximising of the participation of all learners in the culture and curricula of educational institutions.
- Inclusive Education and Training are about uncovering and minimising barriers to learning (DoE: 2005).

All barriers to learning and development should be addressed in our classrooms and schools. Amongst the more frequent causes of barriers are:

- Disability as a barrier;
- Language and communication;
- Lack of parental recognition and involvement;
- Attitudes; and
- Inadequate opportunities for programme-to-work linkages (DoE: 2005).

2.6.3 Inclusive education anxiety

According to Landsberg et al. (2005: 20) the inclusion of all learners becomes an issue related to everyone's beliefs, values and attitudes about diversity, change, collaboration and learning. Assumptions, beliefs and attitudes are directly translated into actions and teaching practices and informs decision-making. Attitudes about diversity and change can be both a barrier and a strong positive force in implementing inclusive education. The attitudes of everybody in the

school are important and need to be explored, challenged, restructured and rethought, when working in inclusive settings. If repressed and unquestioned, negative attitudes can be corrosive to efforts to implement inclusive education, as well as counterproductive, as they spread in a contagious manner among the rest of the community. Research has shown that attitude changes do not have to precede behaviour changes (Landsberg et al. 2011: 20). It is therefore not necessary to wait for people's attitude to change before the change is implemented. A change in behaviour results in a change of attitude. Researchers suggest that the change in attitude by teachers and parents towards disability starts when they begin working collaboratively with learners with disabilities on a daily basis (Landsberg et al. 2005: 20).

2.7 Conclusion

The literature review in this chapter is comprehensive and offers some insights into the roles that parents can play in the education of their children with mild intellectual impairments. It describes different parental involvement models and programmes which best promote active parental participation in education such as the curriculum enrichment model. The literature indicated that many parents would like to support their children's learning, but require guidance on how to do so. The parental level of education and social psychology and perception of disability are identified as impediments when it comes to supporting children's learning. Chapter Three presents the methodology adopted by the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and explains the research methodology, methods and techniques chosen and utilised to generate, interpret and analyse data for the study. It also describes the context, sampling, ethical issues, access to the school, limitations, triangulation, validity and reliability of the study. This study was designed to be qualitative in nature, using the phenomenological approach to investigate how parents perceived their involvement in their children's education, the implications and the solution.

3.2 Research paradigm

Burton and Bartlett (2009: 17) define a research paradigm as "... a coherent set of ideas and approaches which are imbued with a distinctive set of values and beliefs" about the nature of the world. The researcher must take a 'tactical' decision concerning what is the main methodology of the research undertaken (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000: 75). This is an important element of the research process, as the research methodology and subsequent phase of data collection and analysis of data will be determined by the researcher's theoretical framework (Lodico, Spoulding & Voegtle 2006: 6). The present study adopts an interpretivist paradigm, which begins with individuals and sets out to understand their interpretations of the world around them (Cohen & Manion 1994: 36-37). The interpretivist paradigm has its roots in phenomenology, which is referred to as a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one which sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience, rather than by external, objective and physically described reality (Cohen & Manion 1994: 29). Interpretivist researchers aim to understand and physically portray the participants' perspectives and understandings of a particular situation or event (Burton & Bartlett 2009: 22). This paradigm is appropriate for the current research, which aims to explore the perceptions of parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment in their recognition and involvement in the education of their children. Exploring these interpretations will allow for a greater understanding of the impact of parental involvement in teaching and learning for children with mild intellectual impairment.

3.3 Research design

Cohen and Manion (1994: 37) stated that the central endeavour in the context of the phenomenology interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. The adopted phenomenological interpretivist paradigm is used to examine the parents' perspectives in their involvement in the education of their mildly intellectually impaired children. This research paradigm lends itself to qualitative research methods (Check, Russell & Schutt 2012: 210) and enables the researcher to adopt a more inductive approach to understanding subjective human experience (i.e. begins with a working plan that is meant to guide the enquiry but not be prescriptive). This form of the research working plan outlines subjects for study, length of time for data collection, possible variables for consideration, conceptual framework and basic data analysis procedures (Boudah 2011: 127). Thus, given the chosen nature of the research topic and methodology, an inductive stance is more suitable, in which the specific rather than the general is the focus of the study. Adopting an inductive approach complements a purely qualitative research design. Check et al. (2012: 189) indicated that qualitative methods typically involve exploratory research questions, inductive reasoning, an orientation to the social context of educational activities and a focus on human subjectivity and meanings attached by participants to events and lives. The study will create an opportunity for further research, which may examine other issues concerning parental involvement in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment.

3.4 Ontology and epistemological issues

O'Hara, Carter, Dewis, Kay and Wainwright (2011: 80) refer to ontology as the meaning of the nature of reality and epistemology, as about how knowledge is created and what is seen to be legitimate knowledge. Acknowledging the ontological and epistemological stance of research is essential, as research methodologies are comprised of sets of epistemological and ontological requirements (De Vos et al. 2005: 90) which should be aligned with the researcher's own epistemology and ontology (Mouton 2001: 56). In relation to this, Lodico et al. (2006: 10) state that, in any research, specific questions must be posed, relating to the assumptions the methodology makes about the world, the kind of knowledge the methodology aims to produce and how the methodology conceptualises the researcher in the research process. These three important questions will be briefly answered in order to justify the approach adopted in the current research.

3.4.1 What assumptions does the methodology make about the world?

Ontological assumptions concern answers one would give about the nature of reality in the world and how one sees the world and one's place within the world (O'Hara et al. 2011: 80). For the phenomenological interpretivist methodology, there is no one objective reality that exists outside of the actor's explanations. "Pupils, the classroom teachers, other teachers at the school and parents all have a view of what goes on and will act according to how they interpret events" (Burton & Bartlett 2009: 21). Thus phenomenology is a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience, taken at face value, and one which sees behaviour as determined by the phenomenon of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality (Cohen & Manion 1994: 29). In other words, the ontological assumption adopted by this study is naturalistic. This assumption acknowledges the complexity of the reality of the phenomena being discussed (Lodico et al. 2006: 7). In addition to the socially constructed reality of participants, the researcher needs to consider an alternative form of reality that has been produced by prior research (Foster 1996: 3) and other relevant knowledge produced in different contexts of the related research.

3.4.2 What knowledge does the methodology aim to produce?

Epistemology is the philosophical enquiry about "...understanding of how the world exists and what counts as legitimate knowledge" (O'Hara et al. 2011: 80). The epistemological assumption of the phenomenological interpretivist paradigm is that knowledge is interaction subjective and socially constructed (Cohen & Manion 1994: 29) rather than being objective reality. The researcher and participants' interaction is ongoing and there is a continuing chain of events which gives insight into how people live, with the research emphasizing the process.

In the context of research undertaken, there has been very little theory that exists regarding parental involvement in education of learners with intellectual impairments. Therefore, in order to seek to understand the multiple personal views and perceptions of parents and teachers on parental recognition and involvement in education, the phenomenological interpretivist approach is appropriate. To successfully achieve the research aim, a key aspect of the research process is observation and interpretation, which relies on the participants' abilities to reflect upon and verbalise their perceptions of the phenomena being studied.

3.4.3 How does the methodology conceptualise the researcher's role in the research process?

In a phenomenology interpretivist methodology the researcher seeks to understand and portray the participants' perspectives and understanding of a particular situation or event (Cohen & Manion 1994: 29). The methods favoured in phenomenological studies are personal interviews and observations which allow the researcher to collect and interpret data in a normal situation (Burton & Bartlett 2009: 20). The phenomenological methodology recognises the active roles the researcher has in the formation of knowledge as being their own interpretation of data. It is important for the phenomenological interpretivist researcher to acknowledge and believe that history of personal experience, attitudes, behaviour and emotions (including their own) influence how people view reality (Lodico et al. 2006: 16).

3.5 Description of the population and sampling

This research aims to investigate the perceptions and effects of parental involvement in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment who were identified as the sample for this research. Five mainstream schools in extreme poverty context, with learners who were assessed and identified to be mildly intellectually disabled were purposeful selected in Sisonke District. Ten parents (two from each selected five schools) and five teachers (one each from the selected schools) were interviewed. Each school consisted of four members of the School Based Support Team (SBST), giving a total of twenty members (population). The researcher selected the chairpersons (sample) of each SBST in each school because they are the leaders of these teams. The SBST of each school was requested to select the two parents of learners that were identified by psychologists to have mild intellectual impairment. The researcher recommended that the SBST may look at the possibilities of parents availing themselves for the interviews as the criteria of selecting the parent participants (sample). The population of these parents differed at each selected school. There was no school in the selected schools with more than three mildly intellectual impaired learners (confirmed by the psychologist). There was thus a population of not more than fifteen parents in five schools. Only 10 parents (sample) were selected, with the assistance of SBST. This gave a sample of 15 participants (parents and teachers). Two parent participants were unable to avail themselves for the interviews, giving a total of thirteen participants. All participants were females. Cohen et al. (2000: 140) state that qualitative researchers select their participants based on their characteristics and knowledge as they relate to the research question being investigated. Given that an individual's experience is investigated, a large sample size is not

necessary. Cohen et al. (2000: 92) stressed that "...quality of research not only stands or falls by the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation but also by suitability of sampling strategy that has been adopted based on the sample size, representativeness and parameters of the sample...".The present researcher has taken into consideration the sample size and representativeness.

3.5.1 Recruitment

According to the Sisonke District 2011/2012 school information brochure, there are 450 schools in this District. All these schools are ranked according to their levels of poverty and the socio-economic status of the school community (Section 34(1) of the South African Schools' Act No. 84 of 1996). Schools in quintile one and two are regarded as the poorest schools and they are granted a "no fee" status by the Department of Basic Education. Many of the mainstream schools in the Sisonke District are ranked in quintile one and two. For the purpose of the current research, the researcher selected five primary (mainstream) schools. High schools were excluded in the sample. Epstein's explanation of the forces of time in relation to the age and grade level of the child as well as the influence of historical change guided the researcher in selecting the relevant sample of population. The force of time in Epstein's theory (Epstein 2002) is based on the belief of parents that older children are more independent and they (parents) feel less competent to support them, or on the attitude of teachers that do not recruit parent support. Principals and SBST leaders were requested to participate in the study.

Once the consent had been given by the SBST teachers, opportunity sampling was employed and teachers assisted the researcher in selecting and approaching all parents of children with mild intellectual impairment. Initially, all the identified parents were given an information sheet, outlining the main aims of the research and whether they would be happy for their contact details to be given to the researcher who would contact them to discuss the research further. The researcher advised that this first round of recruitment should be done by teachers, as they are familiar with parents and have regular contact, whereas the researcher remained a stranger to them. The parents to whom contact details were given were contacted by the researcher to discuss the research, seek their full consent and schedule an interview. Landsberg et al. (2005: 222) stated that linguistic and cultural differences can create communication problems and could be the reason why some parents feel out of place and unwelcome at school. The researcher was of the opinion that gaining the consent of parent participants by going to their homes would be a more successful approach, given that the

lengthy consent form would appear difficult to read and be returned by selected parents who were illiterate. However, the parents' level of literacy was initially checked with educators and then again with the parents who gave their permission to be contacted.

3.5.2 Selection of research sites (the school contexts)

Sisonke District is one of twelve districts in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). It has four Circuit Management Centres (CMC). Each CMC consists of four circuits, with an average of 35 schools. There are only four special schools and one FET College. There are three District Hospitals and health clinics surrounding each hospital. IsiZulu, isiXhosa and English are the main languages used in this district. Most of the parents are unemployed and are living in very poor socio-economic conditions. The selected schools in the Sisonke District provided the most appropriate environment for the current study.

3.6 Data collection methods

3.6.1 Interviews

Following a phenomenological perspective, the researcher wanted to understand the participants' viewpoint concerning parental involvement in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The semi-structured format of interviews guaranteed that the researcher asks each participant similar open-ended questions. The researcher was non-directive and allowed for exploration of the participants' own experience. Participants were asked questions to elicit their views and perceptions relating to parental involvement in education (see Appendix E for copies of schedules). All the SBST teachers of five schools suggested 09:00 as the starting time of the interviews and the finishing time for both participants was 11:00. The interviews lasted about 40 minutes for each participant. The data produced from semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gain a detailed picture of the worldview of participants, or perceptions or accounts of the topic (De Vos et al. 2005: 296). Semi-structured interviews are defined by De Vos et al. (2005: 296) as an interview which has determined questions on an interview schedule, but the order can be modified according to the interviewers' perceptions of what seems most appropriate.

The use of semi-structured interviews in this study allows an element of freedom and flexibility to the content of the interview, and permits an exploratory approach (Lodico et al. 2006: 21). The interview questions were structured to explore and were formulated to ensure that adequate data collection took place, because there was a chance that the main question

might not be answered (McMillan & Schumacher 2010: 213). Prior to the interviews, participants were identified, consulted and informed about the research overview by the researcher, to help them think about their experiences with their involvement in education. This served as preparation and an antidote to fear of the interview. The interview process started with an introduction to the purpose of the research (Lodico et al. 2006: 125) and an assurance to the participants of respect for confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Best (1989: 165) felt that recording interviews on tape is convenient and inexpensive and obviates the necessity for writing during the interviews, which might have a distracting influence. Lodico et al. (2006: 124) suggest that even in semi-structured interviews it is important for the researcher to have a protocol that helps guide the data collection in a systematic and focused manner.

3.6.2 Observation

Field notes provided a detailed record of the researcher's observation of behaviour and the physical and social context in which it occurs and, as the concern is to explore the perspectives and interpretation of participants, they also included records of the researcher's observations, discussions and interviews (Foster 1996: 45). According to Boudah (2011: 190) field observation is the researcher's technique of trying to see things as they happen, without actively participating in the activity that the participants are engaged in. The theory of ecological systems helps us to understand the complexity of the family as a system and how the individual child functions within the family and society (Landsberg et al. 2005: 216). In this study, the researcher employed what McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 352) call 'intensive observing and listening'. The observation intends to respond to the impact of parents' involvement or limited involvement in teaching and learning, the possible frustration and/or difficulties encountered by teachers as a result of learners who failed to do their homework or are not assisted by their parents and how this affects teaching and learning. The researcher looked for non-verbal clues such as gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, body language and other social interaction that may give a clue as how the teachers felt. The researcher opted for overt observing which, according to Boudah (2011: 192) includes the researcher observing participants without participating in social interaction but identifies him/herself as a researcher. This means participants must be aware that they are being observed for the purpose required.

3.6.3 Documents analysis

To provide rich and quality data, the researcher probed parents' involvement in education by reading and analysing some schools' official documents such as parents' attendance registers, minutes of meetings, daily occurrence registers, admission books, log books and SA-SAMS data. McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 361) explained that artefacts are tangible manifestations that describe people's experience, knowledge, action and values. Document analysis was the researcher's secondary source of data, used mainly as evidence to support the data collected through interviews and observation.

Table 3 presents data collection methods in relation to the research questions

Table 3: Data collection methods in relation to research questions

Key Research Question	Data collection methods (qualitative)	Participants
How do parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment perceive their involvement in their children's education in selected mainstream schools in the Sisonke District?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal interviews • Observation • Document analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Teachers
Sub-questions		
How do parents perceive their involvement in the education of their children with mild intellectual impairment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents
What are the effects of parents' participation/non-participation in their children's education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal interviews • Observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers • Parents • Relevant documents
How can parental involvement be used to enhance inclusive education among learners with mild intellectual impairment in mainstream schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal interview • Literature review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers • Literature

3.7 Data analysis and interpretation

McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 367) define data analysis as a relatively systematic process of coding, categorizing and interpreting data to provide explanations of a phenomenon being studied. In the present research, the data will consist of field notes, interview scripts and document analysis. Data was analysed manually, using open coding through a thematic method. The analysis developed by Wellington (2000: 140) was used and is briefly described

here. The reason for choosing this strategy is that it allows for the categories and patterns emerging from data to be decided in advance and facilitates the interpretation of smaller units, since the analysis beginning with the researcher reading all the data to gain a sense of the whole (Foster 1996: 64). This process involves the researcher typically beginning the analysis of qualitative data by reading data carefully in order to become thoroughly familiar with what they are about, and their basic features. This involves immersing oneself in the data, which may include recorded observations, written transcripts of interviews and document analysis, as was the case in this study. Inducing themes and coding are the next steps which Wellington (2000: 140) suggests. Coding is the process in which the researcher attributes labels to certain data segments of the text (McMillan & Schumacher 2010: 371). During preliminary analysis, the researcher identified key themes and topics for sections of the data which seem particularly interesting and for similarities and contrasts between different parts of the data (Foster 1996: 63). This is the opposite of a deductive approach, where one makes use of predetermined categories to analyse the text. In the present study, the researcher highlighted relevant pieces of text and recorded his thoughts and ideas in the form of notes or memos. The analyses lead to the interpretation of the findings, which is the written account of the phenomenon under study, and in this case the involvement of parents in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment in the Sisonke District of Education. As such the researcher took the following steps.

- Firstly, I transcribed the recorded interviews *verbatim* and the transcription was reviewed repeatedly in order to identify emerging categories.
- Having gone through the data several times, I began to organize the data in the form of smaller units according to the research questions.
- I perused the entire data several times to get a sense of what it contained as a whole.
- The interview reports were analysed to identify dominant themes on a general and sectoral basis after which I documented different themes that had been identified.
- I identified general categories or themes and sub-categories or sub-themes and classified and categorised them. These categories were compared and contrasted with the themes of the data collected through observation and content analysis, based on context against a wide spectrum of critical examination in order to identify areas of convergence and divergence.
- I integrated the findings to ensure that the research question(s) were adequately answered.
- Finally, I summarized the findings for the readers.

The data were categorised according to the following themes:

- Perceptions of the value of education for learners with mild intellectual impairment.
- The influence of economic circumstances on parental support for their children's education.
- The influence of parental conformity with cultural norms, values and beliefs concerning the allocation of resources for education.
- Parenting practices that support education.
- Parent-school relations and support for children's education.

3.8 Validity and Reflexivity

This study has applied the concept of validity by using three types of data collection methods to answer the research question. These data collection methods are interviews, observation and document analysis. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 331) multimethod strategies of data collection permit triangulation across inquiry techniques. Kumar (2005: 153) explains that the capability of being able to measure what was intended in the research project is called validity. Babbie (1990:133) writes "...validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration". The task of the researcher is to ensure that the methods used to collect data, and the data gathered, are appropriate for the study. Reflexivity is about the researcher's rigorously "...examination of his/her personal and theoretical commitments to see how they serve as a sources for selecting a qualitative approach, framing the research problem, generating particular data, relating to participants and developing specific interpretations" (McMillan & Schumacher 2010: 332). The research instruments used were capable of giving an accurate outcome. This was achieved by the researcher obtaining the real and actual data from the field, because after the interviews, the researcher was able to re-engage for further clarification, where necessary, by speaking to the teachers and scrutinising relevant documents to establish credibility and trustworthiness of the data collected through personal interviews with parents and through observation. Boudah (2011: 198) states that credibility of the study refers to whether the participants' perceptions of the setting or events match up with the researcher's portrayal of them in the research report. The researcher discussed his involvement in the study and how he engaged the participants in a repeated, prolonged and substantial study. He ensured checks and balances in the interpretation processes and interaction with data by using multiple data collection sources to ensure triangulation. This also allowed the researcher to present a balanced view of all possible perspectives.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical protocols were carefully considered and adhered to during all the stages of research. This includes gaining ethical approval from the ethical committee at the University of South Africa and KZN Department of Basic Education. Permission was received from all the principals of participating schools and informed consent from the participants, including consent for the interviews to be audio-recorded. The consent forms outlined issues such as confidentiality, data storage and protection, how the results would be presented and their right to withdraw from the study at any time (see appendix D). The researchers spent some time with participants at the beginning of the interview, explaining what the research entailed, verbally and in written form. The researcher acknowledged the universal right to privacy and public right to know, by giving the participants consent forms to read and sign. Participants were given full explanations about all the procedures of the research study; for example, voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study at any time. The researcher created a rapport, so that the participants were able to trust him and feel free and comfortable to talk. Confidentiality was assured to all participants. Pseudonyms were used for selected schools and names of parents and teachers. Audio-recordings of interviews were stored on an encrypted computer, and deleted from the recording device following transcription. The researcher ensured that participants are given an opportunity to ask any further questions and also be given the researcher's contact details in case they wish to contact him after interviews, or request feedback.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the reader with the research methodology and design of this study as to how various instruments were used. The data collection techniques adopted by the researcher, explained in this chapter indicated that in-depth and rich data were gathered to answer the research questions. Chapter Four presents the study's findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, discusses and analyses data derived from personal interviews, observations and document analysis. Data collected was presented in the form of inductive thematic analysis. The main themes and corresponding subthemes were used to present and summarise the data using excerpts from the interviews. In order to ensure ethical consideration, participants were assigned prefix letters and numbers. Letter P1 was assigned to parent number one, parent number two was P2, parent number three was P3, up to parent number seven P7. The same method was used for teachers; T1 was assigned to teacher number one, T2 was teacher number two up to T5, which represented teacher number five. The themes and subthemes were logically presented under the research questions they are meant to answer. This was to ensure that the critical questions of the study were adequately answered.

The data is presented in the following sequence:

- Interviews (which includes parents and teachers);
- Observation (all participants);
- Document analysis (which includes inspecting the parent-attendance register, homework workbook, etc.); and
- Analysis and discussion of results.

4.1.1 Key research question

- How do parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment perceive their involvement in their children's education in selected mainstream schools in the Sisonke District?

4.1.2 Sub-questions

- How do parents perceive their involvement in education of their children with mild intellectual impairment?
- What are the effects of parents' participation/non-participation in their children's education?

- How can parental involvement be used to enhance inclusive education among learners with mild intellectual impairment in mainstream schools?

4.2 Personal interview with parents

4.2.1 How do parents in mainstream schools perceive their involvement in education of their children with mild intellectual impairment? (Research Question 1)

Research indicates that the following factors influence the influence of parents' limited involvement in education (see Chapter Two): parents' attitude; guidance and expectations of education; quality of verbal interaction; participation in cultural and learning-related activities and overall disability. At this point, parents were asked to air their views on the value of education to their children's lives. Most parents interviewed raised the issue of ignorance about the importance of education to their intellectually impaired children. For instance:

(P4)...ingane yami ayikwazi ukufunda ngisho isiZulu ulwimu lwakhe angiboni nje ukuthi uzobayini ngisho nabothisha bathi angimuse esikolweni sezingane ezinenkinga (My child cannot read and write even his home language. I don't think my child will be successful in life. Even teachers are suggesting that I must take him to special school.)

(P1) ingane yami isidomu...(My child is a slow learner....)

(P3) angiboni nje ukuthi lengane yami izophumelela empilweni ngoba ngiyabona nokuthi akasithandi isikiole. (I don't think education for my child is important because I could see that my child does not like school because of his continuous failure.)

Parent (P7) also added that: ...Ngicabanga ukuthi alikho ikusasa elihle lalengane yami ngoba iyagula. (For my child I think there is no future as she is also sick.)

These parents seem not only to be unaware of the value of education for their children with mild intellectual impairment, but also have strong negative perceptions, that need to be changed. The study literature claims that people with mild intellectual disability are capable of learning; reading and doing mathematics to approximately the level of a typical child aged nine to 12 (see Chapter Two). Evidence has shown that people with mild disability can learn self-care and practical skills, such as cooking or using the local mass transit system. Thus individuals with intellectual disability reach adulthood and many learn to live independently and maintain gainful employment (see Intellectual Development Disorder <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10706158>).

4.2.2 Parents' educational ambitions for their disabled children

Parents were asked to express their educational ambitions for their disabled children. The responses reveal that most parents do not believe that education will change their children's lives. Parents referred to the continuous failure of the learners with mild intellectual impairment and concluded that these learners will never become anything in life because of their barriers to learning. For instance:

(P7) Akukho engikufisayo ngalengane ngoba ngiyayibona ukuthi inenkinga (I have no ambitions because I know that my child has got a problem.)

(P4) Ngifisa afunde naye njenganazo zonke izingane. (I wish him to be educated like all other children.)

(P1) Eyi thisha angazi, kodwa angiboni kahle. Njengoba esedlulwe nayizingane ezingamelami nokumelama! (I am not sure because his youngest brothers and sister have overtaken and are ahead of him now.)

These statements indicate that parents' perceptions of their child's future are low, so this may influence how they perceive the value of education for their children and their educational goals for their children. According to Holloway et al. (2008: 4) parental aspirations refer to idealistic hopes or goals that parents may form regarding future attainment. They suggest that parents who hold high aspirations for their children's future are likely to be more willing to exert effort to ensure that those aspirations are realized.

The responses quoted suggest that most parents are neither motivated nor inspired with regards to the possible impact of education on their children's lives. This, of course, may affect the children too, since educational and occupational aspirations are associated with the way in which parents shape their children's activities, time and learning environment (Holloway et al. 2008). Such parents' perceptions are most likely to be seen in the way they involve themselves in their children's education.

4.2.3 Parents' perception of their attitudes and level of involvement in their children's education

Parents were asked to express how they feel about their children's education and how much they were stressed by their barrier to learning. In their responses, many parents expressed the opinion that they were not needed at their children's schools. Epstein's model illustrates that there are overlapping spheres of activity or influence between the families, schools and

communities that can be pushed together or pulled apart (see Chapter 2 section 2.2). In this instance it seems spheres were pulling apart. Most of these parents even said that in the past they were told that the ‘experts’ would deal with the education of their children. This made them doubtful about involving themselves in school activities. For instance:

(P4) Ngiphatheka kabi uma ngibizwa esikoleni ngizolanda I riphothi lakhe ngoba bayangimisa othisha ngilinde kuze kube sekugcineni. Bazongichazela ke othisha into engiyaziyo vele. Kungenza ngifikelwe ukuzenyeza ngengane yami futhi kuyangihlukumeza kakhulu ukungazi lutho kwengane yami. (I felt traumatised when invited to school to collect my child’s progress report as I am made to stand aside and wait until all parents take reports. The teacher will then explain to me something that I know about my child. It is very embarrassing and I feel sad about my child.)

(P5) Ngiyazama ukumusiza ekhaya kodwa akazi lutho. Usheshe akhohlwe. Ngiphatheka kabi uma ngibizwa othisha esikoleni ngoba ngisuke ngazi ukuthi kumayelana nokungazi lutho kwakhe. Ngike ngimfake uswazi uma ngimfundisa kodwa kuyehlulisa. Ngiyamfundisa ukuthi amagama abhalwa kanjani. Kodwa uma sengithi akabhale lutho akakwazi. Nginenkinga enkulu nje ngengane yami futhi iyangi stresa kakhulu. Nobaba wakhe uze amshaye athi uyisilima nasesikoleni. (I tried to assist him at home but he does not understand. He has got very short memory. I felt traumatised when I am invited to school because I know it’s about my child’s problem of being a slow learner. I even use corporal punishment when supporting him. I teach him how to write words but when I tell him to write words he fails to write. I have a problem with my child and it’s stressing me a lot. Even young children/siblings know much better than him. His father also uses corporal punishment and says his is fool even at school.)

As is evident from these remarks, parents seem to be experiencing challenges in relation to their children with mild intellectual impairment. They perceive schools as institutions where experts give time to their children. The teachers are, of course, professionals and even “experts” in their subjects, but this does not mean the same as parent’s perception of an “expert” who must take care of their children.

4.2.4 How parents' economic circumstances affect their child's education

4.2.4.1 How these parents perceived the difficulties in supporting the child's education

Extensive research has found that the following factors in the home environment had greater effect on learners' success than socio-economic status (SES) as a single variable: "...parents' attitudes, guidance and expectation of education; quality of verbal interaction..." (Christenson & Sheridan 2001: 53). There was also a follow-up question on what else may have contributed to their inability to participate. Most parents who were interviewed unanimously cited difficulty relating to proper caring for their children. P2 said:

(P2) Angikwazi ukusiza ingane yami ngenxa yenkinga yemali. Kunzima nokubathengela ukudla futhi angeke ngikwazi ukumshiya egula ngiyosebenza. Ingane yami ihlala igula futhi kumele ngimuse eklinikhi... (I am unable to support my child due to financial problems. I even struggle to buy food and I can't leave my sick child for work as he is in this condition. My child is always sick and I have to take him to clinic.)

These parents were asked to express how they feel about their inability to support their children economically:

(P5) *Sibi kakhulu isimo sezimali kimi. Ngihola u R500 nje kuphela ngenyanga...*(Economic situation is very bad. I am earning only R500 a month...)

(P7) *Ngingumzali oyedwa kodwa ngiyazama kulokho okuncane engikutholayo...*(I am single parent but I try to assist my children with the little that I have...)

These comments indicate that parents experience great difficulty in supporting their children's education, such as buying school necessities; most of them broke into tears when trying to respond to the question. The majority cited unemployment as the root cause of their problem, especially single parents, depending on child support grants and earning very little money. According to Lemmer (2007: 223) single working parents and low income or unemployed families often experience a lack of time or suitable transport to school, or require child carers or elders to be able to attend school activities.

4.2.4. 2 Issue of poverty was also strongly highlighted

Seven parents out of ten interviewed expressed their heart-breaking situation of being unable to support their children. P2 and P3 said:

(P2) *kumele ngibathengele izingubo kancane kancane futhi ngiyaxoxisana nabo ngesimo esikuso nabo futhi bayazibonela...* (I have to buy them clothes in terms and I discuss with them our financial situation and they understand.)

(P3) *Isimo sami sezimali sibi kakhulu. Ngisebenzile izinyanga ezintathu ukusiza izingane zami kodwa isimo saphoqa ukuthi ngibuye ukuzobanakekela. Ubaba wabo usebenza emapulazini uholo ubala.* (My economic situation is very bad. I have worked for three months to support my children but I had to come back and look after them. Their father is a farm worker and is earning very little.)

Table 4 indicates the individual monthly income levels across all municipalities.

Table 4: The individual monthly income levels (source: SA statistics 2007)

INCOME	Ingwe	Kwasani	Kokstad	Ubuhlebezwe	Umzimkhulu
R1-R400	23%	8.5%	10.9%	13.2%	15.4%
R401-R800	29.6%	24.5%	17.9%	25%	22%
R801-R1 600	33%	37.5%	31.6%	44%	46.6%
R1 601-R3 200	6.5%	10%	12.3%	6.2%	7%
R3 201-R6 400	4.4%	9.5%	13%	5.2%	4.2%
R6 401-R12 800	3.2%	4.9%	11.5%	4.1%	35.4%
R12 801-R25 600		4.2%	3.2%	1.2%	0.3%
R25 601-R51 200	0.3%	0.7%	0.8%	0.3%	0.3%
R51 201- R102 400					
R102 401-R204 800				0.6%	0.5%
R204 801 or more		0.2%	0.2%		

These parents are obviously experiencing financial stress in assisting their children with mild intellectual impairments. Arcaro and Magabane (Govender 2007:140) claim that economic conditions often determine the level of parental support and involvement. Meanwhile, from the parents' perspective, it appears that they tried to make their children understand the economic situation, but are these children able to understand that?

4.2.4.3 Lack of time at home for educational support

Parents interviewed generally highlight the issue of lack of time at home to assist their children with school homework. Most of these parents were reluctant to actually express the reason behind their not having time:

(P5) *(P5) and (P7) miningi kakhulu imisebenzi yasemakhaya kumele ngibaphekele nokudla...* (there is a lot of work to do at home and I have to prepare food for my child.)

(P1) added that: ...ngisebenza kanzima usuku lonke bese ngiyakhathala ngingakwazi ukusiza izingane zami ngomsebenzi wesikole... (I am working very hard all the day and I become very tired to help my child with school work.)

Govender (2007:157) revealed that there were factors that made parental involvement difficult. Some of these factors were domestic problems, shift work, late working hours and lack of time. Matheiw (1999: 3) raises factors associated with old age, fear of losing a relationship, lack of education and ignorance concerning on how to support children with special needs. Matheiw (1999) also identified obstacles to parental involvement, such as job schedules, transportation difficulties and lack of proper awareness of unemployed teenage parents on childcare. These factors suggest that the involvement of parents is a huge challenge in most South African schools.

4.2.4.4 The illiteracy of parents as a barrier to educational support

Parents unanimously expressed the issue of their illiteracy and the new curriculum as barriers to their willingness to support their children with homework.

(P2) Usisi wakhe uyazama ukumsiza ngama homework nokumfundisa kodwa unolaka akathandi ukusizwa. Kwesinye isikhathi uvesane athi uyagula... (Her sister tries to assist with home works and teaching him but he does not like it and he is very aggressive. Sometimes he says he is sick.)

(P5) Kuke kwaba nomehluko omncane ngesikhathi umawakhe emsiza ngomsebenzi wesikole. Umfowabo uyena omqonda kangcono futhi uyamuzwa ukuthi uthini uma ekhuluma thina abanye sibuye singezwa. Nabothisha basizwa nguye umfowabo. (There was a difference previously when her mother assisted her with home works. Her sibling understands her and assists to interpret what she says to the teachers.)

Grandparent (P6) added that: *Umzukulu wami unenkani uma uthi uzama ukumsiza ngomsebenzi wesikole. Kwesinye isikhathi uvesane akhale uma umawakhe ezama ukumsiza ngomsebenzi wesikole. (My grandchild is very stubborn when you try to assist him with school work. He sometimes cries when her mother tries to show him how to do school work.)*

Parents seem to lack understanding of the current new curriculum and they do not know how to play their role as parents in the education of their slightly impaired children. Wright (2009:

29) is of the opinion that parents' literacy skills and attitudes about learning and formal education can have an immense impact on their children's education.

4.2.4.5 The negative influence of parental conformity to cultural norms, values and beliefs

Parents expressed different feelings and opinions with regard to cultural norms, values and beliefs for the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment.

(P6) ...*kuyinto eyaziwayo ukuthi uma izihlobo zilalanile zithola umntwana okhubazekile uma kungenziwanga isiko elidingekayo. Kulesimo sendodakazi yami isiko elidingekayo.*(it is a common belief that when the two relatives fall in love and have sexual intercourse they will get disabled children if the required ritual is not done. In cases similar to this of my daughter, a cultural ritual is required.)

The moral model of disability is implicated in the view that a disability has a moral or religious significance and that people become disabled either as a punishment or curse for personal or inherited sins, or as a means for the redemption or inspiration of others (Gill 1999: 281).

(P7)...*angifuni nokuyicabanga nje leyonto ngoba anginayo imali yokwenzela ingane yami amasiko.* (I do not want even to think about it because I do not have money to do cultural rituals for my children.)

However, (P4) has tried it: ...*akusikho ukukhaleleka kwamasiko ngoba sesizame konke ngisho izinyanga nezangoma. Simenzele wonke amasiko kodwa asiwuboni umehluko...* (It is not about cultural norms, values and beliefs because we have done everything for him. We have even gone to traditional healers and *Sangomas* to seek help but nothing comes up.)

Madlala 1990 (Engelbrecht et al. 2005: 187) reports that, when confronted with educational problems, including special educational needs, many parents regard traditional healing as an important resource to turn to. Some parents seem to have cultural beliefs that make them think that barriers to learning are caused by violated cultural norms that were not respected. They believe there is no solution to the child's problem and unless a certain ritual is performed, the child is doomed by an ancestral curse.

4.2.5 What are the effects of parents' limited participation in their children's education? (Research Question 2)

The researcher held conversations, discussions and interviews with the parents and teachers to explore their opinions. One parent said:

P7: Ngingathokoza kakhulu uma ngingathola usizo lokuthi ngikwazi ukusiza ingane yami ngomsebenzi wesikole ekhaya. Lemfundo entsha thina asiyazi futhi yenza kubenzima ukusiza ingane ngoba thina asifundile (I can highly appreciate if I can be assisted to support my child with her school work at home. The new curriculum makes it difficult for us as parents because we didn't get good education in our times.)

And another parent (P2) added: *Ey angazi ke.* (I am not sure.)

The parents' responses indicate that most parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment seem to have lost hope of any success in the education of their children; they show some willingness to comply with all attempts at intervention. Although parents may be aware that their involvement in their children's education is vital for the children's education success, the teachers and school authorities seem to grapple with how this involvement may occur (see Chapter Two for details). Educationists around the world have been trying for years to provide guidance in this respect (Avvisati et al. 2010: 16) while parents may be said to be giving up.

4.2.5.1 Schools as a place of abandonment; relief for the parents

Limited or absence of participation by parents seems to be nurturing the perception that schools are merely a place equivalent to "day care". For many parents it is not necessary that their children must, or needs to, pass or be promoted to the next class:

(P4): Idluliswa kanjani ingane yami iye kwelinye I klasi ibe ingakawazi umsebenzi wakuleliklasi eliphansi? Yini ezokwenzeka eklasini elilandelo? Kumele bayeke othisha ukudlulisa ingane uma beyibona ukuthi ayikakakulungeli ukudlula. (How can my child be promoted to the next class without comprehending the work of a lower grade? What will happen there in that class? Teachers must stop condoning the learner if he/she is not yet ready to progress.)

(P3) kuyafana nje ngoba noma ngingeza esikoleni awukho umehluko ngoba ingane yami iyagula...abekho osista abazongisiza ngemithi. (Whether I am there at school or

not, the child is gona be the same...if the child is sick they will call me, but there are no sisters to give them medication.)

This highlights the need to intensify awareness, backed by social policy, of the importance of education for children with mild intellectual impairment. This awareness must target people with less education and in rural areas.

4.3. Interview with teachers (SBST)

The interview with the teachers reveals the following themes and subthemes:

- ✓ ***Teachers expressed their frustration due to the gap left by the absence of parents' participation***
 - ◆ Teachers' perceptions of causes of non-parental involvement in education.
 - ◆ Lack of parental involvement programmes.

- ✓ ***The implications of non-parental involvement in teaching and learning***
 - ◆ The challenges of involving parents.
 - ◆ Parents' incapacity to support their children.
 - ◆ Lack of communication as a barrier to parental involvement.
 - ◆ Poor school attendance and punctuality.

4.3.1 Teachers expressed frustration due to the gap left by the absence of parents' participation

Landsberg et al. (2005: 222) state that one of the major changes that educators have to deal with in education is diversity of children and parents in schools. They further stressed that diversity needs be regarded as an asset in inclusive education. Teachers expressed their frustration that they were not trained to deal with such challenges of teaching learners with mild intellectual impairment. For instance:

T3: It is not easy to involve parents. They do not accept that their children have got a problem. Sometimes a parent develops a bad perception if an educator is informing her about poor performance of her child. Parents are not availing themselves for discussions and this discourages educators.... There is no way we can do this alone; we have our own children you know!

T5 added that: *We [teachers] don't discuss these challenges as a staff in staff meetings neither nor in phase meetings. We just give a verbal report to the Head of Departments who also does nothing about the problem....*

They also emphasised the negative implications of the lack of parental involvement and their ignorance about the value of education. Majola (2008: 26) recommends that the parties involved in education that is the parents, teachers and learners, should be empowered in order to work as a "three legged pot". The message here is that if one of the legs breaks, the pot will not be able to function properly. The "triangle" of effective school design is sustained by a strong relationship among its stakeholders. It is necessary that all parties are empowered. The partnership will then be effective, because all parties are interdependent. Lack of support and parents distancing themselves influence teachers to neglect these learners and proceed with the rest of the learners who have no barriers to learning.

The second response (T5) seems to result from the lack of educational guidance and a clear directive about the explicit duties of teachers and parents in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment.

4.3.2 Teachers' perceptions of causes of non-parental involvement in education

When teachers were asked about their perceptions regarding the root causes of non-parental involvement in education, they generally answered that most parents find it difficult to accept that their children have got barriers to learning. Secondly there is a lack of parental involvement in programmes.

4.3.2.1 Parents' denial of their children's conditions

(T5): when you invite a parent and she never avail herself, the teacher is discouraged and the consequence is that the child will not get the required support... Also when you give child homework then the parent does not assist then a teacher become discouraged.....

(T3): the parents don't care especially those teenage parents who never accept that their child has problems. Some would prefer to pick up a quarrel with you (teacher) than to accept that she may be required to show up by the school often for reasons relating to her child condition ... it's really difficult!

At this point the teachers seem to blame the parents and the communication breakdown that often results from most parents' denial of their children's conditions. In fact, few teachers completely blame the schools' lack of appropriate programmes to manage the involvement of the parents.

4.3.2.2 Lack of proper parental involvement programmes

A consistent and significant research finding is that educators and school practices are more important predictors of family involvement than family variables such as socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity or race (Christenson & Sheridan 2001: 88, 109). Most teachers in the current study seem to relate the unavailability of school policy and programmes as impediments to effective parental involvement in education. For instance:

(T2) I can't blame parents. We are to blame ourselves. We don't have parental involvement programmes and policies for learners with barriers to learning....

(T1) felt that: most parents are really passionate and are willing to go at any length to support their child, but there is no co-ordinated programme to make this happen as it should be you know.... if you talk to the principals they respond positive but that never translates into action, at least not in this school. So teacher has to do everything on her own....

(T5) blames both the parents and the lack of appropriate programme by the school.... It is not easy to involve parents... They do not accept that their children have got a problem. Sometimes a parent develops a bad perception if an educator is informing her about poor performance of her child....

Most importantly, these responses imply an element of communication breakdown or misunderstanding between parents and teachers, which might be caused by the perception they have about each other. Literature suggest that, schools that are responsive to the needs of parents report high levels of parental involvement (Landsberg et al. 2005: 224) Policies and procedures can either facilitate or inhibit parental involvement. According to Hoover-Dempsey (1997: 15) the parents' degree of involvement is likely to be affected by the school itself. In other words, Hoover-Dempsey strongly believes that parents are more likely to be willing and able to become involved in their children's education if teachers appear to care about the welfare of the children, communicate respect for parents and develop effective means of communication with families. The study conducted by Majola (2008) in the Western Cape

reveals that there are many complex factors contributing to the problems of the non-involvement of parents. Her study reveals that parents' attitude to learners is a major cause of non-involvement. Christenson and Sheridan (2001: 45) pointed out that a major factor that contributes towards or hampers teacher efficacy is teacher training which equips teachers with essential teaching skills but offers limited if any training in how to work with parents and the community.

4.3.3 The challenges of involving parents

All the teachers interviewed emphasised many challenges they experienced when trying to involve parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment. The most predominant challenges mentioned include parents' denial of their children's condition (see section 4.3.2.1) parents' incapacity to support their children and lack of communication as a barrier to parental involvement

4.3.3.1 Parents' incapacity to support their children's literacy

According to Landsberg et al. (2005: 222) the legacy of education during the apartheid years left millions of parents illiterate and therefore unfamiliar with the routines, structures and expectation of schools. Illiteracy was stressed as the reason why parents were reluctant to participate in the education of their children with mild intellectual impairment. All the teachers agreed on this point. T4 said:

(T4)... in this area many parents are illiterate and they don't see the value of education. Parents do not have time....

Regardless of race or culture, parental education is a useful indicator of the level of support for academic endeavour and is associated with learner achievement. A parent's lack of education and/or low literacy level has a negative effect on their involvement in the child's education (Wright 2009: 29).

(T3)...They don't like that because with the disability grant of the child, they manage to survive with it. Now if the child is in special school, that money will be used to pay the intuition fee of special school.

Teacher (T5) even suggested that...*parents must be encouraged to attend Adult Basic Education.*

This seems to emphasise that poverty and illiteracy are barriers to parents' involvement in education. Teachers in the selected schools seem to have many challenges when involving

parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment. This was jeopardising the education of these learners.

4.3.3.2 Lack of communication as a barrier to parental involvement

Christenson and Sheridan (2001: 101) state that there is a reciprocal relationship between school climate and family involvement. They described the characteristics of a healthy climate of an inclusive school as:

- Sense of care;
- Cohesiveness and synergy that bonds people together;
- Direct communication that is open and honest;
- Equitable distribution of influence and power between role-players;
- Innovativeness;
- Adaptation; and
- Problem solving competence.

Another salient point generally agreed upon by the teachers is the communication barrier. The teachers expressed their frustration when trying to involve parents in the education of their children.

(T1) ... there is negative impact on teaching and learning when parents do homework for their children. Sometimes homework is not done and the learner will tell you that my mom said "why I didn't do this work at school?"

(T3)... I think it is the responsibility of the SMT, you know, to ensure that parents are involved in teaching and learning.

Parental empowerment is crucial for educating children with mild intellectual impairment. If parents are taught to read they can regularly listen to their children's reading at home. According to Malepo (Majola 2008: 26) when parents are able to spend at least 10 minutes, daily, listening to their children read, the children's reading performance will improve dramatically. Inappropriate and non-parental involvement in education may become a barrier to effective teaching and learning. Teachers in the current study suggest that lack of communication is a barrier to effective parental involvement in education.

4.3.3.3 Poor school attendance and punctuality

Absenteeism and late-coming of learners with mild intellectual impairment were raised by teachers as having an impact on teaching and learning. This reveals parents' reluctance to prioritise their children's education.

(T2) ... *It doesn't affect teaching and learning only but even the behaviour of the child. Parents absent their children for no sound reasons such a cattle dip and babysitting...*

Teachers suggest that non-parental involvement in education means that parents do not realise the negative impact of absenteeism and late coming of their children on teaching and learning. Oakes and Lipton (Govender 2007: 19) emphasize that when parents support learning at home, their children are almost certain to do well at school. Children from such families are likely to attend school regularly, respect school rules and routines, take class work seriously and do their homework. Even more important, when parents encourage their children to learn at home, the children are more likely to be intellectually ready to learn in school.

4.3.3.4 Observation on absenteeism

In this study the researcher employed what McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 352) call intensive observing and listening, in which the researcher obtains participants' perceptions of events and processes expressed in their actions as feelings, thoughts and beliefs. Observation intends to respond further to the second research question of: *What are the implications of parents' participation or limited participation in their children's education?* This aimed to observe the impact of parents' limited involvement in teaching and learning. For instance, the possible frustration and/or difficulties encountered by teachers as a result of learners who failed to do their homework or are not assisted by their parents; and how this affects teaching and learning. The data for observation is subsequently obtained from intensive observation and listening during school visitations. One of the teacher participants provided the class learner attendance register to the researcher for scrutiny. Table 5 is a copy of the original classroom attendance register.

classroom, parental help, in partnership with educators, is needed. The parents seem to be excluded or distancing themselves in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment.

4.3.4 How can these be improved to enhance inclusive education among learners with mild intellectual impairment? (Research Question 3)

When teachers were asked what would be solutions to the problem of limited parental involvement in their children's education, their responses pointed in the same direction. Teachers unanimously stated that schools need to develop a policy and programme for parental involvement in education for all learners with barriers to learning.

4.3.4.1 Development of parental involvement programmes and policies

To encourage parents to become more active participants in the education of their children, teachers recommended:

(T4) ... Actually, we don't have a programme for parental involvement. However, I as a teacher, I do invite parents if I identify a problem with the child.

(T1) Educators must try to assist the parents through parental involvement programmes. Parents must be invited to school to have discussion with class teachers and observe their children's work, on a regular basis.

According to these sentiments, teachers' suggestions concerning parental involvement in education encourage the initiation of proper policies and programmes. Parental involvement in education influences learner achievements. Educators and other practitioners initiated numerous programmes, worldwide, to encourage parents to become more active participants in the education of their children (Jeynes 2011: 166).

4.5 Document analysis

To provide rich and quality data, the researcher probed parents' involvement in education by reading and analysing some schools' official documents such as parents' attendance registers, minutes of meetings, daily occurrence registers, admission books, log books and SA-SAMS data.

➤ Parent's attendance register

The parents' attendance registers provide information on parents' poor attendance to school meetings. Comparing the schools' enrolment of approximately 300 learners but less than 20% parents attended the previous parents' meetings clearly indicates the very poor attendance of parents at school meetings.

➤ **Minutes of the parents' meeting**

The minutes of the meeting reveal that there were no apology reports from those parents who did not attend the meeting. It was noted that all the schools were having similar experiences. Even though the agenda indicated the critical school issues such as budget, parents do not attend. Minutes of the parents' meetings also indicate that there were nothing said about the roles and responsibilities of parents in the education of their children. Most of the minutes of parents meetings were about the school budget. Figure 5 is a copy of parents' meeting agenda taken from one of the schools participated in the research.

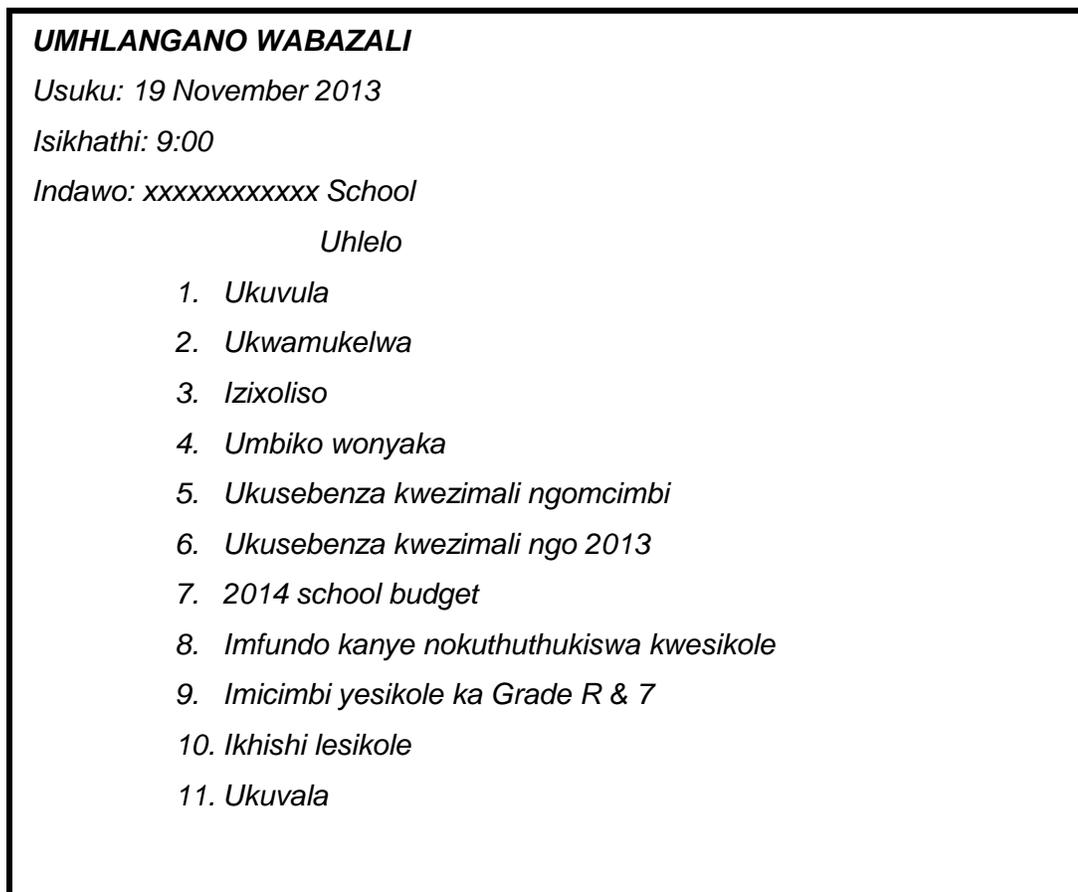


Figure 4: Parents' meeting agenda

➤ **Daily occurrence register**

This document indicated the involvement of parents in the educational misbehaviour of children. Parents were made to sign for their children as witnesses to the reprimanding of the bad behaviour. Table 6 presents the involvement of parents in daily disciplinary actions in one of the schools participated in the research.

Table 6: Daily occurrence register

PHOLELA District: SISONKE School: X X X X X					
Grade	Age	Type of Offence	Correctional Measure	Parent Witness	Educator's signature
1	5	late coming	Warning	R.S. Sosibo	
1	6	late coming	Warning	Konbo	Mr Sosibo
3	9	late coming	Warning	Sosibo	Mr Sosibo
4	9	late coming	Warning	A. Magoso	J. Moko
4	9	late coming	Warning	A. Magoso	J. Moko
6	14	late coming	Warning	B. Magoso	Signature
6	14	late coming	Warning	A. Magoso	Signature

Parents seem to be involved when there is a disciplinary measure to be taken against the child who has done something wrong at school, such as breaking school rules.

➤ **Admission registers**

All admission registers were updated with all the required information available. Schools were using the latest administrative Microsoft known as SA-SAMS for comprehensive school data administration. All the information about learners and parents was available in the system.

➤ **Enrolment register**

Only two schools were noted to have overcrowded classrooms. Furniture was available and there was no shortage of teachers. There were no multi-grade classrooms in all participating schools. The schools' enrolment varied between 200 and 600 learners.

4.6 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results of the study are discussed and analysed in relation to the critical questions of the study set out in the literature review (Chapter Two).

4.6.1 How do parents in mainstream schools perceive their involvement in education of their children with mild intellectual impairment? Q1

The first research question explored parental perceptions concerning their involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairment. Parents' perceptions about the education of learners with barriers to learning were found to be inadequate and needs to be changed. The study stressed the negative impact of parents' perceptions in the education of learners with intellectual impairment. The parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment seem to be lacking any educational ambitions for their children. According to Holloway et al. (2008: 4) parental aspirations refer to idealistic hopes or goals that parents may form regarding future attainment. They suggest that parents who hold high aspirations for their children's future are likely to be more willing to exert efforts to ensure that those aspirations are realized. Epstein's theory of the influence of overlapping spheres was discovered to be pulling apart instead of pushing together the interaction between families and schools.

Parents and teachers expressed concern that there was no adequate parental awareness and involvement in programmes or policies for the education of learners with mild intellectual impairments in their schools. Holloway et al. (2008: 7) point out that parental awareness about their role has been identified as a major contributor to their willingness to engage in supportive parenting. The selected mainstream schools at Sisonke District were found to not yet be transformed into healthy inclusive schools proposed by Christenson and Sheridan in the literature.

According to the results of the study, most parents of learners with mild intellectual impairments seem to be stressed and have negative attitudes to schools, as they know that when they are invited to school it is about the poor performance of their children. According to Bandura (1977: 4) research conducted in a variety of countries revealed that individuals with high self-efficacy in a particular area exert effort in that area, persevere in the face of difficulty and respond resiliently to adversity. They are less prone to self-defeating thought patterns and they experience less stress and depression than those with lower self-efficacy.

It was clear that the negative attitude of some parents to active participation in their children's education, and ignorance about the value of education, resulted from the effects of socio-cultural stigma on people with intellectual impairment or disability. According to Bourdieu (Donkor 2010: 27) cultural capital theories and educational success entails a whole range of cultural behaviour. This perception seemed to have inherited the exclusionary and deficit-based assumption that abandoning these children to the hands of teachers brings period of relief to parents. The perception has been created by the impression of complacency and despair in parents that, no matter how much input or effort committed, the outcome would be the same. Bauer and Brown (Landsberg et al. 2005: 222) emphasize that understanding a family culture is critical to understanding the family because linguistic and cultural differences can create communication problems and can be a reason parents feel unwelcome at school.

4.6.2 What are the implications of parents' limited participation in their children's education? Q2

The themes and subthemes which emerged as a result of this question confirm that parents' perceptions of involvement in education had effects for their limited participation in education of their children with mild intellectual impairments. In human capital and social capital theories, Goldin (Landsberg et al. 2005: 24) observed that there is general belief in the symbiotic relationship between the wealth of a nation and its people, which is human capital.

In this study, teachers experienced challenges and felt discouraged when parents distanced themselves and taught children in their own ways. Some parents may find it difficult to attend school activities but are still involved in their children's learning at home. As Landsberg et al. (2005: 221) state, school-based parental involvement is significantly related to socio-economic status, whereas home-based parental involvement is not. The teachers' perceptions of parents not accepting that their children were having barriers to learning were emphasised. Teachers suggested that non-parental involvement in education made parents not realise the negative impact of absenteeism and late coming on the teaching and learning of their children. According to Lemmer (2007: 221) Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence stresses the importance of family-school relationships and the mutual responsibility for children's learning and development. Children are best supported when schools and families work together in partnership to reach shared educational goals.

The present study revealed that the parents' lack of understanding of the current curriculum and unclear guidance about their roles as parents in the education of their children impacted

on their involvement in education. The restructuring and changes in methods of teaching and curriculum in the present-day education system are too overwhelming for some parents (Matheiw 1999: 6). According to Mbokodi et al. (2003: 17) parents' levels of education or low literacy levels discourage them from helping their children with school work. Parents were worried that they could not afford to buy school needs for their children. Parents are unable to provide books and other relevant learning material, which are necessary for successful study. Children have little access to privacy and comfort, which would enhance serious study. At the end of the school day, children go home to parents who have no resources to enrich them educationally (Mbokodi et al. 2003: 17).

The study revealed that parents' cultural beliefs gave them the perception that barriers to learning are caused by cultural norms that were not respected. They also believed that there is no solution to the child's problem other than the performance of a certain ritual. Mbokodi et al. (2003) stated that education is made irrelevant to the needs of the community if cultural traditions are ignored and learners are marginalised by teaching them insensitive curricular, while ignoring indigenous knowledge. The study also revealed that parents have no time to support their children with school work at home. Mbokodi et al. (2003) list the following other factors that were regarded as the cause of parents' limited participation in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairments:

- Lack of support programmes that empower parents to participate fully and meaningfully in education;
- Lack of guidance teachers' services that empower learners to enhance their skills;
- Lack of library facilities that would solve some of the learners' problems experienced at home.

4.6.3 How can parental involvement be improved to enhance inclusive education among learners with mild intellectual impairment? Q3

This question explored the means of improving parental cognition and involvement in the inclusive programmes for these learners. Lack of parental involvement policy and programmes for learners with mild intellectual impairments made it difficult for teachers to involve parents in the education of their children. Govender (2007: 22) is of the opinion that the school should play a pivotal role in encouraging parental involvement. Teachers suggested the following to improve parental involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairments:

- Parents must be encouraged to attend ABET classes;

- Parents' meetings must be held on a regular basis;
- Parental involvement policies and programmes must be in place;
- There must be early intervention;
- Communication must be improved; and
- Home visits must be carried out.

Some teachers were not recognising, involving and encouraging parents to support their children with mild intellectual impairment. According to Hoover-Dempsey (1997: 15) parents' degree of involvement is likely to be affected by the school itself. If teachers appear to care about the welfare of the children, communicate respect for parents and develop effective means of communication with families, parents are more likely to be willing and able to become involved in their children's education. Matheiw (1999: 6) lists some of the measures that can increase parental involvement in education:

- Sending home notes and daily report cards to keep parents informed of the pupil's progress;
- Regular meetings with parents to discuss progress;
- Avoiding words and phrases that may give parents false or undesirable impressions of their children or their exceptionality; and
- Avoiding professional jargon in communications.

4.7 THE STUDY FINDINGS RECAPPED

4.7.1 Parents perceptions of the value of education

The perceptions of participating parents of the value of education for learners with mild intellectual impairment have implications on how they perceived their involvement in education. The study showed that parent participants experienced severe trauma and stress when they were invited to school. Govender (2007: 22) points out that, while it is important to acknowledge the role of parents in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment, how this role is encouraged is dependent on what the policy of the schools is and how parents perceive their involvement. Parents' ignorance of the value of education emerged when they denied that their children had barriers to learning. The acceptance that intellectual disability exists in certain individuals in society as an objective reality has been expressed in the various ways of naming this perceived difference. Its implication is the complicity of language used in the exclusion of individuals (Chapell et al. 2001: 47). Given the significant role parents could

play in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment, participating parents' perceptions, attitudes and values towards their education was found to be inadequate.

4.7.2 Lack of policies and programmes for parental involvement in education

Although the new policies and legislation in South Africa (White Paper on Education and Training; 1995 & South African Schools' Act 1996) support the optimal involvement of parents in the education of their children, they also indicate the need and importance of active participation by parents in the development of the Individual Education Program (IEP) for each child (Mohsin et al. 2011: 78). The study emphasised that the selected schools were not yet playing their role of developing effective parental involvement policies and programmes for learners with mild intellectual impairment. The literature suggests that parents can be involved in any part of the education and training of their children. Many research programmes have indicated the good outcomes of parents' participation in early intervention programmes and home learning but also the necessity for outreach programmes for children with intellectual disability (Mohsin et al. 2011: 78). According to Mohsin et al.(2011; 78) there are processes in which parents can be involved, such as identification, assessment, educational programming, training, teaching and evaluation.

4.7.3 The influence of cultural norms and beliefs

Cultural beliefs seem to exacerbate parents' negative attitudes towards involvement in the education of their children with mild intellectual impairment. According to Bourdieu (Donkor 2010: 7) cultural capital theories and educational success entails a whole range of cultural behaviour. The present study showed that parents' perceptions of cultural norms and beliefs were discouraging them to participate in their children's education. This perception seemed to have inherited the exclusionary and deficit based assumption that abandoning these children in the hands of teachers brings moments of relief to parents. The perception has been created by the impression of complacency and despair in parents that, no matter how much input or effort was committed, the outcome would be the same.

4.7.4 Parents' poor socio-economic conditions

Poverty and illiteracy of parents were illuminated as the major barriers to their effective participation in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment. The parents' lack of education and/or low literacy level has a negative effect on involvement on a child's education. Wright (2009: 29) is of the opinion that parents' literacy skills and attitudes towards learning

and formal education can have an immense impact on their children's education. The poor socio-economic conditions hindered parents from getting enough time to support their children with school work. Parent participants were struggling to buy educational requisites and to support their children with proper nutrition. The study showed that most of the children with mild intellectual impairment were also sick.

4.7.5 Impact of non-parental involvement in teaching and learning

Lack of parental involvement in education in selected schools was discovered to have an impact on teaching and learning. Mohsin et al. (2011: 78) stated that in training of functional skills among children with disability, parents are of great help in achieving target goals. They are considered as leading mentors for children in their early life, as well as their later life. Parents can play a vital role in the training and development of children with intellectual impairment. Implications of limited parental awareness and involvement had an important impact on inclusive education among learners with mild intellectual impairment. The study by Diamond (1994) revealed that a significant number of teachers have higher expectations of parents than they did before. Lack of support from parents discouraged teachers and caused learners with mild intellectual impairment to experience continuous failure and to drop out of school.

4.8 Conclusion

Chapter Four has given the study's findings. Detailed results obtained from interviews with parents and teachers and the scrutiny of documents were presented, discussed and analysed, using a thematic method. Chapter Five presents the summary, conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the data and analysed and discussed the results. This included linking the results to the study literature in order to justify the results. Chapter Five presents the summary of the findings, the conclusion and recommendations that emanate from the study's findings.

5.2 Summary

The current study has achieved its main objective of investigating how parents in Sisonke District perceive their involvement in their mildly intellectual disabled children's education, the effects and how their involvement can be improved (Section 1.5). The important contribution of the study to the formidable body of knowledge, seriously needed in South Africa was highlighted by the low levels of education, poor socio-economic status, illiteracy, high number of learners with barriers to learning and mild intellectual impairment making 83% of the intellectual impairment (Section 1.4).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Epstein's model of overlapping spheres of influence were found to be relevant, appropriate and illuminative of the problem being studied (Section 2.2). Painstaking research in the field of parental involvement in education, inclusive education and learners with mild intellectual impairment was critically and logically presented (Section 2).

The empirical investigation using qualitative research was utilised to generate, interpret and analyse data of the study (Section 3.1). A qualitative investigation of parental involvement in five mainstream schools was conducted by collecting data through observation, documents analysis and interviews with 10 parents and five teachers. All the participants were females. Interviews with parents were conducted in Isizulu language because all parents in the research were Zulu speakers (Section 3.5). Data analysis and interpretation process was accomplished according to the strategy developed by Wellington. This process involved the researcher typically beginning the analysis of qualitative data by reading data carefully. The

next step was to induce themes and coding and finally, was the interpretation of the findings (Section 3.7).

Data collected was presented in the form of inductive thematic analysis. The main themes and corresponding subthemes were used to present and summarise the data using verbatim examples from the interview and observation (Section 4). The study findings are as follows:

- The perceptions of parents of the value of education for learners with mild intellectual impairment have effect on how they perceive their involvement in education. Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence was extensively tested by investigating the push and pull factors in the family-school partnership (Section 4.2.1).
- Parents and teachers' lack of knowledge of the value of inclusive education emerged in mainstream schools when the parents denied that their children were having mild intellectual impairment and teachers advising parents to take learners with mild intellectual impairment to special school (Section 4.3).
- Lack of parental involvement initiatives by the schools were revealed by the absence of relevant school policies and programmes (Section 4.3.2.2).
- Poor socio-economic status and manifestation of the legacy of education during the apartheid years which left millions of parents illiterate and therefore unfamiliar with routines, structures and expectation of schools were found to have major influence in causing limited parental involvement (Section 4.2.4).
- Limited support from parents influenced teachers to be discouraged and left them with no other option but to keep these mildly intellectually disabled learners in class with no collaborative programme of support from all stake holders (Section 4.3.2). This finding was relevant to Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory where in a Mesosystem - schools influence family and family influences schools in multidirectionality.

5.3 Conclusion

This small exploratory study contributed to the existing research on parental involvement in education. It is one of the first research studies to consider parental involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairment, from the perspective of individual parents and teachers. The importance of this study is that it gives qualitative data about parental involvement in education of learners with barriers to learning. The study forms the basis for future research, since it is grounded on a small sample of five mainstream schools in a single district. The study has revealed very significant issues with regard to the inclusive education

policy which adds to the body of research. The researcher strongly believes that this study managed to illuminate critical issues in parental involvement in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment at mainstream schools in the Sisonke District.

The study concludes that there are many complex factors contributing to the problems of involving parents in the education of their mildly intellectually impaired children. The research has revealed the following overall conclusions about parental involvement at mainstream schools admitting learners with mild intellectual impairment:

- Lack of adequate and appropriate parental involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairment is influenced by factors such as poor socio-economic background, high illiteracy, cultural beliefs, parents' denial of intellectual impairment, diversity, lack of teacher training in parental involvement in education, lack of healthy inclusive climate characteristics, parents' attitudes and perceptions;
- School Management Teams (SMTs) are not creating a conducive climate of an inclusive school which displays healthy school characteristics in order to improve parental involvement at mainstream schools admitting learners with mild intellectual impairment;
- The investigation found that there is an urgent need for teachers to acquire knowledge, skills and strategies for active involvement of parents in inclusive mainstream schools admitting learners with mild intellectual impairment.

5.4 Recommendations

The researcher recommends that schools must develop parental involvement programmes and policies. As it became clear that parental involvement influences learner achievements, Jeynes (2011: 166) recorded that educators and other practitioners initiated numerous programmes worldwide, to encourage parents to become more active participants in the education of their children. There is a need for continuous advocacy campaigns and the monitoring and support of parental involvement programmes in schools. This will assist in improving awareness and accountability of parents and teachers to implement inclusive education in mainstream schools. According to Malepo (Majola 2008: 26) without empowerment, the parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment will find it difficult to contribute fruitfully to the welfare of the school and education of their children.

In order to activate motivation of parental involvement and perceptions of parents about school, the researcher is recommending what Christenson and Sheridan (2001: 101) called a

reciprocal relationship between school climate and family involvement. The schools must display characteristics of a healthy inclusive school such as:

- Sense of care;
- Cohesiveness and synergy that bonds people together;
- Direct communication that is open and honest;
- Equitable distribution of influence and power between role-players;
- Adaptation to parent's needs; and
- Problem solving competence.

Concerning the lack of school parental involvement policies and programmes, the researcher recommends that teachers must be trained on how to work with parents and families. Christenson and Sheridan (2001: 45) state that teacher training is one of the factors contributing towards or hampering effective parental involvement. Literature suggests that teachers are taught essential teaching skills during their training, but receive limited if any training in how to work with parents and community.

Background knowledge about socio-economic status of Sisonke District must be used to identify children who are at risk of failure but not be used as an excuse of not engaging parents. Extensive research has found that the following factors in the home environment had greater effect on learner success than socio-economic status as a single variable: parents' attitudes, guidance and expectation of education, quality of verbal interaction, participation in cultural and learning-related activities, and overall stability (Landberg et al. 2005: 221). The researcher recommends that the afore mentioned factors must be a priority of teachers when involving parents. According to Epstein et al. (2002: 11) most teachers would like to involve parents, but many do not know how and are subsequently afraid to take action. Landsberg et al. (2005: 225) suggested that it is crucial for the success of inclusion that teachers are trained to collaborate effectively with parents and be informed about the unique common characteristics of family dynamics. Teachers must be informed that linguistic and cultural differences can create communication problems and be the reason why some parents feel out of place and unwelcome at school (Landsberg et al. 2005: 222).

The results of the present study encourage further studies on parental involvement in the education of children with barriers to learning. Parents' perceptions of their involvement in education would have a positive impact on the available body of research. Previous research indicates the significant educational benefits when parents are actively involved in the education of learners. According to Holloway et al. (2008: 1) a great deal of research in the

USA and other Western countries support the notion that parental involvement generally has a positive effect on children's achievement. In the present study, parents and teachers indicated many factors that are impediments to parental involvement in education. This result from teachers and parents suggests that further research be conducted to clarify more specific challenges of parental involvement in education. The researcher recommends that:

- Quantitative research with regard to parents' views about their involvement in education of children with barriers to learning be conducted in order to achieve a comparable survey.
- Another recommendation is the replication of this study, or conducting similar studies, utilizing different demographic groups. Further studies with other schools in other districts would add to the body of research and provide results that can then be compared and contrasted to those found in this study. Studies could also be performed with a focus on single grades or single schools in order to help those individual grades or schools make decisions with regard to how to improve parental involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairment.
- Similar studies could be conducted for learners with other impairment. The findings could then be compared and contrasted. In a study in eight villages in another rural area, Kromberg et al. (Adnams 2010: 437) screened a total of 6,692 children aged two to nine years house-to-house, using standard questions. In a second phase the 722 children (10.8%) who screened positive were clinically examined and assessed neuron-developmentally by a paediatrician. Overall, 4.3% of children had one or more of five disabilities (intellectual, visual, hearing, movement disorder or epilepsy).
- Finally, there is a need for a similar study in higher grades, where learner drop-outs are very significant. Annual National Assessment and Grade Twelve results could be used for the analysis of parental involvement in education.

Based on the research findings, the researcher recommends the following practical guidelines of parental involvement at mainstream schools admitting learners with mild intellectual impairment:

- Schools must be assisted by the District Based Support Team (DBST) to develop parental involvement policies and programmes;

- There should be continuous monitoring and support of parental involvement programmes in mainstream schools;
- There should be advocacy campaigns on parental involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairment;
- Development of a module in teacher training that deals with parental involvement in education of learners with different barriers to learning;
- In-service training for the School Management Team (SMT) and School Based Support Team (SBST) members on developing parental involvement programmes and policies;
- Parents should be given a curriculum handbook guide explaining how to support the child at home during each grade.

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Appendix A: Letter requesting permission to conduct research - KZN DoBE

P O BOX 319
CREIGHTON
3263
25 May 2014

The Head of Department
KZN Department of basic Education

Dear Sir

Re: Application for permission to conduct a research study in KZN institutions

My name is Thembani Ephraim Xaba. I am currently studying towards my Master's Degree in Inclusive Education at UNISA. The topic of my dissertation is: ***Parental involvement in mainstream schools admitting learners with mild intellectual impairment: A case of Sisonke District.***

I humbly request your permission to explore educators and parents' perceptions on parental involvement in the education of learners with disabilities (mild intellectual impairment).

To achieve the above, I have chosen five mainstream primary schools in the Sisonke district. The research will take the following form:

- Interviews with the respective teachers and parents
- Documents analysis
- Observation

All sessions will be pre-arranged and explained to participants. The research methods will be clarified before data collection. Confidentiality of all the information received will be assured. I sincere hope that this request will receive your approval.

The details of my supervisor are as follows:

Professor M. O. Maguvhe

Contact No. (012) 441-5702

Email address: maguvmo@unisa.ac.za

I will gladly provide any further information that may be required.

Yours sincerely

Mr Thembani E Xaba

Contact No. 0721849305

Email address: xabate@vodamail.co.za

Appendix B: Letter requesting permission to conduct research – Sisonke District

P O BOX 319
CREIGHTON
3263
25 May 2014

The District Director
Sisonke District of Education

Dear Sir

Re: Application for permission to conduct a research study in the Sisonke District institutions

My name is Thembani Ephraim Xaba. I am currently studying towards a Masters' Degree in Inclusive Education at UNISA. The topic of my dissertation is: ***Parental involvement in mainstream schools admitting learners with mild intellectual impairment: A case of Sisonke District.***

I humbly request your permission to explore educators and parents' perceptions on parental involvement in education of learners with disabilities (mild intellectual impairment).

To achieve the above, I have chosen five mainstream primary schools in Sisonke district. These schools are xxxxxxx Primary, xxxxxxx Primary, xxxxxxx Primary, xxxxxxx Primary and xxxxxxx Primary. The research will take the following form:

- Interviews with the respective educators and parents
- Documents analysis
- Observation

All sessions will be pre-arranged and explained to participants. Research methods will be clarified before data collection. Confidentiality of all the information received will be assured. I sincere hope that this request will receive your approval.

The details of my supervisor are as follows:

Professor M O Maguvhe

Contact No. (012) 441-5702

Email address: maguvmo@unisa.ac.za

Yours sincerely

Mr Thembani E Xaba

Contact No. 0721849305

Email address: xabate@vodamail.co.za

Appendix C: Letter requesting permission to conduct research - schools

P O Box 319
CREIGHTON
3263
25 May 2014

Dear Principal,

Request for permission to conduct research at your school:

I am a student at the University of South Africa trying to further my studies in Inclusive Education. As part of my Masters studies with UNISA, I am investigating parental involvement in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment at Sisonke District.

In order to complete the requirements for the course, I have to become acquainted with various aspects of parental involvement in the education of mildly intellectual disabled learners in inclusive settings. I am planning to obtain the necessary information for this research project through the use of interviews, documents analysis and observation. Therefore I kindly request your permission to allow all School Based Support Team teachers and parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment of your school to participate in the study that will not take more than 50 minutes of their time.

Please note that your identity, all identifying information of the school, the names of the teachers, parents and learners as well as their responses will be kept strictly confidential and will remain anonymous. I also assure you that I will not disturb the normal school routine with this project or cause any financial implications for the school. There are no costs involved and no compensation will be given to participants in this research study.

You are free to withdraw your consent for the teacher and parents' participation at any time and for any reason without consequence.

Any findings pertaining to this research study will be made available for your perusal should you wish to examine them.

Your consent, as requested herein, would be greatly appreciated. Should you have any questions and/or concern in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0721849305.

With sincere appreciation for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

T E Xaba

Postgraduate student

Prof M O Maguvhe

Research supervisor

Please complete the following in order to grant permission to the educators of your school to participate in research project:

I, _____ hereby give my informed consent that the educators of my school are permitted to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Letter of informed consent (interview)

Dear Participant,

Permission for research project:

I am a student at the University of South Africa trying to further my studies in Inclusive Education. As part of my Masters studies with UNISA, I am investigating parental involvement in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairment at Sisonke District.

In order to complete the requirements for the course, I have to become acquainted with various aspects of parental involvement in the education of mildly intellectual disabled learners in inclusive settings (mainstream classroom).

I am asking you to participate in this research because you have been identified as a parent/SBST teacher with a child who has been identified as having intellectual barriers to learning. You will be asked to participate in an interview that will not take more than 50 minutes of your time. The researcher will be observing the relationship between the school and parents. Classroom visits will be done to observe the effects of parental involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairment. Some school documents will be requested for analysis.

Your participation in the research is completely voluntarily. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate and may discontinue your participation in the interview at any time without consequence. There are no costs involved and no compensation will be given to participants in this research study.

Any and all personal and private information, which may be regarded as sensitive, including but not limited to names and locations will be treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity throughout and subsequent to the study. You will not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. Any findings pertaining to this research study will be made available for your perusal should you wish to examine them.

Your consent, as requested herein, would be greatly appreciated. Should you have any questions and/or concern in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0721849305.

I thank you in anticipation of your kind co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

T E Xaba

Postgraduate student

Prof M O Maguvhe

Research supervisor

Please complete the following in order to confirm your willingness to participate in the research project:

I, _____ hereby give my informed consent to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Appendix D: Interview guide

Each interview with parents took approximately 40 minutes.

1. Parents Interview Schedule

School	Date	Time	
		From	To
A	01 September 2014	9:00	10:00
B	02 September 2014	9:00	10:00
C	03 September 2014	9:00	10:00
D	04 September 2014	9:00	10:00
E	05 September 2014	9:00	10:00

2. Teachers Interview Schedule:

School	Date	Time	
		From	To
A	01 September 2014	10:00	11:00
B	02 September 2014	10:00	11:00
C	03 September 2014	10:00	11:00
D	04 September 2014	10:00	11:00
E	05 September 2014	10:00	11:00

3. Parents and teachers (Participants) observation schedule

School	Date	Time	
		From	To
A	01 September 2014	9:00	11:00
B	02 September 2014	9:00	11:00
C	03 September 2014	9:00	11:00
D	04 September 2014	9:00	11:00
E	05 September 2014	9:00	11:00

4. Documents Analysis Schedule:

School	Date	Time	
		From	To
A	01 September 2014	11:00	11:30
B	02 September 2014	11:00	11:30
C	03 September 2014	11:00	11:30
D	04 September 2014	11:00	11:30
E	05 September 2014	11:00	11:30

1. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Interviews with parents of learners with mild intellectual impairments

Seven parents were interviewed separately in their respective children's schools using the same instrument. The aim was to explore their perceptions and views on the topic of this study. The interviews lasted for not more than forty minutes per parent.

Section A :- Perceptions of the value of education

- How do you perceive the value of education for learners who have barriers to learning

- Do you think the education of your child is important? Why?
- What are your educational ambitions for your child?
- Is there any difference between educated and uneducated person? Why?

Section B :- Economic circumstances

- How your economic situation is affects your role of supporting your child's education?
- Do you experience some problems in buying the school needs for your child? Please elaborate.
- How do you get help/support to buy school needs?
- Do you think the school is supportive to you and your child? Why?

Section C :- Parental practices that support education

- How do you support your child in his/her education?
 - At home?
 - at school?

- Does the school assist you on what to do and how to support your child with the school work?
- How often do you check your child's school work?
- Is there a duty roaster/activity routine for your child at home? Why?

Section D :- Parental conformity with cultural norms, values and beliefs

- According to your cultural norms, values and beliefs, how can learners with mild intellectual impairment be assisted?
- What cultural norms do you think can help learners with learning disabilities?
- Do you think cultural norms, values and beliefs are important in education of your child? Why?
- Do you think there is a difference between the school culture and home cultural norms, values and beliefs? Why?

Section E :- Parent-school relations and support for children' s education

- How do you feel when you are invited to a parents meeting? Why?
- How is your relationship with the teachers of your child?
- How often do you get feedback about performance of your child?
- What role do you think the parents can play in his/her child's education?
- How are you involved by the school in the education of your child?

2. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH SBST/SMT TEACHER

The interview with teachers took approximately forty minutes per teacher.

- The five educators of the five selected mainstream primary schools were interviewed separately. The aim was to explore parental involvement in education of learners with

mild intellectual impairment. Educators' questions were asked around the following topics:

SECTION A:- Parental involvement programs

- Does the school have any parental involvement programmes/plans for learners with mild intellectual impairment?
- Briefly explain them
- Are they effectively implemented?
- What are the challenges?

SECTION B:- Parental involvement policies of school

- Do you have any policies that deal with parental involvement?
- Briefly explain them.
- Are the policies implemented successfully?
- What are the challenges?

SECTION C:- Challenges and successes in parental involvement

- What are the challenges of involving parents in the teaching and learning for learners with mild intellectual impairment?
- What are the successes in involving parents in the teaching and learning for learners with mild intellectual impairment?

SECTION D:- Impact on teaching and learning

- What is the impact on teaching and learning when parent of learners with mild intellectual impairment are involved?
- What is the impact on teaching and learning when parent of learners with mild intellectual impairment are not involved?

SECTION E:- Parent-educator relations

- Can you please explain briefly how are the relations between parents of learners with mild intellectual impairment and teachers?

SECTION F:- Causes of non- parental involvement

- In your opinion, what do you think are the causes of non-parental involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairment?

SECTION G:- Suggestions for improving parental involvement in education

- What do you suggest must be done in order to improve parental involvement in education of learners with mild intellectual impairment?
- The order and wording of the questions varied from interview. The researcher asked further questions to explore some of the participants' answers further. There will be no right or wrong answer. The researcher was interested in hearing about participants' views and experience.

3. OBSERVATION

Observation took approximately two hours per school

The researcher took field notes of the following observations:

- Parental involvement in education
- Parent-teacher relationship

- Parents' non-verbal expression
- Teachers' non-verbal expression

4. DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS

Analysing school documents took not more than 30 minutes.

The following documents were analysed by the researcher:

- Registers
- Learners' profile
- Learners' workbooks
- Parental involvement policies
- Minutes of the parents meetings
- School year plan
- Parental involvement program

DR RICHARD STEELE

BA, HDE, MTech(Hom)

HOMEOPATH and EDUCATOR

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EDITING CERTIFICATE

Re: **Mr T. E. Xaba (UNISA)**

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AT MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS ADMITTING LEARNERS WITH MILD INTELLECTUAL IMPAIRMENT: A CASE OF SISONKE DISTRICT

I confirm that I have edited this dissertation and references for language and layout. I am a freelance editor specialising in proofreading and editing academic documents. My original tertiary degree which I obtained at UCT was a B.A. with English as a major and I went on to complete an H.D.E. (P.G.) Sec. with English as my teaching subject. I obtained a distinction for my M.Tech. dissertation in the Department of Homeopathy at Technikon Natal in 1999 (now the Durban University of Technology). In my capacity as a part-time lecturer in the Department of Homeopathy I have supervised numerous Master's degree dissertations.

Dr Richard Steele

30 June 2015

electronic



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Nomangisi Ngubane

Tel: 033 392 1004

Ref:2/4/8/193

Mr TE Xaba
P O Box 319
Creighton
3263

Dear Mr Xaba

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "Parental involvement in the education of learners with mild intellectual impairments at Sisonke district", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 July 2014 to 30 June 2015.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education. (Sisonke District)

Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD
Head of Department: Education
Date: 22 July 2014

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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