THE INCLUSIVENESS OF GROUPING PRACTICES IN REGULAR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN REGION OF SOUTH AFRICA

By

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DECLARATION

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I declare that **THE INCLUSIVENESS OF GROUPING PRACTICES IN REGULAR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN SCHOOLS** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE DATE

(Mr. Nilford Hove)

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ABSTRACT

Learner grouping is one of the classroom instructional pedagogies that can facilitate inclusion of all learners in the regular classrooms. This research sought to establish the inclusiveness of grouping practices in regular primary schools in the Johannesburg Metropolitan region in light of the policy on inclusion. The study was carried out through the lens of inclusive pedagogy by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011).

Qualitative methodology was used through descriptive phenomenology. Data collection was carried out by means of observation and interviews with 15 teachers at fifteen primary schools. Data were analyzed using model by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010).

Three themes emerged from the study, which were: (a) current grouping practices; (b) inclusiveness of the grouping practices; and (c) strategies to enhance inclusivity in the grouping practices. Findings revealed three common grouping practices namely, mixed ability grouping, ability grouping and pairing. However, some teachers do not group their learners but teach them on a one-on-one basis. These grouping practices showed varied levels of inclusiveness, emanating from what teachers do when grouping learners, as well as how learners relate to each other when they are in the groups – whether they accept each other or they exclude some from the learning activities within their groups. However, none of the grouping practices was found to be in line with all the principles of inclusion.

The following recommendations are put forth: (a) class sizes should be between 25-30 learners to enable teachers to have small group sizes that are inclusive; (b) groups should be used interchangeably according to the concept being taught and should be subject specific; (c) ability grouping should be disregarded as it fuels labelling; (d) learners with special educational needs should be given more time to complete tasks within the groups; (e) as well as opportunities for differentiated instruction.

A model of an inclusive grouping practice was suggested, which envisages group sizes of between two and six learners that accommodate learners of different ages, gender, backgrounds, ability levels, as well as being able to use teaching/learning resources that address the needs of diverse learners, and differentiated instruction.

Key Terms defined: Grouping practices, Inclusive education, Regular classes, Ability grouping, Social model, Differentiated instruction, Cooperative learning, Social skills, Pairing, Mixed ability grouping.

I-ABSTRACT

Ukufundisa ngokudidiyela abafundi kubonakala kungenye yezindlela zokufundisa ezingasiza ekuthuthukiseni ukubandakanya bonke abafundi ekufundeni ngaphandle kokuphuma iqhubu nabathize emagunjini okufundela ajwayelekile. Lolucwaningo beluhlose ukubonisa imikhutshana ehambisana nokubandakanyeka kwamaqenjana abafundi ezikoleni zamabanga aphansi e Johannesburg Metropolitan region ngokwenqubo-mgomo yokubandakanya bonke abafundi. Lolucwaningo lwenziwe futhi lwahlelwa ngokomqondosimo ka Florian kanye no Black-Hawkins (2011) othuthukisa imfundo ebandakanyayo. Kusetshenziswe ucwaningo lokuqonda kanye ne phenomenology echazayo ukuqoqa imininingwane yalolucwaningo kothishela abayi shumi-nanhlanu (15) ezikoleni eziyishumi-nanhlanu (15). Ulwazi luqoqwe ngokusebenzisa okubonwayo kanye nezingxoxo namathishela. Lonke ulwazi luhlaziywe ngokwe modeli ka Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010). Lolucwaningo lubonise izindikimba ezintathu; a) izindledlana okudidiyelwa ngazo abafundi; b) ukubandakanywa kwabafundi emaqenjaneni; c) amasu ahlukene okudidiyela abafundi. Imiphumela yalolucwaningo igqamisa imikhutshana emithathu yokudidyela abafundi; ukudidiyela okuxubile, nokudidyela ngokwamakhono-mqondo noma ngababili. Noma kunjalo, kucacile ukuthi iqeqebana lamathishela aliwasebenzisi amasu okudidyela abafundi kodwa lifundisa ngokuphuma nomfundi ngayedwa iqhubu. Lemikhutshana yokudidyela ibonakalise amazinga ehlukene okubandakanywa kwabafundi engafani lokhu okulawulwa yizinqumo othisha abazithatahyo uma bedidyela abafundi kanye nendlela abafundi abaxhumana ngayo bebodwana - lapho abanye bebonisa ukwamukelana kanti abanye bebandlululana emaqenjaneni. Akukho nelilodwa iqenjana elibonakale lihambisana nemigomo yokubandakanya abafundi. Ngokwemiphumela yalolucwacingo, iziphakamiso eziladelayo zibalulekile: a) isibalo sabafundi kufanele sibe phakathi kwama 25-30 igumbi ngalinye ukwenza umsebenzi wokubandakanya

bonke abafundi wenzeke; b) ukudidiyela abafundi emaqenjaneni kufanele kushintshashintshwe kuhambisane nalokho okufundwayo ngalesosikhathi kanye nezidingo zesifundo; c) ukudidiyela abafundi ngokomqondo-khono kufanele kuyekwe ngoba kunomthelela ekubandlululweni kwabanye abafundi; d) abafundi abanezidingo zokufunda ezithe phecelezi kumele banikezwe ithuba elithe xaxa lokuqedela umsebenzi nokuba bedidyelwe emaqenjaneni; e) kanjalo nemiyalelo yokufunda ehleleke ngokwezidingo zokufunda zomfundi ngamunye. Lolucwaningo luphakamisa iModeli yokuhlela abafundi ngokudidiyela egcizelela ukuthi abafundi bangaba phakathi kwababili kuya kwa bayisithupha eqenjaneni ukuze wonke umfundi athole ithuba lokubonelelwa ekufundeni kubukwa iminyaka yakhe, ubulili, yikamuva lempilo yakhe, yizinga lokomqondo-khono kanjalo namathuba okufinyelela nasekusetshenzisweni kwezinsiza kufunda nokusebenza kanye nemiyalelo yokufunda ehlelwe ngokwezidingo zomfundi.

KHOTSO

Lihlopheng tsa barutoana ke e 'ngoe ea litlelase tsa thuto ea sekolo tse ka tsamaisang ho kenyelletsa barutoana bohle litlelaseng tse tloaelehileng. Patlisiso ena e batlile ho tseba ho kenyeletsoa ha mekhoa ea ho hlophisa lihlopha tsa likolo tsa likolo tsa mathomo tikolohong ea Johannesburg Metropolitan ka lebaka la leano la ho kenyeletsoa. Boithuto bona bo entsoe ka lenane la lithuto tse kenyelletsoeng ke Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011). Mokhoa o nepahetseng o sebelisitsoe ka mokhoa o hlalosang. Ho bokella data ho entsoe ka mokhoa oa ho shebella le ho buisana le matichere a 15 likolong tsa mathomo tsa leshome le metso e mehlano. Lintlha li ile tsa hlahlojoa ho sebelisoa mohlala ke Lodico , Spaulding, le Voegtle (2010). Ho ile ha hlaha lintlha tse tharo thutong eo e neng e le: (a) litloaelo tsa sehlopha sa joale; (b) ho kenyeletsoa ha mekhoa ea ho hlophisa lihlopha; le (c) maano a ho ntlafatsa ho kenyeletsa mesebetsing ea sehlopha. Liphumano li senotse mekhoa e meraro e tloaelehileng ea sehlopha, e leng, bokhoni bo tsoakaneng ba sehlopha, bokhoni ba ho hlophisa lihlopha le ho rala. Leha ho le joalo, matichere a mang ha a etse sehlopha sa barutoana a bona empa a ba ruta a le mong. Mekhoa ena ea ho hlophisa lihlopha e bontšitse maemo a fapaneng a ho kenyeletsoa, a simoloha ho seo matichere a se etsang ha a hlophisa barutoana, le kamoo baithuti ba amanang ka teng ha ba le sehlopheng - hore na baa amohela kapa ba khelosa ba bang mesebetsing ea ho ithuta har'a lihlopha tsa bona . Leha ho le joalo, ha ho le e 'ngoe ea mekhoa ea lihlopha e fumanoeng e lumellana le melao-motheo eohle ea ho kenyeletsoa. Ho hlahisitsoe likhothaletso tse latelang: (a) boholo ba sehlopha bo lokela ho ba lipakeng tsa baithuti ba 25-30 ho etsa hore matichere a be le lihlopha tse nyane tse akaretsang; (b) lihlopha

li lokela ho sebelisoa ka mokhoa o ts'oanang ho latela mohopolo o rutoang 'me li lokela ho bua ka ho khetheha; (c) bokhoni ba ho hlophisa lihlopha bo lokela ho hlokomolohuoa kaha bo hlahisa mabitso; (d) baithuti ba nang le litlhoko tse khethehileng tsa thuto ba lokela ho fuoa nako e eketsehileng ea ho etsa mesebetsi ka har'a lihlopha; (e) hammoho le menyetla ea thuto e arohaneng.

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

The study seeks to contribute to the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa and to scholarship in this field by investigating how grouping practices in regular classes reflect on inclusivity. This chapter will give a background of the study and cover aspects such as the statement of the problem, main research question, sub-research questions, objectives of the study, rationale for the study, significance of the study, methodology and design, theoretical framework, delimitations, definition of terms and organization of the research program. In the following section, I present the background to the study.

1.2. Background

Nations worldwide have adopted inclusive education as an educational practice for attaining equity, justice and quality education for all learners (Marin, 2014). Embedded in the educational practice of inclusive education is the recognition that the provision of education is a basic human right, which can be traced as far back as the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and to the subsequent signing of various international declarations on education. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) calls upon nations to declare primary education free and compulsory; UNESCO, through the Jomtien Declaration (1990), launched the Education for all (EFA) movement, with the intention to ensure access to basic education for all, by addressing three fundamental problems in education, namely, (a) access to education; (b) education as a lifetime learning and citizenship; and (c) inclusion of marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2001). The United Nations (1994) reaffirmed the international trend towards inclusive education under the slogan “Education for All”, as adopted by the Jomtien Conference (1990).

Inclusive education is intended for all learners without distinction on the basis

of their differences (Bubpha, 2014). Attaining this goal requires a shift in focus from one that is concerned with only those individuals who have been identified as having “additional needs” to learning for all (Florian & Black- Hawkins, 2011). Inclusive education is premised on the principle that all children can learn, and they should be placed in regular schools located in their neighborhoods that are appropriate for combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building inclusive societies and achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994).

As a signatory to world conventions on human rights, South Africa has expressed its commitment to the adoption of inclusive education in order to provide education for all its citizens as well as a strategy to address the racially entrenched attributes and the institutionalization of discriminatory practices that resulted in differences in the ways that learners learnt (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). The South African Constitution (section 29) specifies that everyone has a right to a basic education without discrimination (Republic of South Africa) (RSA), 1996). In particular, Section 29(1) states that everyone has a right to basic education; Section 29(2) talks about equity in education; whereas section 29(3) states that learners should not be discriminated on the basis of race. To realize this goal, the country passed the Education White Paper 6 in 2001 to guide the implementation of inclusive education. The policy emphasize that (a) the needs of all learners should be met in the classrooms; (b) differences in learners should be respected, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV or other infectious disease; and (c) attitudes and teaching methods must change to meet the needs of all learners (Department of Education, 2001) (DoE). With its commitment to inclusion in education, the learner population in schools, irrespective of where it is situated, is now characterized by diversity in terms of age, socio-economic background, historical background, gender, sexual preference, ability and interests, among others (Van Vuuren, Van der Westhuizen & Van der Walt, 2016).

The movement towards inclusive education has sparked the debate on classroom pedagogies that are inclusive, capable of meeting the needs of diverse learners, informed by the need to eliminate social exclusion, which is

the consequence of negative, ill-natured attitudes and lack of due response to distinctions on the basis of race, economic situation, social background, ethnic origin, language, religion and individual abilities (Kirillova, 2015). Unlike previous practices where teaching was mainly from the teacher who treated learners as passive recipients of knowledge, current practices demand that pedagogic strategies should become more learner-cantered in order to increase learning opportunities for all learners (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017).

Grouping, in particular, is one of the learner-cantered pedagogies for inclusion, which requires small groups of learners to learn collaboratively, using multiple means of engagement, such as projects and discussions (Scott & Carter, 2017). It promotes acceptance amongst learners, boosts their confidence in the classrooms and instils a sense of responsibility for learning for themselves and for others. To that end, Reid (2012) avows that learner grouping is an effective educational intervention for use with learners in general education classes who have disabilities as they can improve, both on academic achievement and social acceptance. In the same vein, many proponents of inclusion believe that grouping is an effective way to integrate learners with disabilities with their counterparts without disabilities, as they will be able to receive assistance from their peers without disabilities (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2011). Diverse learners can solve problems together, and build healthy relations amongst different learners in the classrooms. They can brainstorm together to find answers to common problems and lend their individual strengths to the group as a whole in any particular task the group is undertaking. This enables them to achieve positive outcomes for the whole group (Orfano, 2012).

Internationally, learner grouping is a long-time educational practice. In the United States of America (USA), the practice can be traced as far back as the start of the 20th century, with the emergence of the industrial era, when parents wanted their children to attend schools with a record of good performances in learners' attainment (Viar, 2008). Studies suggest that the grouping practice followed a strict streaming system that differentiated between general, vocational and academic education ability groups within schools (Dunne, 2010). In the United Kingdom (Viar, 2008), America (Hallam & Ireson, 1999) and New

Zealand (Spratt Florian, 2015), learners were put into groups based on their needs that included extra assistance, time and practice to cope with the content and learn skills that the teacher taught the entire class, while other learners who could cope were busy with enrichment activities (Selvaraj, 2015).

Academic results were used in the 1960s and 1970s to allocate pupils to streams on entry to secondary schools (Hallam & Ireson, 1999). Contemporary studies reveal different grouping patterns that are currently practiced internationally, with the most commonly practiced being mixed ability grouping, ability grouping and pairing, which all indicate different levels of inclusivity and, in some cases, highlight their lack of inclusiveness.

Mixed ability grouping entails having learners of diverse backgrounds and abilities in the same group, readily helping each other (Al-Shammakhi & Al-Humaidi, 2015). Learners are divided into small groups, taking into account their different levels of abilities, backgrounds, ethnicity and other differences, such as gender and ages of learners. Positive outcomes from the use of mixed ability grouping are that the practice leads to the improvement of social relations and social skills among different learners (Kruger & Nel, 2011).

A study by Petrenas, Puigdellivol and Campdepadros (2013), which sought to analyze the groups that lead to academic success and improve classroom co-existence at Spanish educational centers, established that learners are grouped according to their mixed abilities to encourage social cohesion. Mixed ability grouping provides lower functioning learners with models who can assist them in their learning (Vaughn, Bos & Schumm, 2011). In their study, Baker and Clark (2017) established that mixed ability groups in New Zealand also take into consideration issues of learners' backgrounds to ensure that all learners are accommodated within the same group settings in spite of their differences. Most teachers who use mixed ability groups emphasized that everyone has something to contribute as every learner has his/her own strengths (Pohtola, 2015). To facilitate the inclusion of diverse learners in the groups, teachers decide in which group each learner should be, rather than learners themselves deciding where they want to sit (Pohtola, 2015). Factors like social class, socio

economic status, ethnicity, gender and special educational needs are considered when arranging learners in mixed ability groups in Sweden (Ramberg, 2014).

In spite of all the benefits of mixed ability grouping in regular classrooms, there are notable challenges with regards to inclusion. These challenges relate to the complexities in offering differentiated instruction within mixed ability groups, in giving more assistance to learners with special educational needs and providing teaching/learning media that address the needs of all learners. A study by Petrenas et al. (2013) on ways of organizing the inclusive classroom notes that, once learners are grouped by mixed ability, teachers cease to give attention to some learners in the groups because they cannot attend to everyone, which impacts negatively on the academic inclusion of learners who need more support from the teacher. Where teachers reach out to the needs of individual learners in the groups, a potential dilemma of channeling learners into categories arises based on the amount of support an individual learner requires (Duncan, 2012). The challenge is compounded by the lack of teachers who are adequately prepared to teach diverse learners in an inclusive pedagogic manner (Bubpha, 2014).

Further to the problems of grouping learners by mixed ability is the constant argument that having learners who are diverse in their abilities learning together in the same group holds back the progress of gifted learners as they are circumstantially forced to work at the slower pace that learners with special educational needs require. A study by Marumo and Mhlolo (2017), on grouping mathematically gifted learners, reveals that mixed ability grouping does not benefit learners who are gifted because they are being held back by underperforming learners. This positions mixed ability grouping as good for academic inclusion, but lacking in its ability to unlock opportunities for more exploratory learning by gifted learners.

In addition to the above, key to inclusive practices is the use of appropriate teaching/learning material that addresses the needs of all learners (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, given the diversity of learners in mixed ability

groups, teachers face challenges in providing the teaching/learning materials for the various categories of learners in the groups. This impinges on one of the principles of inclusion which requires the provision of teaching/learning materials that are appropriate to the needs of each individual learner (Tanenbaum, 2011).

In other countries, learners are grouped according to their abilities in what is commonly referred to as “ability grouping” that is the practice of dividing classes into small instructional groups. This is based on learners’ abilities in a hierarchical form, where high performing learners are put in a group of their own, followed by those who are performing slightly behind them till the least performing group of learners are placed in their own group (Loveless, 2013). A study by Dupriez (2010) established that, in the United States of America, learners are mostly grouped according to their abilities, where teachers are able to tailor curriculum content to specific groups of learners according to their levels of performance. In spite of the above, Efthymiou and Kington (2017) argue that, although learners are grouped and given work according to their abilities, their performance and interaction with their peers is reduced. On the other hand, a study in the UK primary schools by Baines, Blatchford and Webster (2015) revealed that there is a tendency for learners with special educational needs to rely on their teachers and their teaching assistants if they are grouped according to their abilities.

Although ability grouping is aimed at improving the academic levels of all learners, a study by Ramberg (2014) in Sweden established that grouping learners by ability has very little or no effect on all groups of learners’ levels of achievement. In Finland, Rytivaara (2011) established that ability grouping propels negative effects of labelling on learners who will be in lower achieving groups. In Spain, Petrenas et al. (2013) established that ability grouping entails reducing the curriculum of those learners with more educational and social difficulties. Regionally, Nkomo (2013) asserts that teachers in Zimbabwe group learners according to ability so that they can deal with a uniform group of learners operating at the same level of ability.

However, Dupriez (2010) argues that grouping learners by ability can give rise to variations in the scale and quality of learning for learners with special educational needs while Ramberg (2014) attests that ability grouping perpetuates issues of inequality, social injustice and democratic rights of learners, because learners are treated differently with limited opportunities for socialization, despite their differences. Learners with special educational needs can feel less welcome in the classrooms because they can see that they have been categorized as underperforming learners.

Congruent with the practice of grouping learners by ability is the traditional practice of streaming learners into like-ability classes. The assumption underpinning the practice of streaming is that it is easier to handle a large group of learners with similar characteristics when they are on their own (Petrenas et al., 2013). The top class receives high achieving learners while the least performing learners per grade are placed in the last class. The practice of streaming learners has been linked to teachers' lack of knowledge of other alternatives of attending to heterogeneity in the classrooms, or alternatives that provide both quality and equality in education (Petrenas et al., 2013). Countries where streaming has been established include Malaysia (Mansor, Maniam, Hunt & Nor, 2016), Spain (Petrenas et al., 2013) and Japan (Al-Shammakhi & Al-Humaidi, 2015). Regionally, streaming is mostly done in Zimbabwe (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2015). Matavire, Mpofu and Maveneka (2013) assert that streaming of learners is done to cater for individual and group interests.

A major drawback to streaming is that, although the practice enables learners to progress at their own levels of performance, allocation of resources, such as learning materials and teaching staff, benefit learners in high ability classes (Matavire et al., 2013). This compromises the quality of education in the classes that have the lowest performing learners as they believe that teachers have labelled them as underachieving learners who cannot cope (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2015).

Schools in some countries group learners in pairs, where two learners work on a task together, practice together and review academic skills that the

teacher has planned (Lerner & Johns, 2012). Pairing of learners is done to enable them to assist one another. Examples of tasks that can be done in pairs include saying words aloud, writing, spelling, reading sentences or solving a mathematical problem. The strategy in pairing involves having a high achieving learner paired with a learner who is underperforming (Person, 2012). Other learner variables, such as language, are also considered in pairing. A study by Jalali-Moghadam and Hedman (2016) in Sweden on the narratives of teachers about literacy support on bilingual learners revealed that learners who speak the same language are paired together to enable them to help one another in the lessons in a language they both understand. Teachers are also able to give extra support to learners if they are in pairs, as they all face a common challenge in Mathematics (Limaye, 2016).

However, one negative aspect of pairing learners is that socialisation in the group is limited to two learners only. This contradicts one of the principles of inclusion that all learners should be able to socialise with all other learners in the classroom so that they can live happily together (Bubpha, 2014). An absence of opportunities for interactions with other learners in the classrooms poses the challenge of learners being unable to learn critical social skills, such as self-expression, from others. Inclusive settings emphasise building a community in which everyone belongs and is accepted and supported by his or her peers (Frederickson & Cline, 2011).

Like anywhere else in the world, learner grouping is equally important in South African Schools for all learners to benefit from cooperative learning. Studies have been carried out in South Africa which reveal various practices that are used by teachers in the classrooms. Prior to 1994, learners were streamed into classes according to their academic abilities and within class ability grouping, with the primary aim being to improve on learners' academic attainment (Excel, 2018). In that line of discernment, parents sought to place their children in classes and schools with a record of good results in terms of learner performance (Dupriez, 2010). However, streaming learners into like ability classrooms or groups is a practice that is deeply engrained in the special needs discourse, where learners with disabilities were taught

separately because they would hold back the progress of other learners without disabilities (Florian, 2015).

Current studies on grouping practices in South African regular classrooms reveal the use of ability grouping, mixed ability grouping and pairing, and whole class teaching. A study by Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel and Tlale (2015) established that ability grouping is practiced in the Vaal Triangle area where teachers focus on teaching learners with special educational needs in groups of their own because of the training they received which focused on the academic aspects of learning prior to the policy on inclusivity. Muthivi and Broom (2008) established that, in the Limpopo Province, learners at grade six level were grouped by ability and teachers were not inspired to include diverse learners in the same groups. However, like streaming, grouping learners by ability excludes learners with special educational needs from other classroom activities that are carried out by learners without special educational needs in the regular classrooms (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

On the other hand, Marais (2016) established the use of whole-class teaching where learners were taught as one large group, with no group work being implemented in the classrooms. In light of inclusivity, such a practice deprives learners of the opportunity to learn from one another as teaching is mainly teacher centered (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In addition, a qualitative interpretive study by Bojuwoye, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla and Sylvester (2014) in Western Cape primary and secondary schools revealed that learners who are performing well are moved next to learners who are having difficulties so that they can assist them. The problem with that arrangement is that, although learners with special educational needs are assisted by their peers who are performing well academically, the practice limits learners' opportunities to interact with all other learners in the classrooms. Classrooms have become social environments where individuals with diverse personalities and a wide range of abilities come together to create a complex web of human relationships (Recchia & Lee, 2013). In that light, grouping of learners needs to be planned and implemented by teachers whose responsibilities include: arranging a highly engaging learning environment that encourages

appropriate behaviour; recognizing that all learners belong; and structuring a learning environment in which learners can work together in different activities that cater to all areas of development (Allen & Cowdery, 2009). As strategies for teaching and learning in regular classes, grouping practices should be reflective of inclusivity given the widely diverse categories of learners that now exist in the regular classes in South Africa.

1.3 Problem Statement

From a legal perspective, all learners have a right to participate in environments that make it possible for them to benefit socially and academically from being in the classroom (Lerner & Johns, 2012). This includes the building of a community in which everyone belongs and is accepted and supported by his or her peers (Friend & Bursuck, 2011; Lewis & Doorlag, 2011).

The attainment of freedom in South Africa in 1994 ushered in a new era in the education system as schools are now accommodating all categories of learners, a feature that distinguishes education post-1994 from education pre-1994. However, there is paucity of information on how grouping practices in regular classes should be constructed to embrace diversity in a way that reflects on inclusivity. Unlike in traditional grouping practices, such as heterogeneous and homogeneous groups, very little is known about what constitutes inclusive grouping practices in regular classes (Florian, 2015).

Background to the study has established that learner grouping is a common teaching/learning practice that is practiced both internationally and in South African schools with the purpose of improving learner performance amongst learners of abilities. Inclusive pedagogy stipulates that learning should be for all learners without separating learners based on their differences, (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, the movement towards inclusive education requires that all classroom practices including learner grouping should reflect on inclusion. The scarcity of literature on grouping practices that are inclusive necessitated this study, with the view of establishing best practices of learner grouping in view of policy on inclusion. It is in this in light of inclusivity that I

sought to discern how the regular classes grouping practices have been transformed in tandem with the transformation in the socio-political order to embrace diversity through the way learners are grouped in those classrooms.

1.4 Research Aim

The resolve of the research was to explore how grouping practices in regular classes reflect on inclusivity. This is on the framework of the need to teach all learners in one classroom setting regardless of their categorical differences.
The policy of inclusive education enunciates that all learners should access quality education in the same environments in spite of their diversity. In line with the policy of inclusivity, the research sought to answer to the question:

1.5. Research Question

How inclusive are current grouping practices in Johannesburg Metropolitan regular primary schools?

1.5.1 Research sub-questions

Research sub-questions were formulated from the main research question stated above. These research sub-questions sought to gain insight into the grouping practices in the regular classes yet answering to the main research question on how inclusive they are.

These research sub-questions were:

1. How are learners in regular classes grouped?

2. How are the current grouping practices in alignment with the principles of inclusivity?

3. How can the current grouping practices be strengthened to enhance inclusivity in the regular classrooms?

1.6 Rationale for the study

The undertaking of this study was derived from both a professional and personal motivation. I developed interest in this study because of the shift in policy in education from special schools to inclusive education which requires that all learners should receive their education in the same settings without the discrimination of others based on categorical differences, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO, 2005). South Africa adopted the policy of inclusivity in 2001 through the Education White Paper 6 which advocates that learners of diverse backgrounds should receive education in inclusive settings. In that light, I felt it imperative to take stock of existing research in the grouping of learners in ways that reflect on inclusivity in order to draw conclusions for educational policy and management and to examine closely the organizational procedures and operational methods of schools (Dupriez, 2010). This is against the backdrop of learners' differences that now exist in the regular classes versus the grouping practices as strategies for teaching and learning.

On the other hand, lived experiences in regular class teaching also influenced me to develop an interest in this topic. I am currently a practicing teacher who has come to realise that, in almost every class that I have had contact with; learners are grouped in one way or the other. Given the different grouping practices that are being implemented by the regular class teachers as strategies for teaching and learning, I sought to explore the grouping practices that reflect on inclusivity in view of the policy of inclusion. As a practicing teacher in the regular classes, I have noted some quandaries in the teaching of learners in the regular classes as teachers juggle around grouping practices to address issues of learner diversity, support provision and learners' academic attainments in ways that do not separate learners on any basis.

Successful inclusion depends on the creation of a climate of empowerment which involves a sense of belonging (Smith, Polloway, Patton & Dowdy, 2011). This is based on the conviction that all learners have a right to be accepted and to participate in educational settings where they can benefit

socially and academically (Lerner & Johns, 2012). In that light, the environments in which learners receive instructional services affect how they learn (Heward, 2014). Their experiences as part of classroom communities are the basis of lifelong patterns of social behaviour.

With the current emphasis on inclusion, it is particularly important to find ways to improve the social relationships of learners, as the formation of relationships is one of the key purposes of inclusion (Florian, 2015). Peer mediated learning promotes inclusion and encourages peer interaction between students with and without disabilities (Butler & Wong, 2012). On the other hand, the thrust towards learner grouping in the regular classrooms, in light of inclusivity, is driven by the need to develop high quality, inclusive experiences for all learners (Parekh, 2013). All learners should be able to benefit from being in the regular classroom, which now accommodates learners who are diverse in ethnicity, religion, race and socio-economic backgrounds. They should be allowed to participate in groups with other learners whom they did not know before the class, or have not worked with in a group before so that they can learn to respect, take care and empathize with those who are different from them (Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, 2014).

The absence of inclusive grouping practices in the regular classrooms perpetuates the exclusion of learners in the regular classrooms, both socially and academically, and this militates against the policy on inclusion (Florian, 2015). It also goes against the Millennium Development Goals of eliminating discrimination against the girl child, children from poor backgrounds and learners with disabilities from education systems, United Nations (UN, 2015). Furthermore, South Africa has a history of segregation, based on racial lines that was coded with inequalities in education and resource provision to different categories of learners, which has to be erased (Vandeyar & Killen, 2006). In that regard, the undertaking of this study intended to explore ways by which learners in the regular classrooms are grouped in line with inclusion, in order to ascertain ways to eradicate lines that divide learners, encourage optimum participation by all learners in the classroom life, as well as to ensure that no

learner is left behind.

1.7 Significance of the study

I envisage that the study will benefit all stakeholders in the field of inclusive education. These stakeholders include teachers, researchers, policy makers, learners themselves and other stakeholders in the Department of Education. Findings and recommendations will enlighten the various stakeholders on the appropriate grouping practices of learners in the regular classes that reflect on inclusivity in light of the policy of inclusivity. Such information will strengthen inclusivity in the regular classes. Ultimately, this will help all learners to feel welcome in the classroom communities for the purposes of learning through their exposure to grouping practices that reflect on inclusivity.

In addition, the findings of the research will add value to the already existing body of knowledge with regards to the grouping of learners in regular classes. Given the limited literature regarding the grouping of learners in regular classes in ways that reflect on inclusivity (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), it is anticipated that this study will close the gap in literature and knowledge paucity in terms of grouping learners in the regular classes. Also, researchers will be able to use data and information gathered in this study for future studies. Findings will contribute towards strengthening the current practices in the grouping of learners in a bid to holistically benefit all learners in the regular classes through the way they will be grouped. This study will provide a model that teachers, through orthodox training, in-service training, and workshops, may embrace when grouping learners in the regular classes in the face of inclusivity.

The regular classes consist of learners who are diverse. As such, the model will help the teachers in empowering them to group learners in ways that allow for differentiated instruction without necessarily segregating learners on the basis of categorical differences. Thus, the results of this study will equip the teachers (through in-service training and workshops) with the necessary knowledge base that will enable them to engage learners through inclusive

group set-ups. It is also envisaged that the findings of this research will add value to the curriculum of student teachers. Universities and teachers' training colleges will be able to add the recommendations of this study to the curriculum of teacher education in order to fully equip these student teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills on how to group their learners in ways that reflect inclusivity. In the following section, I present the research methodology and design that was used in this study.

1.8 Research design and methodology

The research sought to establish how groups in ordinary classes reflect on inclusivity. In carrying out this study, a qualitative research approach was used. Researchers utilize qualitative approaches to investigate behaviors, perceptions and experiences of the participants in a naturalistic way (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Arthur; Waring, Coe & Hedges, 2012). A qualitative approach researches a situated activity that locates the observer in the real world (Mertens, 2010). To ascertain how ordinary grouping practices reflect on inclusivity, I needed to get the perceptions and feelings of the participants and observe the grouping practices in action in the regular classrooms on the backdrop that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings (Mertens, 2010). I intended to understand how grouping practices reflect on inclusivity from the participants' perspectives and their experiences about grouping learners in the regular classes.

Descriptive phenomenology was used in this study. It is a research approach that investigates human experiences at a fundamental level (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). A descriptive phenomenological design is a beneficial aspect of qualitative research because it is non-static and offers the flexibility to explore the topic further and to extract the most information possible to explain the details of the phenomena. In this context, a descriptive phenomenological design was deemed fit as it enabled me to explore how grouping practices in regular classes reflect on inclusivity through the participants' own voices and my observations. One powerful aspect of a descriptive phenomenological research design is that it allows the participants to explain their lived

experiences through their individual voices (Williams, 2012). Phenomenological research design emphasizes the individual's subjective experience (Mertens, 2010). Individual participants were able to give their own experiences in the grouping of learners in light of the policy of inclusivity. A phenomenological research design involves getting each participant to focus on his or her phenomenological space and to describe the experience on his/her own terms (Bordens & Abbott, 2011). Phenomenologists concur that there is not a single reality and that an individual has his or her own reality. Views from different participants and the observations that were undertaken were aimed at producing a detailed report on how regular classes reflect on inclusivity. In the next section, I present the sampling strategy used for this study.

1.8.1 Sampling

Participants in this study were selected through purposeful sampling. This is the sampling procedure most used in qualitative research (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2011; Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010). Purposeful sampling enables the selection of information-rich cases from which to learn about issues relating to the subject under study (Arthur et al., 2012). In this case, I used purposeful sampling to select regular classroom teachers who have in-depth knowledge about inclusive education as well as experience in teaching in regular classes in South African primary schools. In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomena (Creswell, 2012). In this study, purposeful sampling applied to both individuals and sites. Purposeful sampling does not aim to obtain a large and representative sample, but to select those elements that can provide the richest detailed information that can answer the research question (Lodico et al., 2010). In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomena (Creswell, 2012). In this study, purposeful sampling applied to both individuals and sites. A total of 15 practicing regular class teachers who have qualifications in inclusive education were purposefully selected for in- depth interviews. For the purposes of triangulation, their classes were also

used for observations on how their preferred grouping practices reflect on inclusivity. The following section discusses the data collection procedures followed.

1.8.2 Data collection methods

Data were collected using observations and in-depth interviews. Interviews lead to face-to-face engagements with research participants individually that are not possible with questionnaires or focus groups (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Interviews allow a researcher to take advantage of personal communication in order to probe deeply into a participant's experience. They are also ideal when the researcher wishes to follow up initial responses by probing for additional information that can clarify existing data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Arthur et al., 2012). I carried out in-depth interviews with research participants on how they group their learners in the face of the policy of inclusivity. In those interviews, I was able to probe further through follow-up questions on issues that needed clarity. In addition, observations were used in order to corroborate the information from interviews with what I observed for myself on how grouping practices in regular classes reflect on inclusivity. Behaviour is best understood as it occurs without external constraints and control (McMillan & Schumacher, 2012). Observations allow the researcher to see the world as the research subjects see it and to understand the subjects' interpretations of that world (Check & Schutt, 2012). The following section discusses the theoretical framework that provided the lens to this study.

1.8.3 Theoretical Framework

I carried out this study through the lens of Florian and Black-Hawkins' (2011) theory of inclusive pedagogy that was framed out of the need to define what constitutes good practice in the regular classes in light of the inclusive education movement (Florian, 2015). Although there is consensus and understanding that inclusive education is a process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion from the culture, community and curricula of regular schools, little is known about it at classroom level (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This

theoretical framework was developed after studies by Florian (2007), Florian and Black-hawkins (2011) in different countries from 2007 to 2011 sought to ascertain what constitutes good practice for inclusivity at classroom level. Results of the studies revealed that teachers were mostly still focusing on separating learners in order to provide individual support as they strive to attend to diverse learners without excluding some from the classroom learning environment.

Inclusive pedagogy emphasizes a change in teaching and learning from that which works for some learners towards that which involves learning opportunities that suit all learners and provide a rich learning community (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Florian (2007) found that teachers who want to become more inclusive in the classroom respect and respond to their learners 'differences and are able to include learners rather than excluding them from what is generally available in their classrooms. The background to this study indicated that learners who are widely diverse are now in existence in ordinary South African schools. As such, they need to be grouped in ways that embrace diversity and, at the same time, are able to give support to learners who need it; ensure improvement in learners' academic attainment without excluding anyone from any group setup; and give optimum support to all learners. The following table is an illustration of inclusive pedagogy in the classroom.

TABLE 1.1

Table of Inclusive Pedagogy

Additional needs approach to	Manifest in terms of Most and Some	Manifest in terms of	Inclusive pedagogical approach Everybody
A student with dyslexia needs specialist support to develop literacy skills. A multi- disciplinary team that includes a psychologist, reading specialist and a speech and language therapist assesses her and	The student is included in selected classroom activities that do not require literacy skills.	The student receives additional support in a 'base' classroom where she can receive specialist support to develop literacy skills. The student is marked as different	The class teacher takes account of individual needs of all students in the classroom and plans a lesson with differentiated options that will ensure that each student will be able to participate in the lesson. However, while the class teacher takes account of differences between learners, he does not predetermine the learning that is possible by assigning students to different options. Instead he allows the students to direct the course of their own learning through choice of activities.

The table above shows the key tenants of Inclusive pedagogy contrasted with the additional needs approach.

In light of the above, the choice of the inclusive pedagogy theory for this study was influenced by its position with regards to inclusivity at the classroom level. The

theoretical framework embraced in this study emphasizes three broad aspects which are: (a) that education in regular classes should focus on all learners and not some or most; (b) the presence of some learners in the classrooms should not hold back the progress of others; and (c) difficulties in learning should be seen as a professional challenge for teachers and not deficits in learners. This theory was chosen because it defines how inclusive education should be viewed in practice at a classroom level. Gauging against its three broad principles highlighted above, I envisaged that I would be able to explore how the grouping practices in the regular classes reflect on inclusivity. In the next section, I present a definition of terms.

1.9 Key Terms defined

1.9.1 Grouping practices

Grouping practices refer to the arrangement of learners in the regular classes by perceived levels of attainment (Glenda & Hunter, 2016). Vaughn et al. (2011) define grouping practices as ranges of grouping procedures involving a range of grouping structures that are selected based on the learning needs of the learners and instructional goals of the teacher. Along the same lines, grouping practices refer to the sorting of learners into categories to provide instruction (Maloch, Worthy, Jordan, Hampton, Hungerford-Kresser & Semingson, 2013). In this context, grouping practices refer to the arrangement of learners into smaller groups in the regular classes as strategies for teaching and learning.

1.8.4 Inclusive education

Inclusive education refers to the dynamic, continuing process which facilitates the presence, participation and achievement of all learners in the same education system (Deluca, Tramontano & Kett, 2014). It is a philosophy that improves access to quality education for those learners who may be vulnerable or have barriers to learning (DoE, 2014). In other words, inclusive education can be viewed as an approach to education that embraces diversity, allowing learners of different categories and abilities to learn successfully alongside each other without

discrimination. The goal of inclusive education is to enable learners to belong to an educational community that values their individuality (Powell, 2016). In view of the above, inclusive educationis herein defined as a process that is aimed at including learners of different categories in the general education system. In this regard, it is defined as a system that welcomes and celebrates diversity in a general education classroom with supplementary supports and adaptations that allow all learners to benefit from that placement.

1.8.5 **Regular classes**

Regular classes are units that accommodate different categories of learners for the purposes of teaching and learning (Bubpha, 2014). In regular classes, all possible measures are taken to accommodate learners with additional support needs (DoE, 2015). Regular classes are those classes that have few resources (DoE, 2014). They cater for a majority of learners with low support needs and a smaller percentage of learners with disabilities who have moderate or high support needs (DoE, 2014). In this context, regular classes refer to those units that accommodate learners of different backgrounds, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, intelligence and race, among others. In addition, regular classes are those classes within regular schools that provide low and medium support needs to all learners who require such supports.

1.8.5 Ability grouping

According to Lewis and Doorlag (2011), ability grouping entails that learners requiring a specific skill are grouped together. It comprises a collection of learners requiring instruction in the same skill area. For example, Smith and Tyler (2010) posit that ability grouping requires that learners who need specific instruction on reading skills may be grouped together. The practice is about bringing learners of similar abilities together for learning (Kirk, Gallagher, Coleman & Anastasiow, 2012). Ability grouping is based on the current levels of skills of learners (Polloway, Patton, Serna & Bailey, 2013). This implies that learners who are performing above average in any particular skill are grouped together. Similarly, those with average levels of ability are grouped on their own

depending on their levels of performance in any particular skill. In this context, ability grouping refers to the strategy of grouping learners according to their levels of academic performance in different subjects and topics.

1.8.6 Social Model

The social model is the discernment that environments within which learners attend schooling act either to exclude or include them from full participation (UNESCO,2001).It is about identifying the range of possible barriers that need to be addressed to allow optimum access, retention and achievement by all learners (DoE, 2015). In the social model, a person's imperfection is not the cause of disability but rather the impairment is due to society that discriminates and excludes people with impairments (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010). In this context, the social model is a perception that views learning environments as playing the all-important role of erasing or minimising barriers to learning.

1.8.7 Differentiated instruction

Florian (2015) defines differentiated instruction as the notion of responding to diversity among learners without regard to categorical differences. Differentiated instruction reflects the philosophy of teaching that enables teachers to reach the unique needs of each learner, capitalising on the learners' strengths and weaknesses (Lerner & Johns, 2012). Differentiated instruction is about recognising and respecting learner differences and being able to provide tailored instruction that addresses the needs of individual learners. This is instruction that meets students' different requirements through the provision of varied levels of materials and tasks that need support which is given in multiple ways and times. The idea behind the differentiation of instruction is to make sure that all learning experiences are shared across a whole range of learners' abilities. In this context, differentiated instruction refers to the provision of curriculum to learners in ways that respect diversity in the regular classes. Differentiated instruction takes note of the fact that the regular classes are widely varied in terms of learners' backgrounds, ethnicity, gender, age,

intelligence and religion, amongst others. As such, differentiated instruction is a way of responding to the varied needs of learners in the regular classes. It is important to note that what is being differentiated is not the curriculum content but the instructional methods.

1.8.8 Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy that allows learners to learn from one another (Hallahan et al., 2011). Along the same lines, Lerner and Johns (2012) define collaborative learning as a teaching/learning strategy where two or more individuals interact in a supportive manner that benefits all. Cooperative learning allows learners to converse with one another and brainstorm together in order to find solutions to problems or to complete assignments (Orfano, 2012). In this context, collaborative learning means a strategy of teaching and learning where learners who are widely diverse are able to learn through discussions in a single group set-up.

1.8.9 Social skills

Frederickson and Cline (2011) define social skills as “socially acceptable behaviours that enable a person to interact effectively with others”. Heward (2014) defines social skills as the ability to hold a conversation, express feelings and participate in group activities. Similarly, Pinar and Sucuoglu (2013) define social skills as those activities that enable a learner to be able to make friends, interact with peers in the classroom as well as to solve problems cooperatively. Through these social skills, an individual can achieve three goals: (a) good interpersonal relationships; (b) the ability to cope with various social situations; and (c) effective interaction in social settings (Lopez, 2016). In this study, social skills refer to the abilities of learners to live harmoniously with their peers in and outside the classroom environment. These include the ability to hold conversations in appropriate ways ask for assistance politely and show respect for others.

1.8.10 Pairing

Lerner and Johns (2012) define pairing as a strategy in which two learners work on learning tasks together, practice together and review an academic skill that the classroom teacher has planned. Pairing involves a higher performing learner and a lower performing learner working together by participating in highly structured tutorial sessions (Hallahan et al., 2011). One learner acts as the player and the other as the coach (Kirk et al., 2012). In this study, pairing refers to a strategy of grouping learners for the purposes of learning where they can work on tasks in pairs. Examples of tasks that can be done in pairs include writing, spelling words, reading sentences or solving mathematical problems. As they work together, one learner can assist when the other hesitates or makes a mistake.

1.8.11 Mixed ability grouping

According to Vauhgn et al., (2011), mixed ability grouping is a practice where lower functioning learners are provided with models who can assist them in their learning in areas where they are struggling. Learners of different achievement levels are grouped together for the purposes of teaching and learning. On the other hand, Baker and Clark posit that mixed ability grouping refers to where learners who are diverse in terms of their backgrounds are grouped together in the same group. In the context of this study, mixed ability grouping refers to the practice of grouping learners of different academic abilities in the same group. It refers to where high achieving learners, average learners, and learners with special educational needs are placed together in the same group setting.

1.10 Delimitations

The study was carried on in the Johannesburg region, which is located in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. The region has five districts of education which are: Johannesburg Central, Johannesburg East, Johannesburg North, Johannesburg South and Johannesburg West. I focused on schools in these districts in this region. Three schools were purposefully selected from each of

the five districts in the region, giving a total of fifteen schools that provided the fifteen classrooms for observations as well as the teachers for the interviews.

1.11 Organization of the study

Chapter 1 presented the background of the study together with the statement of the problem. Other aspects covered in this chapter include research aim, objectives of the study, the main research question, research sub-questions, rationale for the study, significance of the study, methodology and design, theoretical framework, delimitations, definition of terms and organisation of the study. Chapter 2 covers both international and local literature that is related to the grouping of learners in the regular classes in ways that reflect on inclusivity. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and design as well as its components which include: sampling and sample size; data collection; data analysis and ethics in research. Chapter 4 presents the findings. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings. Chapter 6 is the last chapter which presents summary, conclusion and recommendations.

1.11 Summary

Chapter 1 presented the background to the study, statement of the problem, research aim, objectives of the study, main research question, sub-research questions, rationale for the study, significance of the study, research methodology used and its components which are: design, sampling, data collection, theoretical framework, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 presents both local and international literature related to the study through the lens of inclusive pedagogy. Literature is discussed under sub-topics: grouping of learners in regular classes, reflection of principles of inclusivity in groups, and strategies to strengthen inclusiveness of groups.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents international, regional as well as South African literature on learner grouping. It starts with a discussion on the history of learner grouping and then proceeds to discuss current grouping practices in the regular classrooms, as well as how the contemporary grouping practices are in line with principles of inclusion.

2.2 History of learner grouping

Learner grouping has been in practice for a long time across education systems the world over. In the past, learners were categorised and placed in separate schools that were deemed fit for the education of each category of learners. Two distinct types of schools existed, special schools that catered for learners with disabilities and regular schools that accommodated learners without disabilities. The major argument at the time was that learners with disabilities cannot cope well with regular classroom pedagogies alongside learners without disabilities. Quite often, they were placed in hospitals, asylums or other institutions that provided little, if any, education (Tremblay, 2007). In the last 30 years, the education of children with disabilities or special educational needs has undergone substantial changes in developed countries, giving them better opportunities for both quality and equality in education.

Special education is specifically designed instruction to meet the unique needs and abilities of exceptional learners. However, the historical legacy of separate educational provision for learners with disabilities, based on a medical model of disability, has, over the years, been challenged by perspectives emphasising human rights (Werning, Artiles, Engelbrecht, Myriam, Caballeros & Rothe, 2016). Such perspectives meant that learners with disabilities are now being integrated in regular classrooms/mainstream classrooms. This was called “integration” which stressed that learners with special educational needs should be located in mainstream classrooms, with

additional professional support from specialist teachers who are trained to deal with learners with disabilities. Rodriguez and Garro-Gil (2014) distinguish four stages that characterise the evolution of the education of children with special educational needs: (a) exclusion which entailed excluding people with special needs (disabilities) from social contexts (family, schools, community); (b) segregation which was underpinned by the belief that children withdisabilities can learn but should be separated from the rest of society; (c) integration where public schools were required to create new spaces for learners with special educational needs so that they could socialise with their non-disabled peers; and (d) the inclusive stage where classrooms and other social and socio-educational structures are designed from the outset to include students with special educational needs.

Until the late 1980s, the special educational terms, “mainstreaming” and “integration”, were in general use in Canada referring to learners with disabilities who were placed full-time or part-time in regular classrooms (Bunch, 2015). Major school reforms were witnessed in the 1980s where effort was on restructuring the general education system to accommodate all learners (Lupart & Webber, 2012). These reforms saw special education, with its unique history and organisational configuration showing a gradual but steady progression towards the present inclusive education discourse (Lupart & Webber, 2012). At the basis of the restructuring movement is the idea that the separation of regular and special education be inclusive in order to enable schools to meet the needs of all learners in the same classroom settings effectively.

While learners with disabilities were taught separately in special schools, learners without disabilities were taught in schools of their own, referred to as regular schools, where they were divided into smaller groups for the purposes of teaching and learning. The popular practice at the time was streaming learners into like ability groups in the same classroom, or across the classes within the same grade (Yee, 2013). The practice of streaming/ability grouping was used where learners experiencing the same problem were grouped together so that the teacher could help them in their area of need while in a group or classroom of their own (Kruger & Nel, 2011). According to Garelick (2013), streaming or grouping learners by

ability was dominant up until the late 1960s. However, popular research at the time condemned streaming or ability grouping based on the argument that this perpetuated segregation of learners in education systems (Loveless, 2013). Furthermore, streaming entailed tracking learners into various curricula based largely on IQ, but sometimes other factors, such as race (Garelick, 2013).

Current arguments are that ability grouping or streaming is a practice that belongs to the past; for example, Garelick (2013) argues that the concept of “ability” refers to an obsolete idea of each learner possessing an essential academic ability that schools and teachers can access. The practice of grouping learners by ability augurs well with teacher centred pedagogies where learners do not have optimum opportunities for learning from one another.

Transformation in the education systems has seen the conjoining of the previously two separate systems of special schools and regular schools into one system of education that has all learners learning together despite their differences. This has sparked debate on classroom pedagogies that are inclusive, capable of meeting the needs of diverse learners. This is informed by the need to eliminate social exclusion, which is the consequence of negative, ill-natured attitudes, and a lack of due response to distinctions on the basis of race, economic situation, social background, ethnic origin, language, religion and individual abilities (Kirillova, 2015).

UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action for Special Needs Education (1994) is the most visible indicator of inclusive education’s emergence in policy and professional practice. This was strengthened through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006. The movement towards restructuring the education system is the recognition that discrete systems of regular and special educational must be modified and combined to enable schools to teach all learners in the same environments (Lupart & Webber, 2012). Substantial support for this broader

view of diversity has come from groups such as the World Health Organization (WHO, 1980) and has been articulated in UNESCO World Conferences of 1994.

2.3 How learners are grouped in the regular classrooms

Given the history and benefits of learner grouping as learner centred pedagogic strategies in the regular classrooms, it is imperative to ascertain whether the grouping practices are in alignment with principles of inclusivity in light of the inclusive discourse. As a result of the policy on inclusivity, focus in schools has shifted towards strategies and approaches for inclusion at classroom level in order to develop high quality, inclusive experiences for all learners (Parekh, 2013). Different grouping practices which include ability grouping, mixed ability grouping, whole class grouping and pairing are being practiced in the classrooms (Ford, 2013). The grouping practices being practiced show varying degrees of inclusiveness. In the following section, I present literature on how learners are grouped in the regular classrooms from an international perspective.

2.3.1 International literature on grouping of learners in the regular classrooms

2.3.1.1 Ability grouping

Several studies have been carried out which indicate that ability grouping is one of the strategies that is still being practiced in the regular classrooms in various countries. Ability grouping is a commonly used strategy where learners who are performing at approximately the same level of academic achievement can work together in their own groups, separated from other learners, for additional help. For example, Spratt and Florian (2013) report that some learners in New Zealand are assigned to groups based on their need for additional help, time and practice in order to master the content and skills covered in a particular unit or lesson. This enables learners of different academic abilities to proceed with their learning in their own time without outpacing or holding back the progress of others (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Learners with special educational needs are enabled to have more practice while gifted learners can work on more challenging work.

In some schools in America, ability grouping is practiced specifically to address the needs of gifted learners in the classrooms (Yee, 2013). The intention is to allow gifted learners to proceed at their own pace without being held back by the average students and those who are struggling. Similarly, a study by Pay (2016) on the effects of within-class mixed ability grouping reveals that most teachers in the United Kingdom group their learners by ability because of the need to support gifted learners.

Proponents of grouping learners by ability argue that teachers are able to tailor activities and assignments according to levels of ability of learners in their own groups. For example, Bunch (2015) purports that teachers are able to present content in an organised, direct and efficient manner, taking into consideration learners' abilities and interests, and differentiating instruction according to individual strengths and needs. Similarly, Smith and Tyler (2010) aver that learners who need specific instruction on beginning reading skills may be grouped together, where the desired curriculum skill is carefully sequenced so that the teacher teaches each step in sequence (Lerner & Johns, 2012). In the same vein, schools group learners according to ability so that teachers can tailor their instruction to a homogeneous group of learners who study at the same pace (Nkomo, 2013). This is in response to learners' differences in pace of learning as teachers attempt to address the needs of each learner separately (Crawley, 2017).

On the other hand, Strauss (2013) posits that some schools practice ability grouping to address learners' achievements because of the pressures that teachers have to produce high pass rates for their learners. For example, teachers and principals who use ability grouping in England say that the practice helps them to improve the academic standards of all learners (Senter, 2013). The teacher can revisit concepts taught to the whole class with those who did not grasp the concepts while those who have mastered the skills can engage in enrichment activities (Spratt & Florian, 2013).

Ability grouping is also practiced to enable teachers to adapt different tasks in the regular classrooms. For example, a study by Efthymiou and Kington (2017) in the UK revealed that teachers vary work according to the levels of operation of their learners in the ability groups. Learners who are struggling are given less challenging tasks in their own groups. This was corroborated by Baines et al. (2015) whose study on the challenges of implementing group work in primary school classrooms and including learners with disabilities in the UK revealed that over a third of learners with special educational needs were placed in low attaining groups where they were not necessarily engaged in team work as the levels of interactions in low achieving groups are not as intense as in groups with high achieving learners.

In line with the above, curriculum and lesson planning is aimed at addressing the needs of the learners. For example, a study by Walsh (2018) on the inclusion of learners with special educational needs in the general education classroom revealed that learners were grouped by ability in the UK because teachers wanted to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of every learner. This is supported by Person (2012) who argues that ability grouping is used by many teachers because they perceive that it provides an opportunity to adapt teaching to the needs of different learners.

Besides the within-class ability grouping enunciated above, some literature indicates that ability grouping in the regular schools also takes the form of streaming learners of the same grade into different classes according to their abilities in particular subjects or across subjects. Learners who are academically high performing are put in a class of their own, average learners in a class of their own, and the least performing learners in a class of their own.

A study by Al-Shammakhi and Al-Humaidi (2015) on the challenges facing teachers in mixed ability classes and strategies used to overcome them revealed that, in Japan, most teachers prefer classes that are streamed according to the abilities of learners as they feel they are better able to meet the needs of each academically defined group of learners.

A similar study by Mansor et al. (2016) on the benefits and disadvantages of streaming practices to accommodate learners by ability revealed that, in Malaysia, learners are streamed into classes for the whole year using the previous year's exam results as placement criteria. This allows teachers to provide for standardised lesson planning and facilitate reduced peer pressure that enables learners to improve their self-esteem. In the same vein, a qualitative study by Petrenas et al. (2013) in Spain revealed that regular schools organise classrooms based on streaming which entails reducing the curriculum of learners with educational and social difficulties in a class of their own. The assumption underpinning the practice of streaming is that it is easier to handle a large group of learners with similar characteristics when they are in a class of their own (Petrenas et al., 2013).

2.3.1.1 Mixed ability grouping

Other than ability grouping, learners are also grouped by mixed ability, where learners of different abilities are placed in one group so that they can learn together in the same group. This enables learners to sharpen specific subject knowledge as well as develop the intra and interpersonal skills and attitudes that are necessary in their daily activities (Wiesen, 2013). Mixed ability grouping is used where lower functioning learners are provided with models, for example, learners with articulation problems can benefit from hearing the more appropriate of their peers express themselves (Vaughn et al., 2011), leading to the improvement of social relations and social skills among different learners (Kruger & Nel, 2011).

A study by Al-Shammakhi and Al-Humaidi (2015) in Oman reports that learners in mixed ability groups eagerly help each other in those groups despite their differences. They disregard whatever makes them different and work together, assisting each other in the process towards achieving a common set goal for the group. The proximity that learners of different abilities have when they are in mixed ability groups enable learners with special educational needs to learn important social skills from their peers without disabilities through modelling and imitation from within the same groups. These social skills include, among others, problem skills, respect for one

another and talking in polite ways.

Mixed ability grouping in Finland is influenced by the argument that the idea of ability grouping can make learners placed in low ability groups predisposed to achieving lower educational outcomes (Walsh, 2018). Learners in mixed ability groups build their confidence and self-esteem, and build respect for other learners as they engage with each other socially in the groups (Parents 24, 2017). A study by Baker and Clark (2017) in New Zealand established that ethnically diverse domestic learners and predominantly Asian international learners learn in mixed ability settings to erase the social differences created by their differences in backgrounds and ethnicity. This indicates that mixed ability grouping goes beyond the mere abilities of learners to include issues of diversity emanating from learner backgrounds. In line with the above, teachers use mixed ability grouping in the belief that everyone has something to give and every learner has his/her own strengths (Pohtola, 2015). In practicing mixed ability groups, most teachers in Sweden assign learners to different groups rather than letting learners decide where they want to sit (Pohtola, 2015). This is done to minimise playfulness amongst learners who are friends if they sit in the same group as well as to ensure that every learner is accommodated in mixed group settings. The next section discusses the pairing strategy that is also widely used as a learner centred pedagogy.

2.3.1.2 Pairing

Schools in some countries group learners in pairs. This entails having two learners sit together and engage each other in the learning processes. This strategy is often used in reading and Mathematics, and sometimes involves drill and practice (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2010). One of the reasons for using pairing is to enable learners to assist one another to achieve a common goal. According to Frederickson and Cline (2011), some researchers suggest ranking learners by reading levels from 1 to 20, then matching the 1st reader with the 11th reader, the 2nd with the 12th, 3rd with the 13th in that order. This ensures that each group has both a stronger and a weaker learner, where one

can act as the tutor while the other learner is the tutee. Benefits in such an arrangement have been noted in the improvement of self-esteem of both tutor and tutee and their interactions with others (Frederickson & Cline, 2011).

Buli-Holmberg and Jeyaprathaban (2016) confirm the above in a study on the use of language in the regular classrooms in Norway which indicated that learners can help one another in their pairs and achieve better academic results. In the same vein, Loreman et al. (2010) assert that pairing is a practice that has been consistently and successfully used as a practical approach for engaging learners with disabilities in the inclusive classroom because of benefits, such as learners of different abilities being able to engage each other on the activities given by the teacher.

On the other hand, a study by Jalali-Moghadam and Hedman (2016) in Sweden on the narratives of teachers about literacy support for bilingual learners who are dyslexic revealed that learners who speak the same language are paired together. The logic behind such an arrangement is to allow learners speaking the same language to help one another in the lessons. Learners in the classrooms are also allowed to speak in their home languages other than the language of teaching and learning. This was established in a study by Person (2012) in Sweden where learners speaking the same language are paired together so that they can help one another. A study by Commins (2010) also established that, in the USA, putting linguistic diversity at the centre allows schools to meet the needs of second language learners. Native and second language learners are therefore grouped together (Commins, 2010). Firstly, this is to enable learners to assist one another in a language that is easier to comprehend, and secondly, to ensure that learners do not feel segregated on the basis of language differences. Similarly, a study by Limaye (2016) in India revealed that learners who come from poor and illiterate families are paired together in order to receive extra support from the teacher. In addition to the above, Person (2012) revealed that teachers in Sweden can work with learners in pairs if they are facing a common challenge in Mathematics.

2.3.1.3 Whole class teaching

Learners in regular classrooms in some countries are taught as one large group using what is commonly referred to as “the lecture method”. In this practice, learners are not divided into smaller groups for the purposes of teaching and learning. A qualitative study by Mackey (2014) in the USA to examine how teachers included learners with disabilities in their regular classrooms revealed that learners are taught as one large group in the regular classrooms using the lecture method. However, teacher preparedness in teaching diverse learners emerged as an influential factor in teaching the whole class as one large group. In the study by Mackey (2014), teachers had only studied one undergraduate course in inclusion and they felt inadequately prepared to teach diverse learners.

A study by Efthymiou and Kington (2017) in Sweden established that learners taught as one large group using the lecture method emphasised the academic rather than the social elements of pedagogy. Focus was on covering the academic curriculum by negating issues of social inclusion amongst all learners. This was corroborated by Walsh (2018) in a study in the USA on the inclusion of learners with special educational needs in the general educational classroom, which revealed that some teachers taught their learners as one large group using the lecture method. The inclusion teacher would go around the classroom and make sure the learners were on task and taking notes, without being involved in discussions and problem solving platforms (Walsh, 2018).

Other negative effects of teaching learners as one large group are that this deprives learners of the opportunity to learn from one another and denies them opportunities to interact socially amongst themselves. In the following section, I present literature on how learners are being grouped in the regular classrooms from a regional perspective.

2.3.2 Regional literature on grouping of learners in the regular classrooms

Most African countries acknowledge the presence of diverse learners in the classrooms (Molosiwa, Mukhopadhyay & Moswela, 2014) therefore learners are grouped differently in the regular classrooms in different countries. In some cases, teachers put more emphasis on the improvement of the academic performance of learners when grouping, disavowing issues of social justice which can be addressed through allowing diverse learners to have more time for interactions amongst themselves. In this section reference is also made to the fact that learners are grouped with consideration of their disadilities.

2.3.2.1 Ability grouping

Studies indicate that, like in other countries, learners in the African region are grouped according to their abilities. Ability grouping takes two forms, which are within-class grouping and across-class grouping, commonly referred to as streaming (Chinyoka, 2013; Matavire, Mukavhi & Sana, 2012). Within-class streaming entails learners in the same class being arranged in smaller groups according to their abilities. On the other hand, across-class streaming has learners doing the same grade being streamed into separate classes according to their abilities. The idea is to have learners performing at the same level being taught together so that they do not affect the pace at which others, who are different from them, learn.

The motive for grouping learners by their levels of abilities is mainly informed by the need to respond to differences in academic achievements of learners by providing teaching approaches that cater for individual learners' needs, styles and prior achievements while they interact in a group of their own (Nkomo, 2013). Advocates of ability grouping maintain that, in this way, teachers can meet individual needs more successfully (Wadesango & Bayaga, 2013). Nonetheless, such a practice is rejected by inclusive pedagogy as being a perpetuation of exclusion (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

A study by Mapolisa (2013) indicates that ability grouping in Zimbabwe starts at grade two level with learners reading at approximately the same level being grouped together. A similar study by Nkomo (2013) on learner grouping in the regular classrooms reveals that, in Zimbabwe, within-class ability grouping is used to accommodate the different paces of learning, with fast learners being grouped alone. Within-class ability grouping in the classrooms is mostly done per subject (Nkomo, 2013). A study by Gyimah (2010) in Ghana revealed that learners are mostly grouped by ability as teachers have to identify individual children's learning styles predicated by the argument that since each person is different, the way they learn will differ. Similar findings were established in Kenya (Westbrook, Durrani, Brown, Orr, Pryor, Boddy & Salvi, 2013) and Zambia (Banda, Mostert & Wikan, 2012).

Learners doing the same grade are also placed in different classes based on their performances in what is commonly known as streaming. Academically high performing learners are grouped together in the top class, and the least academically performing learners are placed in a class of their own. Streaming has remained the most dominant way of grouping learners in Zimbabwe, despite the current drive for inclusion (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2015). The practice of streaming has become institutionalised in schools so that there are few schools in Zimbabwe that do not stream according to ability (Matavire et al., 2012). From research conducted by Matavire et al. (2013), streaming of learners is done to cater for individual and group interests. However, the same study by Matavire et al. (2013) revealed that allocation of resources, such as learning materials, tend to affect learners in lower achieving groups, as resource and teaching staff allocation benefit learners in high ability classes.

2.3.2.2 Whole class teaching

In some countries, learners are taught as one large group. In Botswana, regular classrooms practice whole class approaches where learners are regarded as passive recipients of knowledge (Otukile-Mongwaketse, 2018; Nkobi, 2011). This is because of the large class sizes of between 35 and 40 learners where teachers find it difficult to give attention to all the learners (Mangope, 2017; Iloanya, 2014).

Due to the large class sizes, teaching is mainly teacher centred in Botswana. A study by Otukile-Mongwaketse (2018) in this country revealed that pedagogical styles are authoritative and learners do not have opportunities for interaction amongst themselves in the learning processes. Classroom teaching is teacher-centred, punctuated by recitation and rote learning (Otukile-Mongwaketse, 2018). Although the formal curriculum acknowledges that there are many ethnic groups in Botswana, it does not describe minority groups' practices nor does it discuss relationships, current or historical, between ethnic groups to encourage inclusive practices (Mulimbi & Dryden-Petersen, 2017). A similar study carried out by Chikasanda, Mtemang'ombe, Nyirenda and Kapengule (2014) in Botswana also revealed that a lack of resources and large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to use grouping strategies that promote inclusion.

In the same vein, a study by Chiphiko and Shawa (2014) in Malawi found 50 learners in a standard 2 classroom seated on bare ground in an open place under a tree, with between five and 10 learners sharing a book. In view of the above, a lack of resources coupled with large class sizes make it difficult for teachers in Malawi to practice grouping practices that are inclusive in the classrooms (Chikasanda et al., 2014).

Similarly, a study by Ngonyani (2010) in Tanzania which sought to establish how teachers facilitate learning for learners with disabilities in the inclusive classrooms revealed that teachers mostly taught their learners as one large group using the lecture method, asking questions to the whole class. Learners were arranged in rows with four learners per desk because of the high numbers of learners in the classrooms.

Miles, Westbrook and Croft's (2018) study in Tanzania sought to interrogate the complex craft of developing inclusive and equal learning environments for learners with disabilities. It established that learners were taught as one large group and teachers focused more on learners who put their hands up, those who were mobile and able to walk to the chalkboard or simply those who were

seated in the front. A study by Chikasanda et al. (2014) in Malawi indicated that although group discussions were used by the teachers, there was not much time for them in the classrooms.

Research carried out in Malawi by Westbrook et al. (2013) and Chikasanda et al. (2014) revealed that teachers use the lecture method in whole class approaches because of a lack of resources. Similarly UNESCO (2016) reveals that, in Nigeria, teachers tended to engage learners on a question and answer strategy using the lecture method. Teachers start their lessons with whole group direct instruction and transition over the course of the lesson to question and answer periods followed by individual work. Teachers in that country rarely use small groups in the classrooms (UNESCO, 2016). A study by Erling, Adinolfi and Hultgren (2017) exploring the difficulties of English medium instruction in low and middle income levels revealed that, in Ghana, teaching in the regular classrooms is highly teacher centred with the teacher speaking for the majority of the lesson times, with no group work being given. This denies learners the opportunity to engage one another in smaller groups. In Mali, Senegal, Uganda and Kenya, classroom instruction time is largely lecture-based, with teachers speaking to learners who will be simultaneously writing (UNESCO, 2016).

2.3.2.3 Learners with disabilities

Studies indicate that teachers in the regular classrooms are aware of the presence of learners with different disabilities in their classrooms and they make special arrangements to accommodate these learners so that they can benefit from the teaching and learning. For example, studies by Mwajabu and Milinga (2017) and Ngonyani (2010) in Tanzania indicated that teachers consider learners' disabilities and arrange the seating of learners according to their visual acuity so that all learners can see the chalkboard. Learners with albinism, as well as other partially sighted learners, are required to sit in the front row. In addition to the above, learners are not separated according to their gender in the classrooms. Miles et al. (2018) also revealed that, in Tanzania, teachers reported moving learners with physical disabilities and

hearing impairments to the front of the classroom so that they could see and hear the teacher. In no instances were learners with disabilities or impairments taught in interactive small groups with other learners without disabilities.

Mulimbi and Dryden-Petersen (2017) found out that some learners in Botswana group themselves on ethnic lines in the regular classrooms, for example, the Herero and Khoisan learners because of their difficulties in the mastery of Setswana and English, which are the official languages of instruction.

2.3.3 South African literature on learner grouping

Studies by Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel, and Tlale (2015), Donohue and Bornman (2014), Muthivhi and Broom (2008), Naude and Meier (2019), Marais (2016), Bojuwoye, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla and Sylvester (2014), and Vandeyar and Killen (2006) established the implementation of various grouping practices as strategies for teaching and learning in the South African regular classrooms. These included ability grouping, mixed ability grouping, pairing, and whole-class teaching. These practices are influenced by factors such as class sizes, teacher training and space in the classrooms.

A study by Engelbrecht et al. (2015) in the Vaal Triangle aimed at deepening teachers' perceptions of barriers to learning and how this impacted on classroom practices. It established that learners are mainly grouped by ability. Findings in this study also revealed that teachers understood diversity in terms of how they were trained. This focused on the deficit approach and individualised barriers to learning, where the disabled learner cannot participate as an accepted member of the peer group in the teaching/learning process. This prompted teachers to group learners based on ability, marginalising those with barriers to learning. In the same light, a study by Donohue and Bornman (2014) focused on factors that hinder the implementation of inclusive education revealed that most teachers are deeply entrenched in the disability model due to the training that they received prior to inclusion. They therefore resort to ability grouping because they do not have the necessary skills to teach diverse learners in the regular classes. This

indicates that change in policy did not move in tandem with change in classroom practices on how to teach diverse learners. A study by Muthivhi and Broom (2008) in Venda in the Limpopo Province established that teaching and learning continue to be instantiated in the pre-1994 era based on ability. This was a qualitative study aimed at examining institutional practices of classroom teaching and socio-political changes in Venda at grade six level. Further findings in this study revealed that teachers felt they were under no obligation to make teaching adjustments to align with inclusion because of a diversity of learners in the classrooms.

Besides the use of ability grouping in the classrooms, a qualitative study by Naude and Meier (2019) in the Tshwane district of Gauteng revealed the use of mixed ability grouping in the classrooms. This was a qualitative study that was aimed at understanding the impact of the physical learning environment in foundation phase classrooms. Findings indicated that learners were placed in small mixed ability groups where learners with disabilities were supported by their peers.

A qualitative study by Marais (2016) aimed at exploring student teachers' challenges when teaching in overcrowded classrooms. This study established the use of whole-class teaching where learners were taught as one large group. Due to overcrowding, teaching strategies did not include group work. Teachers felt that they had no time to engage in group activities because there was not enough time for proper feedback from learners. This was particularly so because most of the activities planned for an overcrowded classroom discourage active participation (Marais, 2016). Case studies of 18 teachers working in diverse classrooms of five secondary schools and five primary schools in urban areas of three provinces of South Africa investigating the responses of South African teachers to the challenges of school integration, revealed the widespread implementation of whole class teaching. Findings indicate that teachers did not create a sense of belonging for their learners deliberately as they were taught as one large group. In one classroom, learners were randomly seated in the classroom and the teacher arbitrarily asked different learners to read to the class. However, a study by

Naude and Meier (2019) revealed that whole class teaching was used when introducing lessons before transiting to mixed ability grouping which caused a lot of noise due to overcrowding in the classrooms.

Pairing of learners is one of the grouping practices practiced in the South African regular classrooms. A qualitative interpretive study exploring the experiences of Western Cape primary and secondary school learners about the provision and utilisation of support services to improve learning revealed that learners who are performing well are placed next to learners who are having difficulties in order to be assisted (Bojuwoye et al., 2014). A study by Vandeyar and Killen (2006) on the state of desegregation and integration in three South African schools with different histories and race profiles established that learners were paired together regardless of racial differences. At one of the schools, non-white learners were put together with white learners. However, at another school, non-white learners were paired together and were seated at the back.

2.4 How the grouping practices are in alignment with principles of inclusion

Inclusive education is anchored in its seven universally agreed principles. These are: teaching all learners; exploring multiple identities; preventing prejudice; promoting social justice; choosing appropriate materials; teaching and learning about cultures and religions; and adapting and integrating lessons appropriately (Tanenbaum, 2011; UNESCO, 1994). The grouping practices discussed above indicate varying degrees of inclusivity and, in some cases, the absence of inclusive practices that are in line with the principles of inclusion. The following section presents a discussion on the inclusiveness of the grouping practices.

2.4.1 Ability grouping

Literature presented above indicates that learners are grouped by ability in countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, Israel, Kazakhstan and Singapore (Jacobs, Renandya & Power, 2016); United States of America, (Glenda & Hunter, 2016); New Zealand (Spratt & Florian, 2013); Sweden (Person, 2012); Zimbabwe (Nkomo, 2013); Kenya (Miles et al., 2018) and Zambia (Banda et al.,

2012). Although ability grouping is practiced, among other reasons, to enable teachers to offer more support to learners who need it, critiques of ability grouping believe that the practice perpetuates exclusion. For example, Florian (2015) posits that teachers are forced to teach to the middle level if they are grouped according to their abilities, leaving out both struggling learners and gifted learners.

According to Dunne (2010), learners in higher performing groups learn more than learners in other groups, enjoy being given more work to do and, in some cases, more advanced and more complex work than that is provided to learners in low achieving groups. This compromises the quality of education that learners in lower achieving groups receive as inclusion is aimed at improving the quality of education for vulnerable learners, such as those with special educational needs (Kesalahti & Vayrynen, 2013). If learners in low achieving groups receive low quality education, this impinges on the principle of providing both quality and equality in education.

The fundamental belief of inclusive education is that learners with special educational needs benefit academically and socially if they are learning together with their typical peers (Bunch, 2015). In that regard, grouping learners by ability precludes learners with special educational needs from social inclusion and from fully participating in the classroom activities that are enjoyed by other learners in higher achieving groups. This positions ability grouping as a poor classroom practice for inclusion. Inclusive management takes into account education that allows children to learn together, to be recognised and provided with equal education opportunities (Bubpha, 2014). Separating learners promotes segregation in the classrooms.

Ability grouping is the educational claim that learners of similar academic ability who are placed in the same group can be taught more effectively because their individual needs can be addressed (Dupriez, 2010) but research shows that this practice has no significant impact on learners' achievements (Parekh, 2013). Inclusive pedagogy requires that the present day classroom should be pedagogically capable of educating diverse learners in the same group settings (Thakur, 2014). Separating learners based on their abilities infringes on the

principle of equality in education and the provision of quality education to all learners in the regular classrooms (Florian & Black- Hawkins, 2011; Tanenbaum, 2011). Instead, grouping learners by ability levels can give rise to variations in the scale and quality of teaching depending on the level of the class (Dupriez, 2010). Inclusive education should be seen as a process that increases participation and decreases exclusion from the culture, community and curricula of regular classes (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Classrooms should have systems that allow for placements where each learner feels safe, accepted and valued and is assisted in developing his or her affective and intellectual capacity (Lopez, 2016).

Literature revealed that, in New Zealand, learners who are placed in ability groups learn different things depending on the groups they are in (Rubie-Davies, 2017). In addition, Rubie-Davies (2017) shows that learners who come from low socio-economic backgrounds or are Maori or Pasifika, are much more likely to end up in lower ability groups. This is influenced by the multiple socio-economic barriers which they have to overcome in order to be competitive members of the classroom environment. In light of inclusive pedagogy, grouping learners by their levels of abilities in the regular classrooms exacerbates inequalities and exclusion as learners of immigrant origins and learners from poor backgrounds are more likely to be placed in groups of low-abilities. This aggravates issues of inequality, social injustice and violations of democratic rights of learners who are placed in groups of their own based on their levels of abilities (Ramberg, 2014).

Although inclusion is a far broader concept than just the learners' group or class placement, ability grouping is presented as a pedagogical method that inhibits the inclusivity of regular classroom grouping practices, as it divides learners into different groups with reference to their prior knowledge (Ramberg, 2014). Learners need to feel connected to others in the classroom as part of the process of developing a sense of interdependence with others in a broader social community (Frederickson & Cline, 2011). The lack of interdependence with other learners that is prevalent in ability grouping makes it less inclusive.

Rubie-Davies's study (2017) in New Zealand also established that learners in high ability groups are often given stimulating, challenging and engaging activities whereas learners in low ability groups are given repetitive, skills-based, low level tasks. In the same vein, a study by Gonchar (2013) revealed that some teachers group learners by ability within classrooms, separating the strong Maths group or the emergent readers (Gonchar, 2013). This means that learners who are behind can get more help from teachers, while learners who are ahead do not get bored in class as they are not held back. Inclusive pedagogy rejects the notion that the presence of some can hold back the progress of others (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Teachers should be able to attend to the needs of all learners in the same group setup without separating them.

Studies indicate that there are more serious problems associated with ability grouping with regards to low level learners. For example, a study by Strauss (2013) indicates that low-level ability grouping can make learners placed in low ability groups predisposed to achieving lower educational outcomes. This leads to a situation where teachers have low expectations of learners who are in lower ability groups (Shepherd, 2012). This negatively affects the learners' ability to socialise with others, as well as further diminishing their levels of achievements in class. Ultimately, this segregates learners with disabilities from what is ordinarily provided to learners without disabilities in the classrooms (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Arguably, grouping of learners based on their abilities points to an injustice that is directly linked to access to equitable and quality education for all learners (Tanenbaum, 2011). The mandate for classrooms is to accommodate all learners on an equal basis, and provide quality education to all without regarding their differences.

2.4.2 **Mixed ability grouping**

For equity in education, learners are taught in mixed ability groups so that no single group can progress at a faster rate than any other (Heward, 2014). Literature has indicated that learners are grouped by mixed ability in America, and Sweden (Ramberg, 2014); Oman (Al-Shammakhi & Al-Humaidi, 2015); the

United Kingdom (Pay, 2016); Finland (Barlow, 2017; Llagan, 2016); and New Zealand (Baker & Clark, 2017), among other countries.

There are a number of positive effects of mixed ability grouping that have been consistently found in different studies which suggest good inclusive practices in the classrooms. Such positive outcomes include the development of positive self-esteem by learners with special educational needs because of the intra-group relations of diverse learners that ensue (Eredics, 2015). Furthermore, learners in mixed ability groups can develop new social skills through interaction with one another and this increases learners' confidence in the classrooms (Eredics, 2015).

In addition to the above, a study by Harnish (2015) showed that stereotypes can be removed if diverse learners are allowed to learn together in the same group. This was corroborated by Budginaite, Siarova, Sternadel, Mackonyte and Spurga (2016) who established that inclusive education models where learners from different backgrounds and abilities learn side-by-side are more effective at increasing attainment levels among disadvantaged learners. This is in line with one of the fundamental principles of inclusive education which pronounces that all learners should be able to learn together, regardless of their individual difficulties or differences (Winter & O'Raw, 2010). The ideals of social justice can be seen as complete when there is equal participation of all learners in a group setting that is designed to meet their needs (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013).

Merely putting learners with special educational needs in the regular classroom does not constitute good inclusive practices. Classroom inclusive pedagogy focuses on how learners learn with each other in their groups (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In this regard, mixed ability grouping responds well to inclusivity because it allows for equality in education where learners who are diverse learn together in the same groups receiving the same quality education and subverting prejudices towards particular learners. Learners' multiple social group identities are brought to the learning environment. These may include gender, race, ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation, age and socio-

economic status (Garibay, 2015). Acceptance of such diverse learners within one group set-up is a good practice in inclusive pedagogy, which dictates that teachers must attend to individual differences while avoiding the stigma of making some learners feel different (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This requires the teacher to put in practice strategies that remove prejudices towards vulnerable learners, such as allowing all learners to learn together, thereby providing opportunities for social cohesion through their interaction with other learners (Tanenbaum, 2011).

Literature also indicates that learners in mixed ability groups are given the same tasks which they do together as a group. This resonates with inclusive pedagogy which dictates that differences between learners must be accommodated through the choice of tasks and activities that should be made available to all learners, without making some learners feel different (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The inclusive classroom should be a space where all learners have the opportunity to interact and learn in a positive and meaningful way (Harnish, 2015). Furthermore, there should be learning opportunities that are made available for everyone so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The above views are reflected in mixed ability groups where learners are grouped together without due regard to their differences. In inclusive pedagogy, focus should be on what is to be taught rather than who is to learn it (Florian, 2015). Diversity is viewed as strength and a stimulus for the learning and development of all learners in mixed ability groups (Borg, Hunter, Sigurjonsdottir & D'Alessio, 2011). Mixed ability groups also enable all learners to achieve better academic outcomes because they encourage social inclusion (Janta & Harte, 2016).

Despite the numerous advantages that were established above in the use of mixed ability groups in the regular classrooms, there is a lack of some practices that should bolster inclusion of all learners. These practices relate to the difficulties in differentiating instruction within the mixed ability groups, problems in giving more assistance to learners with special educational needs and provision of teaching/learning media that address the needs of all learners. For example, a study by Petrenas et al. (2013) indicates that teachers face

difficulties in giving assistance to particular learners with varied special educational needs within the mixed ability groups. Furthermore, there is a potential dilemma of channelling learners into categories based on the amount of support an individual learner requires (Duncan, 2012).

In addition to the above, there is the argument that having diverse learners in the same group holds back the progress of gifted learners as they are circumstantially forced to work at the pace of learners with special educational needs. This was substantiated in a study by Marumo and Mhlolo (2017) which established that gifted learners do not benefit from mixed ability groups because they are constantly being held back by underperforming learners. Arguably, this positions mixed ability grouping as lacking in its ability to enable diverse learners to progress at the same rate without holding back others, or leaving others behind.

Key to inclusive pedagogies is the use of appropriate teaching/learning materials that address the needs of all learners (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, given the diversity of learners in mixed ability groups, teachers face challenges in providing the teaching/learning materials for the various categories of learners in the groups. This impinges on one of the principles of inclusion which requires the provision of teaching/learning materials that are appropriate to the needs of each individual learner (Tanenbaum, 2011).

2.4.2 **Pairing**

Literature has also established that learners in the regular classrooms are also paired for the purposes of teaching and learning. Pairing of learners in the regular classrooms has been revealed to be dominant in countries such as Sweden (Jalali-Moghadam & Hedman, 2016) and India (Limaye, 2016). Essentially, learners help each other in the common language that they both understand. This is supported by Buli-Holmberg and Jeyaprathaban (2016) who indicated that learners in Norway help one another in pairs through their common languages. A study by Limaye (2016) in India established that learners who come from disadvantaged backgrounds are paired together in order to

receive extra support from the teacher. This is consistent with findings by Person (2012) who established that learners in Sweden are paired together if they are facing a common challenge in Mathematics.

Although learners are paired so that they can help one another, the act of separating learners from others on any basis runs contrary to the principle of inclusion which requires that all learners should learn together in spite of their differences (Florian, 2015). Learners should be made to feel that they are part of the class and that they are being valued in the classroom community (Borg et al., 2011). Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argue that, in line with inclusive pedagogy, no learner should be excluded from participating in the other activities being carried out by other learners on any basis. Inclusive settings must emphasise building a community in which everyone belongs and is accepted and supported by his or her peers (Frederickson & Cline, 2011). It can be argued that separating learners and pairing them on the basis of their language differences runs contrary to inclusive pedagogy. A learner who has a disabling condition may be excluded from the enriched learning that can take place within the classroom to the detriment of the learner (Winter & O'Raw, 2010).

When learners are being paired, due consideration should be given to their differences in order to erase the lines that separate them, and not to propel the differences by pairing them separately. This calls for classroom teachers to be able to manage diverse classrooms and implement differentiated instructional strategies that do not make learners feel that they are different (Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014).

2.4.2 Whole class teaching

Whole class grouping entails teaching learners in the regular classrooms as one large group and has been found to be practiced in the USA (Mackey, 2014; Walsh, 2018) and Sweden (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017). From a regional perspective, whole class teaching was found to be prevalent in Botswana because of large class sizes (Mangope, 2017); Tanzania (Ngonyani, 2010) and

Malawi because of shortages of resources like textbooks (Chiphiko & Shawa, 2014); Nigeria (UNESCO, 2016); and Ghana (Erling et al., 2017).

Indications from the studies above indicate that learners are taught as one whole large group because of large class sizes and shortages of teaching/learning resources in the classrooms. However, the practice of teaching learners as one large group using the lecture method, compromises the quality of teaching and learning as learners cannot learn through interactions amongst themselves. This infringes on one of the principles of inclusivity which stipulates that the provision of quality education to all learners requires the use of appropriate teaching/learning materials which learners can use in smaller groups in the regular classes (UNESCO, 2005). Instead of solely relying on the lecture method in the whole class group teaching strategy, there is the need to incorporate a variety of activities, assignments and audio-visual media as well as appropriate books and materials that reflect accurate images of diverse people (Tanenbaum, 2011) to enable learners to take different pathways towards participating in class (The McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning, 2018).

Furthermore, whole class group teaching through the lecture method conflicts with the other principle of inclusivity which dictates that lessons need to be adapted and integrated appropriately in order to facilitate full inclusion of alllearners (Peebles & Mandaglio, 2014). Successful inclusion is likely in classes where all learners demonstrate high levels of engagement through interactions in the groups (Lerner & Johns, 2012). Teachers therefore need to be mindful of who is in their classrooms so that lessons can be more culturally relevant (Tanenbaum, 2011).

Literature has indicated that the lecture method tends to focus on learners who raise their hands to answer questions. Arguably, learners who do not participate in the question and answer sessions are likely to be left behind, which is contrary to inclusive pedagogy that prescribes that no child should feel left behind in the learning process in the classroom (Florian & Black- Hawkins, 2011).

2.4.3 Disabilities and diversity

Learners are also grouped with consideration of their disabilities and other differences. In the United States of America (Commins, 2010) and Sweden (Jalali-Moghadam & Hedman, 2016), linguistic diversity is used to group learners so that they can help one another in a common language. Ramberg (2014) established that in Sweden, factors like social class, socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender and educational needs influence how learners are grouped as they can be mixed in one group. On the other hand, Al- Shammakhi and Al-Humaidi (2015) in Oman and Kesalahti and Vayrynen (2013) in Denmark report that learners are grouped according to their ages and are grouped randomly regardless of their attainment and ability levels. Regionally, learners of different backgrounds are grouped together in Botswana (Mangope, 2017) while, in Tanzania, Mwajabu and Milinga (2017) established that teachers make efforts to arrange seating arrangements of learners according to their visual acuity. Other than that, learners with disabilities are taught in interactive small groups with other learners without disabilities. The above practices demonstrate high levels of inclusivity in light of inclusive pedagogy. This speaks to the principle of inclusivity which is aimed at eliminating social exclusion which is the consequence of a negative, ill-natured attitude and a lack of due response to distinctions on the basis of race, economic situation, social background, ethnic origin, language, religion and individual abilities (Kirillova, 2015). In light of the multiple identities of learners that exist in the regular classes, teachers need to create groups that help learners feel pride in themselves by engaging learners in projects where they can talk about their experiences as it relates to the academic content, despite their differences (Tanenbaum, 2011).

Learners have multiple social group identities to bring to the learning environment. These identities can include gender, race, ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation, age and socio-economic status (Garibay, 2015). The regard for learner diversity and disabilities in inclusive pedagogy enables all learners to feel welcome in the classrooms. The presence of some learners in the groups does not have to be seen as having the potential to hold back the

progress of others (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). All learners should be able to participate in classroom life in the groups.

The discussion above focused on how learner groupings in the regular classrooms are in alignment with the principles of inclusive education. It has been noted that some practices are in alignment with the principles of inclusion, while others perpetuate exclusion.

2.5 Summary

This chapter presented literature which focused on how learners were being grouped in the regular classrooms historically, contemporary grouping practices in the regular classrooms, and how the grouping practices being implemented are in line with principles of inclusion. The following chapter presents the research paradigm, methodology, design, sampling, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations applied in this research.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented related literature on the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms. This chapter discusses the research methodology and design that were employed in this study. The philosophical assumption guiding the research is presented and reviewed. Other aspects covered in this chapter include the research design, data collection tools, population and sampling, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical issues.

3.2 Paradigm

Every research is grounded in some fundamental logical assumptions about the approaches that are appropriate for the construction of knowledge in that study. Once one has established a topic of study, it becomes imperative to think about how to go about the research. It is important to start by questioning the research paradigm to be applied in conducting research because it guides how to undertake the study to understand the phenomena (Wahyuni, 2012). A paradigm represents a world view that defines the nature of the world, the individual's place in it and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is the lens through which a researcher looks at the world. Any research paradigm has certain philosophical assumptions that drive thinking and action (Mertens, 2010).

In this study, I position myself within an interpretivist paradigm. Its main purpose is to understand reality from people's perspectives. For this study, my intention was to understand the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms from practitioners. The interpretive paradigm assumes that knowledge is socially constructed by those who take part in the research process and that researchers need to understand the complexity of lived experiences as comprehended by those who live it (Mertens, 2010). In undertaking this study, the assumption was that the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms is contextual and much valid information could be sourced from the

regular classroom teachers who, based on the daily experiences in the regular classrooms, would be able to provide in-depth information on the phenomena. I envisioned that the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms could best be established through interactions with participants who are the practitioners in the classrooms. There are three philosophical and theoretical issues of research paradigms which are the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). The following section presents the three philosophical and theoretical issues that framed the interpretive paradigm in this study.

3.2.1 Ontology

In an interpretive paradigm, ontology refers to the nature of reality that is subjective and socially constructed with the researcher and the respondent both involved in the knowing process (Fard, 2012). Ontology in an interpretive paradigm is dependent on the interaction between the researcher and the researched. Reality about the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classes was established by the interaction between myself and the regular classroom teachers in the primary schools. The construction of the reality about the inclusiveness of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms hinged on the regular class teachers' daily experiences.

Realities exist in the form of multiple and intangible mental constructions that are based on experience and dependent for their form and content on the persons or groups holding the constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In an interpretive paradigm, the researcher attempts to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge (Mertens, 2010). In this regard, reality about the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms would be established through interactions with different regular class teachers with each holding their own perspectives. The other tenet of any paradigm is epistemology.

3.2.1 Epistemology

Epistemology in an interpretivist paradigm refers to how reality should be

understood. It is critical to know the position that one holds throughout the data collection process in a research. Epistemology is about the relationship between the researcher and that which can be known about the reality (Fard, 2012). The basic question that guided this study was how to establish the inclusiveness of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms. Epistemology represents the beliefs on how to generate, understand and use the knowledge that is deemed to be acceptable and valid (Wahyuni, 2012). Epistemology in interpretive research directs the inquirer and the inquired to be interlocked in an interactive process, each influencing the other, in the construction of knowledge (Mertens, 2010). In light of the above, construction of the reality on the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms was dependent on the relationship between the participants and the researcher in the data collection process. Shah and Al-Bargi (2013) assert that, in an interpretivist paradigm, the inquirer and the inquired are fixed into a single entity and that their interactions lead to certain findings. It is about the relationship between the researcher and that which can be known about reality.

3.2 Research Design

A paradigm leads us to ask certain questions and use appropriate approaches to systematic inquiry which is the methodology (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). Interpretivists believe in qualitative techniques that are diverse and present human beings as the primary research instrument (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). They include phenomenology, grounded theory, case study and ethnography (Mertens, 2010). Interpretivists try to get diverse perspectives to interpret meaning through a discussion involving the comparison of conflicting ideas that can lead to a reassessment of previous positions (Mertens, 2010).

I carried out this study through the qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research studies behaviour as it occurs naturally (Arthur et al., 2012). Similarly, Savin-Baden and Major (2013) assert that qualitative approaches are used by researchers to study the behaviour, perspectives and experiences of the targeted group in a naturalistic way. I felt that the

inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms can best be noted when engaging in qualitative research methodology which allows for in- depth interviews as well as observations of how learners are grouped in the regular classrooms (Arthur et al., 2012).

Qualitative research is inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to- face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2012). The focus is on understanding people and their circumstances, how they consider the world and make meaning of it (Savin- Baden & Major, 2013). The research was objectively aimed at exploring the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms at primary school level. In that light, I felt that the aims of the study could best be addressed through the adoption of the qualitative approach since data would be sought through the participants' personal reflections of their various grouping practices in the regular classrooms. Participants would be able to give meaning to their lived experiences with regards to the grouping practices that are being implemented.

The characteristic of qualitative research is that it is a flexible, naturalistic method of data collection (Lodico et al., 2010). Similarly, McMillan and Schumacher (2006) argue that qualitative research is concerned with understanding social phenomena from participants' perceptions. The views raised above influenced me to adopt the qualitative research methodology in that I would be able to make optimum use of the flexibility inherent in the approach during the data collection process. An in-depth interview, as a tool of collecting data, would enable me to be flexible in asking questions related to the study.

In order for the researcher to adequately gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and feelings of other people, he needs to engage them in ways that allow for both oral engagements as well as observations on how the said people behave as they interact with each other (Lodico et al., 2010). This can only be done through optimum interactions and involvement with the participants. I intended to visit the sites which, in this case, were the fifteen

mainstream classrooms that were purposefully sampled. Qualitative researchers engage with the places where their participants work, play, worship or live out their daily lives (Arthur et al., 2012). This allows for optimum opportunities for interactions that build a deeper understanding of the feelings and experiences of the phenomena under study. “The aim of such research is to investigate the meaning of social phenomena as experienced by the people themselves” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

McMillan and Schumacher (2006) argue that analysing the contexts of the participants and their meanings including feelings, beliefs, ideas, thoughts and oral actions, adds to the understanding of a context. In the same vein, Arthur et al. (2012) assert that qualitative research is based on the collection of verbal data which are often presented by the researcher in the form of a narrative account of what people say or do without altering what they have said. Qualitative research methodology was the most appropriate approach in this study as it was aimed at understanding the participants and their circumstances with regards to the grouping practices which they are implementing in their classes.

A deeper understanding would come about through in-depth interviews that allow for further questions that are outside the set guidelines in the unstructured interviews. These questions allow for the sourcing of other relevant information that might be difficult to obtain in other methodologies, for instance, quantitative research. The research was undertaken within the classroom social settings. I envisaged building a working rapport with the teachers so that they would willingly volunteer information they would rather choose to retain if it were a quantitative research. This is in line with Savin- Baden and Major’s (2013) assertion that qualitative research occurs in natural settings of people whose experiences are the objects of expectations. The advantage of using qualitative methodology is the ability to examine phenomena in their natural settings, striving to interpret these phenomena in context thereby increasing the levels of trustworthiness in the research findings.

The goal of qualitative research is depth and not breadth (Arthur et al., 2012). To attain depth in research, a researcher has to engage in purposive sampling which requires that participants have to be chosen because they possess valuable information about the phenomena under study. In this regard, the research was not aimed at obtaining breadth but rather on accessing depth. I chose this particular methodology because participants (teachers) would be chosen on the basis of their experiences, knowledge of learning disabilities as well as their qualifications in inclusive education, among other considerations. Choosing a very big sample, as in quantitative research, would not attain depth in this case.

Despite its strengths, qualitative research methodology has its own limitations. Jabeen (2013) argues that qualitative research is unable to generalise the findings outside of the research participants because of the small size of population covered, among other reasons. The research findings from a sample based on purposive strategy may not truly reflect the practices of other participants who are not information-rich but are practicing in the same settings. The size of the sample from which data are sought may not universally apply to all other participants from the same population groups.

Qualitative research usually involves relatively small numbers of participants and this can mean that it is less likely to be taken seriously by other academic researchers, by practitioners or by policy makers (Griffin, 2014). This could be because of the low numbers of participants chosen that the said stakeholders may feel is not representative enough. A case in point is of 15 participants being purposefully selected to participate in a study because of how rich they are in knowledge of the field under study, compared to over 1,000 teachers who happen to fall in the same population but are left out because they are deemed not knowledgeable enough. In view of the above, Jabeen (2013) notes that a non-probabilistic sample may not represent the characteristics, events or processes of the whole population.

In addition to the above, qualitative findings closely relate to local conditions and contexts, and may not be generalised in terms of other groups. For example, research findings from one site may not reflect the same picture as another site

because of factors such as class, ethnicity, resourcefulness, gender and race. These factors do affect the way people view and respond to the same phenomena manifested in different localities.

Another limitation of qualitative research is that it depends heavily on the skills of the researcher and therefore results can be easily influenced by the personal biases and idiosyncrasies of the researcher (Chen, 2012). In view of the above, these idiosyncrasies may manifest themselves throughout the study, in particular, during the process of data collection and analysis. The researcher may be influenced by his/her beliefs, experiences and notions to try and direct the research towards a particular outcome. In this case, the researcher's views towards each particular grouping practice in the regular classroom could have influenced me to drive the research process towards approving or disapproving of the inclusiveness of a particular grouping practice. It is possible that the reality is not defined correctly because of the subjective perspective of the author (Ramona, 2011).

Whilst qualitative methods can examine social processes at work in particular contexts in considering depth, the collection and especially the analysis can be time consuming. This relates to the collection of large volumes of data that are needed to give a rich description of the phenomenon under study. This could be a tedious exercise which could tempt the researcher to leave out important information that is valuable to the study. The amount of time needed for the purposes of interviews and observations might mean more resources would be needed to sustain such a long stay in the field of study (study sites).

In this research, data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations. In contiguity with these methods of data collection could be the issue of power dynamics. Jabeen (2013) notes that these power imbalances arise out of a social construction of gender, ethnic, class and sexual identities. These tend to challenge the researcher as he/she tries to get accepted by the participants who are not of the same social status, ethnic group and gender. In the same light, participants could approach the study with some degree of

negativity because of the differences with the researchers in the areas stated above. In addition, in the process of data collection, the presence of the researcher may affect or influence the responses of the participants.

Because qualitative research is mainly done with words and words may have multiple meanings (Jabeen, 2013), this becomes a challenge for qualitative researchers as they decide about their “own” voices thereby compromising the actual voices of the participants. The narrative process may inadvertently use words that were not precisely given by the participants.

Although these are general limitations to qualitative research, knowledge of these disadvantages helped me to avoid them as much as I could. Steps that were taken to mitigate these limitations are discussed later in this chapter, under section 3.9 Trustworthiness (Reliability and Validity). These measures were taken to remove any biases and contradictions that could affect the trustworthiness of the research outcomes. Over and above that, the choice of qualitative research methodology was heavily influenced by the advantages rather than the limitations stated above.

A descriptive phenomenological research design was used in this study. Descriptive phenomenology investigates the fundamental human experience to reveal the essence of lived experiences (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Williams (2012) notes that the phenomenological design is a beneficial aspect of qualitative research because it is nonstatic and offers flexibility to burrow further into the topic to excavate the most information possible to explain the rich details of the phenomenon.

I chose a descriptive phenomenological design because it would enable me to uncover information beyond mere statements and delve into those aspects that involve personal feelings about the grouping practices used in the regular classrooms. The interviews and observations helped me to go beyond that which is generally perceived as obvious. This was done through developing a positive working relationship with the participants. A descriptive phenomenological research design allows the participants to explain their lived experiences through their individual voices (Williams, 2012). I needed to “read through” the words of

the participants to get that aspect of the participant's experience and understanding which was lived before it was reflected upon. A descriptive phenomenological design allowed me to ask for clarity beyond the meanings of words and phrases expressed by the participants. These verbal interactions gave both flexibility to the study and detailed accounts of the experiences of the participants in their daily interactions with diverse learners in their various group settings.

A descriptive phenomenological research design involves getting each participant to focus on his or her phenomenological space and to describe the experience (current or from memory) on his or her own terms (Bordens & Abbott, 2011). In view of the above, it can be argued that the descriptive phenomenological design acknowledges that the experiences, beliefs, feelings and actions of an individual are not universally generalisable. A descriptive phenomenology gives each individual his/her phenomenological space and the experiences he/she expresses are regarded as very important to the study. Each individual gives his/her own account of his/her experiences with regards to the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms. Descriptive phenomenologists agree that there is not a single reality, each individual has his or her own reality (Dakada, Abongdia & Foncha, 2014). This realisation of the contribution of each individual participant in the study gave depth to the study as data were both triangulated and/or presented in ways that reflected what the participants had said without alterations.

In descriptive phenomenology, the research aims to describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible while remaining true to the facts (Groenewald, 2004). What is perceived true of a phenomenon has to be discarded until the study is conducted and the data are examined and presented (Williams, 2012). A phenomenological research design does not seek to prove what is generally perceived as true but rather to establish how participants experience the phenomenon under study. I removed any preconceived ideas and perceptions that I had as I dealt only with data brought forward by participants as the research was being undertaken. A descriptive phenomenological design brings detail to the study. According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), phenomenologists seek not only to uncover what

individuals experience but also how they experience the phenomenon. It is a study of lived experiences. As such, phenomenological research is not only concerned about what is being lived or experienced but also how that particular phenomenon is being experienced. This design helped me to put together a rich account of the phenomenon under study.

3.2 Sampling

Qualitative research is an approach that is most used in is purposeful sampling (Lodico et al., 2010; Gay et al., 2011). I used purposive sampling in this study. Purposive sampling is selecting information-rich cases for study indepth (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). I specifically used homogeneous sampling which directs the selection of people of similar backgrounds and experiences in a study. For example, participants would be similar in terms of educational qualifications, jobs or life experiences (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). In this case, I used homogeneous purposeful sampling to select regular classroom teachers who have qualifications in inclusive education as well as experience in teaching in regular classes in South African regular primary schools. Homogeneous purposeful sampling applied to both individuals and sites which, in this case, were regular schools accommodating diverse learners.

3.2.1 Purposeful Sampling

In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn about or understand the central phenomena (Creswell, 2012). Once researchers have initially mapped the field, they selectively choose the persons, situations and events most likely to yield data about the evolving research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In view of the above, I chose sites that would give detail to the grouping of learners in the regular classrooms in the face of the policy of inclusion. These were sites that had participants who had knowledge about inclusive practices at classroom level.

Purposeful sampling applies to both individuals and sites (Creswell, 2012). Site sampling is when a site is selected to locate people in a particular event (McMillan

& Schumacher, 2006). I did site sampling with assistance from District Based Support Teams. This was particularly important because the District Based Support Team members have information about the schools in the district that would be of benefit to the study in giving both detail and insight to the study. The involvement of District Based Support Teams was necessitated by the realisation that some schools enrol learners based on ability while others enrol learners regardless of their backgrounds. A total of 15 schools were selected in this study. Purposeful sampling aims to select persons, places or things that can provide most detailed and rich information to answer the research questions (Lodico et al., 2010). In view of the above, all the schools selected fell within the boundaries of the Johannesburg region of education.

3.5.1.1 Description of the Schools

All the schools sampled were located in the township. They enroll learners who are widely diverse in ability, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, gender, age and religion, among other differences, in line with the dictates of DoE (2001), which stipulates that all children should be accommodated in schools nearest to them. Johannesburg region has five districts in terms of delimitations by the Gauteng Department of Education. These districts are: Johannesburg Central, Johannesburg East, Johannesburg North, Johannesburg South as well as Johannesburg West. Names of schools used in this study are not their real names, fictitious names were used for the purposes of anonymity.

Schools were sampled from each of the five districts for the purposes of the study. Johannesburg West had more participants than other district, not by design but because of data saturation.

Table 3.1: List of schools sampled (Fictitious names of schools)

Name of School	District
St Mary's primary school	Johannesburg North
Pine View primary school	Johannesburg North
Imbali primary school	Johannesburg North
Waterfield primary school	Johannesburg West
Impumelelo primary school	Johannesburg West
Intuthuko primary school	Johannesburg West
Ntabeni primary school	Johannesburg West
Good Hope primary school	Johannesburg East
Arikopaneng primary school	Johannesburg East
Ntini primary school	Johannesburg East
Veli prmary school	Johannesburg South
Jabulani primary school	Johannesburg South
Loreto primary school	Johannesburg South
Thabani primary school	Johannesburg Central
Malibongwe primary school	Johannesburg Central

The table above indicates names of schools that were sampled for the study as well as their respective districts within the Johannesburg Metropolitan region.

3.2.2 Participant sampling

The research sought to explore the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms. In that light, I purposefully chose practicing regular class teachers because of their daily engagement with learners in the classrooms. Arthur et al. (2012) notes that one should select information-rich cases – those from whom one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. Various considerations were brought to come up with criteria that I used to determine the appropriateness of an individual to take part in the research. The criteria that were used in selecting the sample contained the following:

1. Understanding of South African policies on inclusive education

I envisaged that information-rich participants have to have knowledge about South African policies on inclusive education. Such participants find it easy to comprehend the need for grouping learners in one way or the other, in light of inclusivity.

2. Qualification in inclusive education

I chose teachers who have a qualification in inclusive education/special needs education because they have a deeper understanding of diverse learners and the pedagogic strategies that can be used in the regular classrooms. More so, they have a deeper understanding of inclusion and how different learners can be included in the groups for the purposes of teaching and learning.

3. Teaching Experience

Experience itself helps the individual teachers to be better placed to deal with learners with special educational needs. Thus, the power of experience was not overlooked in selecting participants. In this regard, an experience of five years and above was considered sufficient for the purpose of the study.

4. Experience in teaching learners with special educational needs

The experience discussed above relates to general teaching. However, it may not be enough if due consideration is not given to the experience in teaching learners with special educational needs. This was considered very important, hence was one of the criteria used in the selection process of the participants. The following table shows the profiles of the selected participants. Fictitious names were used for anonymity.

Table 3.2: Participants' profiles (Fictitious names were used)

Name	Age	Gender	Qualifications	Years' Experience
Mr. Sithole	46	Male	Certificate Education; B Ed in Special needs	18
Ms. Dhlodhlo	38	Female	Diploma in Education; ACE Inclusive Education	11
Ms. Sekhoto	45	Female	Diploma in Education; B Sc Special Needs Education; Honours in Inclusive Education	16
Ms. Dhlamini	51	Female	Diploma Education; B Sc in Counselling	18
Mr. Mofokeng	40	Male	Diploma in Education; ACE Special Needs Education; B Ed Special Needs Education	19
Ms. Mhlongo	40	Female	Diploma in Education; B Ed Special Needs Education	20
Mr. Mpofu	42	Male	Diploma in Education; B Ed Inclusive Education; Honours Inclusive Education	20
Mr. Khazi	52	Male	Certificate Education; B Ed in Special Needs	23

Mr. Sempi	48	Male	Certificate Education; B Ed in Special Needs	17
Mr. Mpinga	47	Male	Bachelor of Education in Special Needs Education	19
Ms. Chiwasa	46	Female	Bachelor of Education; Honours Special Needs	9
Ms. Gwala	38	Female	Diploma in Education; B Ed Special Needs Education	10
Ms. Mzila	47	Female	Certificate in Education; Diploma in Special Needs Education	20
Ms. Khumalo	33	Female	Diploma in Education; B Ed Special Needs Education	8
Ms. Ngwenya	46	Female	Certificate in Education; Diploma in Special Needs Education	

3.5.2.1 Sample size

The goal of purposeful sampling is not to obtain a large and representative sample; the goal is to select persons who can provide the richest and most detailed information to help us answer a research question (Lodico et al., 2010). In the same vein, Arthur et al. (2012) argue that one is required to collect sufficient data to represent the experiences that are being investigated and stop when saturation is reached. Initially, I intended to interview a total of 25 participants and carry out observations in those 25 classrooms. However, due to data saturation, 15 participants were eventually interviewed and observations carried out in those 15 classrooms. This was because data collected had reached saturation point to adequately answer the research question. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) argue that a few cases studied in depth can yield many insights about the topic. The overall ability of a researcher to provide an in-depth picture diminishes with the addition of each individual or site (Creswell, 2012). Arthur et al. (2012) note

that a researcher should collect sufficient data to represent the experiences he/she is investigating and may stop when saturation is reached.

3.5.3 Procedure

I first sought permission from the Gauteng Department of Basic Education to carry out the research in the schools. This was done by completing a research form seeking authorisation to do so. Information submitted included how the research would be conducted, purpose of the research, aims and objectives and the target districts. The research proposal was also attached which had more information about the research with regards to the above.

After gaining permission from the Department of Basic Education, I proceeded to the district authorities with the permission letter granted by the Department of Basic Education. At this point, I sought to gain permission from the relevant districts to visit targeted schools for the purposes of the research. With help from District Based Support Teams, I was able to identify schools where I would obtain rich and in-depth data about effective and efficient grouping practices in the regular classrooms.

From the chosen districts, I proceeded to the schools to gain permission to carry out the study. Also, the visit to the schools was aimed at identifying and seeking consent from the would-be participants. In this regard, permission was sought from gate keepers that included the security personnel as well as the principals of the schools. According to Arthur et al. (2012), it would be unthinkable for an unidentified researcher to gain entrance into a school and conduct a research. I explained to both the security personnel at the gates and the principals of the schools the purposes of my research. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) argue that observation-based research requires that we pay particular attention to the ethical aspects of our projects. In view of this, it was necessary to get consent from gate keepers to omit any issues of suspicion that might arise. Administrators might be wary of research that was aimed at evaluating their personnel or institution or that might reflect badly on their organization (Mertens, 2010). As such, I gave school principals assurances about the amount of control that I would have over

the research process and the use of the finding.

With consent from the principals, I managed to identify participants with the assistance of School Based Support Teams. Consent was sought in the form of a letter which they signed after I had explained the purpose of the research. The observations took two whole days with each participant. The observations took place during the school day, from the time school started up to the end of the school day. I used field notes to write down what I was observing. This was particularly guided by the observation protocol which directed me on what data to collect during the observations. After each day's notes, I would verify the notes with the participants after which I would thank them.

3.6 Data collection methods

The research sought to establish the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms. The nature of the study required naturalistic methods of data collection. I collected data through interviews and observations.

Qualitative research is characterised by flexible, naturalistic methods of data collection and usually does not use standardised instruments as its major data source (Lodico et al., 2010). I used qualitative methods to collect data as they allowed for rich and thick descriptions of the phenomena under study. They enabled me to observe for myself the various grouping practices in the regular classrooms.

Both interviews and observations provided the most appropriate ways of understanding and determining the inclusiveness of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms. The interviews and observations were naturalistic in nature because they involved observing the grouping practices in the regular classrooms, as well as talking to participants who possessed a number of attributes that have been discussed which enabled them to be selected.

The choice of both interviews and observations was also influenced by the need to triangulate data. In this case, data from what the participants said were checked

against what I had observed during the observation process. This enabled me to identify gaps, spaces, differences and similarities in order to probe those areas that needed clarity. The following discussion focuses on each method of data collection that was used.

3.6.1 Interviews

Interviews allow researchers to engage with individual research participants face-to-face in a way that questionnaires or focus groups do not (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Interviews are appropriate when a researcher wants one-to- one communication to deeply investigate a participant's experiences. They are also ideal when the researcher wants to probe for additional information that can clarify the data collected (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Unlike questionnaires, interviews enable the researcher to make follow-up questions that could shed light on issues that need clarity. However, the usefulness of an interview depends on the astuteness and knowledge of the researcher about the phenomenon under study. This enables the researcher to ask probing questions that reach out to every item of the study that may otherwise be overlooked. I carried out in-depth individual interviews with research participants on how they group their learners in the face of the policy of inclusivity.

In view of the above, in-depth individual interviews enabled me to gain complex in-depth information from participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The focus was not about getting specific answers to questions but rather to develop an understanding and interpretation of people and situations. The opportunity for dialogue which in-depth interviews provide allows the researcher to probe and clarify and to check that he/she has clearly understood what is being said. There are also opportunities to ask additional questions on unexpected issues that arise (Arthur et al., 2012).

I needed to gain detailed information about the grouping practices in order to determine their inclusivity. Interviews may be used to corroborate or verify observations (Arthur et al., 2012). They can be used to provide more details and to uncover complex beliefs, knowledge or experiences than a survey. Interviews

are flexible research tools which can be used to gather a range of different types of information, including factual data, views and opinions, personal narratives and histories, which make them useful as a means of answering a wide range of research questions (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Punch (2009) posits that the interview is a flexible data collection tool which suits a wide variety of research situations. The nature of the research required the sourcing of information about the inclusiveness of the grouping practices and participants' personal views through their personal narratives.

In-depth interviews are purposeful interactions in which an investigator learns what another person knows about a topic, discovers and records what that person has experienced, what he or she thinks and feels about it, and what significance or meaning it might have (Arthur et al., 2012). In using the in- depth interview as a method of data collection, I wrote down a list of topics that I wanted to cover in the interviews and a couple of open-ended questions to start with. Further follow-up questions were asked emanating from what participants said. The idea was to get to the detail of the inclusiveness of grouping practices.

In-depth reflection often requires several interviews with each participant. Two or three 90-minute interviews, spaced about a week or two apart, were able to provide opportunities to build rapport and achieve deeper reflection (Arthur et al., 2012). In this research, I undertook two 60-minute interviews with each individual participant which were tape recorded. The interviews were spaced by two weeks from each other with each individual participant. The initial stages of the interviews focused on building friendships with the participants to make them feel free to participate whole heartedly. The interview started with general questions and moved on to more specific ones. An in-depth interview would only have a general sense of the questions or topics to be discussed, would be kept deliberately open-ended, and there would be no attempt at standardization (Punch, 2009). The questions in this type of interview have a tendency to be open-ended, require broad responses and enable a discussion about a specific topic.

3.6.1.2 Interview Guide

I designed an interview guide that was inclined towards answering the research question. Effective interviewing depends on a well-planned interview guide to ensure that you cover the topics you want your participants to address (Arthur et al., 2012). This keeps the data collection process focused on the issues raised in the research question. In this case, the questions that I drew up in the interview guide sought to address the inclusiveness of the grouping practices. The interview guide that I drew up contained a list of questions that I intended to cover in the interview. Part of the purpose of the interview guide is to reflect on wording and sequence, and to avoid asking leading questions or closed questions requiring a one-word answer which could just be easily asked via a questionnaire (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

The interview guide had questions starting from general to more specific ones that sought more detail on the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms. The process of drawing up the interview guide included rephrasing the questions so that they were made up of appropriate terms related to the field of the study as well to ensure that the vocabulary used could be easily understood by all the participants. These question sets included matters related to the topic as well as those that enabled the participants to tell their experiences, share their feelings or thoughts and reflect on decisions and events (Arthur et al., 2012).

The questions also probed participants on what influenced them to choose to implement a particular grouping practice rather than others. Thus, in this regard, it was expected that the participants would reflect on decisions and events that influenced them to implement a chosen particular grouping practice. However, decisions on grouping were deemed not to be entirely based on the experiences of the participants in that regard, but rather their thoughts on the different grouping practices as well. By asking about what they thought about different grouping practices, I felt the participants might have individual thoughts or feelings about particular grouping practices which are not based on what they have experienced. These thoughts could be entangled in the “if” word, which meant some particular grouping practices could be more inclusive, only “if” certain measures are taken to

improve on them.

The interview guide lists primary areas of exploration for each session. According to Arthur et al. (2012), the researcher should tell the participants what interests him/her and then invite them to tell the researcher about the subject. In the beginning, general focal points are drafted that generate the interview questions. It is important to note that the interview guide is a “plan of action” that identifies key areas to be addressed. It does not contain specific questions to be asked. The specific questions will emerge as the interview unfolds, and the wording of these questions will depend upon the direction the interview takes (Punch, 2009). In order to develop strong interview questions, a researcher needs to ask questions that explore opinions/attitudes (Savin- Baden & Major, 2013). In view of the above, the interview guide for this study firstly had questions that asked for knowledge, feelings, values and behaviors.

More precisely, the interview guide had questions that sought to establish what the participants know about the various grouping practices, their strengths and weaknesses and ultimately their inclusiveness in the regular classes. Secondly, questions meant for the participants to reflect on the different grouping practices and share their feelings about them were also included. The third category of questions on the interview guide sought the participants’ opinions of each of the different grouping practices (values). The last category of questions had to do with the implementation of grouping. These questions investigated what the participants are doing in their regular classes when it comes to the grouping of their learners.

Interview questions have to allow contrasting, evaluating, as well as comparing data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I encouraged participants to think about extreme cases pertaining to each particular grouping practice. The participants were asked to reflect on these and explain how they deal with any extreme cases that arise when learners are grouped in their classes. Such a reflection brought out hidden aspects of each grouping practice that pointed to either its inclusiveness or lack of inclusivity.

As practitioners in the regular classes, the participants were always bound to have their own personal feelings about grouping practices. As such, evaluative questions were also included. These allowed for the participants to make their own judgments about each grouping practice based on their thoughts and feelings. This also enabled participants to categorically state which grouping practices they thought were inclusive. Circular questions were included to encourage meta-thinking on the part of the participants.

For the in-depth study, specific follow-up questions were asked during the interview as they arose from the responses that were given by the participants. The interview guide, as a data collection instrument, increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection systematic for each respondent (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). In this way, gaps in the data can be predicted and dealt with.

Cohen et al. (2007) noted nine aspects that should be avoided when structuring the interview guide. These were noted and acted upon in this study. These aspects relate to:

- Keeping the vocabulary simple and straight forward;
- Avoiding prejudicial language;
- Avoiding ambiguity and impression;
- Avoiding leading questions;
- Avoiding hypothetical or speculative questions;
- Avoiding sensitive or personal questions;
- Avoiding questions that make assumptions.

In observing the above, I sought to give participants the opportunity to respond to questions in ways that would ensure depth.

3.6.1.3 Initial questions

I initiated the interview questions by asking direct questions that related to the study. These direct questions related to participants' experiences in teaching in the regular classrooms. Even though the interview environment was friendly, care was taken to avoid asking the participants for sensitive information. The questions were therefore limited to professional issues. In addition to direct questions, narrative questions were also asked. These were meant to allow participants to talk about their experiences in teaching in the regular classes vis-à-vis the grouping practices. At this point, the goal was not to solicit for detailed descriptions about grouping practices in the mainstream classes, but rather on opening up the dialogue, moving strategically towards more complex questions. Structural questions about participants' experiences were also asked.

I also asked questions that sought to verify, prompt and probe, as well as follow-up questions on what participants had said. I used verification questions to paraphrase in order to check understanding. I sought to confirm with the participants that what they had said was indeed that which I had noted. Prompts and probes are used to enable participants to go deeper into an idea (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). There were instances during interviews when participants gave responses that were vague. In such instances, I asked for clarity or elaboration that allowed the participants to give more detailed information or elaborate on what they said earlier in response to the same question. Follow-up questions were used to elicit additional information in order to clarify, confirm or extend on their responses while closure questions were used to end a line of questioning.

3.6.1.4 Parts of the interview guide

The interview guide consisted of four parts that were: header, script, question set and closing. Under the header, information about the session itself was recorded. The header contained information relating to the date, location and the names of

the participants that was needed during data analysis (Savin- Baden & Major, 2013).

The script contained essential information about the interview that I needed to share with the participants. On this part of the interview guide, the researcher provides information about the way in which the interview will be recorded as well as an assurance about the confidentiality of the approach (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Also, this included information that intended to remind the participants about informed consent. The question set contained primary questions about grouping practices in the regular classrooms. The closing part was used to thank the participants as well as to provide contact information.

3.6.1.5 Roles and responsibilities assumed by the researcher

In addition to posing the questions and keeping the conversation flowing, the researcher has other responsibilities at various times and also simultaneously (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). These responsibilities included guiding the interview and listening to what participants were saying.

3.6.1.6 Guiding the interview

Savin-Baden and Major (2013) note that the interviewer guides the conversation and strives to understand the participants' views. This was achieved by means of rephrasing questions when participants would have given information that was outside the topic under study. Understanding the participants' views and meanings of what they were saying gave me the opportunity to gauge whether the questions had been understood correctly. In this regard, I assumed the responsibility of asking the participants relevant follow-up questions as well as rephrasing some in instances where misunderstandings were detected. This was in addition to my responsibility of developing strong questions and the interview guide.

3.6.1.7 Listening

A researcher should encourage participants to speak and then should listen to what they say in order to summarize comments and to check on understanding (Creswell, 2012). I had to take the role of being a good listener. This meant that participants were given as much time as they needed to talk about their perceptions about grouping practices in the regular classrooms. This allowed me to collect as much data as I needed for the research. In addition, taking the role of a good listener enabled participants to be confident and take the interview process seriously. Listening carefully enabled me to pay attention to detail in order to ask relevant follow-up questions that sprung from what the participants were saying. As such, I was able to ask good follow-up questions. To achieve this, I tried to keep a good balance between note-taking and listening.

Throughout the interview process, I tried to keep an open mind by guarding against being judgmental about the participants' views of the inclusiveness of their grouping practices in the regular classrooms.

3.6.2 Observations

Researchers go to the places where people work, play, worship, learn or conduct the numerous other tasks of daily life (Arthur et al., 2012). Observations, as methods of qualitative data collection, were used to give an in-depth insight of the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms. Qualitative approaches are used by researchers to investigate the behaviour, perspectives and experiences of the people they study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). One of those approaches is collecting data through observations. I used both interviews and observations for data collection because of the advantages they have in qualitative research which emphasizes depth not breadth. I had to visit the sites of learning (regular classes) to see for myself the grouping practices being implemented. Observation based research is a well-established technique particularly in classrooms (Arthur et al., 2012).

When conducting observations, the primary goal is to gather data that are accurate and naturalistic (Lodico et al., 2010). Behaviour is best understood when it occurs without external constraints and control (McMillan & Schumacher, 2012). The

naturalistic way under which observations take place gave weight to the choice of this data collection method. The key conditions of the idea of a natural setting are that there are no conditions or variables that are not usually present which could influence or disrupt what is being observed (Newby, 2010). In this regard, the natural settings were the regular classrooms which presented a platform to observe learners as they go about their daily work in a normal way even in the absence of the researcher. This gave me the opportunity to see for myself how inclusive the grouping practices are in the regular classrooms. Observation is a means of seeing the world as the participants do, in its entirety, and for understanding their interpretations of that world (Check & Schutt, 2012).

Data that were collected through interviews had to be corroborated in order to strengthen the trustworthiness of the research outcomes. During interviews, participants shared their views, experiences and opinions about the grouping of learners in the regular classrooms in the face of inclusivity. Observations helped to validate or dispute the sincerity of some of the participants' presentations about particular issues in the research. I was able to verify how the various grouping practices work in the mainstream classes.

Qualitative observations involve observing all potentially relevant phenomena and taking extensive field notes without specifying in advance exactly what is to be observed (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The main task for the observer is to observe what happens naturally and not to control it (Arthur et al., 2012). The details recorded contribute to a better understanding of the behaviour observed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2012). The views raised above illustrate the importance of observations as a means of collecting data that is naturalistic and, at the same time, to confirm or reject data that would have been collected through interviews.
In light of the above, I used observation as a data collection method that would strengthen the validity and reliability (trustworthiness) of the entire research process and ultimately its outcomes.

3.6.2.1 Observation protocol

I designed an observation protocol for the purposes of data collection in order to

keep the research process focused on the effectiveness of grouping practices in the teaching of learners in the regular classrooms. The observation protocol consisted of questions which guided me on the aspects of the research I needed to observe. Observation protocols generally identify important areas that the researcher must attend to and provide an organized space for writing down brief descriptions of conversations and interactions observed (Lodico et al., 2010). Researchers must design protocols or instruments for collecting and recording the information (Creswell, 2012). Johnson and Christensen (2012) note that researchers must decide what is important and what data are to be collected.

Prior to the observations, I drafted a protocol which stated the areas that were to be observed. These areas were related to the research question as well as its objectives. Lodico et al. (2010) posit that researchers who use observations must conduct their research in a way that is accurate and unbiased in order to obtain richly detailed information. This is achievable through the use of an observation protocol which guides the researcher. In designing the observation protocol, I considered the following areas which were used in the observations.

1. Are learners placed in small interactive groups?

2. Are learners mixed in terms of gender?

3. Are learners in each group of the same age?

4. Have the learners been grouped according to ability?

5. Are the teaching/learning resources being shared equally amongst all learners?

6. Is the teacher reaching out to all the learners in the groups?

7. Is the teacher allowing for co-operative learning in the groups?

8. Are the learners willing to work with each other in the groups?

9. Are learners with special educational needs given the chance to participate in the groups?

10. Is the teacher giving out specific instructions to specific groups of learners?

In addition to the questions set, the observation protocol had spaces for comments and for writing down detailed descriptions of conversations, interactions and observed natural behaviors from both the learners and their teachers. Also, the protocol had spaces for dates, time and names of the schools observed.

3.6.2.2 Role played by the researcher

It was important for me to define my role in the whole observation process. I positioned myself as a complete researcher. I made it publicly known to the participants that I am a researcher who is observing the classes for the purposes of finding out the inclusiveness of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms. In many settings, a qualitative researcher takes the role of a complete observer, who does not participate in group activities and is publicly defined as a researcher (Check & Schutt, 2012). Newby (2010) calls this the inactive and known approach. In this observational approach, the observer is visibly an outsider of the group. My presence in the mainstream classes was publicly known by both the participants and their learners. I explained that I was observing them for the purposes of a research study, but would not have any interaction at a personal level with them.

The inactive and known role which I assumed was influenced by the need to allow the processes of learning to go on as normal without my interference. In that regard, observations on how learners are grouped and the inclusiveness of the grouping practices were allowed to carry on in their natural settings. I remained neutral and I did not directly influence the way learners were being grouped and how they were learning. Newby (2010) posits that we follow people in order to collect data on their behaviour that will be useful for our research. In that light, my role was simply to observe how learners were learning in their various groups, with

emphasis being put on the inclusiveness of the grouping practices.

However, there are some notable challenges to the strategy that was used. Check and Schutt (2012) argue that, when a researcher announces his or her role as a research observer, it is likely to alter the situation being observed. This means that there was the likelihood that certain learners or the teacher would behave differently due to the presence of the researcher in their mainstream classes. The overt observer is more likely to have an effect when there are only a few people or if the observation is different from the usual activities in that setting. This might cause some reactive influence as participants might start conducting themselves in ways they think the observer wants to see. This was addressed by ensuring a prolonged presence in the classes to build an element of trust between the participants and myself so that participants conducted their duties in ways they normally do.

3.6.3 Biases in observational research

Despite all the strengths observations have in qualitative research, they have some biases that I needed to be aware of in order to avoid them. These biases militate against the trustworthiness of the research findings. Arthur et al. (2012) postulate that the potential for observer bias has always been recognized by researchers, since the method almost always involves some sort of subjectivity. This means that researchers may be tempted to give judgments which are not true reflections of what transpired. However, if researchers are aware of the biases that are entrenched in observations, they would be able to produce a balanced report.

Even if the observer is not actively involved, he/she can affect what happens (Newby, 2010). The mere presence of the researcher in the classroom may lead the participants to behave in ways that are not what they normally would do in the absence of the researcher. For example, there could be teachers who teach their learners in one large group who may randomly place their learners in groups to give a researcher what he is looking for. Equally, in a research into disruptive classroom behaviour, a child with a record of poor behaviour will behave well during the observation. These are issues that can be avoided by constructing a

checklist of things to observe, or by increasing the number of observation sites (Newby, 2010).

There is also a tendency to see what we want to see. This can happen when we are analyzing our data when patterns that support our research are accentuated (Newby, 2010). The researcher may be tempted to see the inclusiveness of a particular grouping practice even though evidence suggests that it is not inclusive. This may influence the researcher to take note only of the strengths of such a grouping and disregard the evidence. It is also difficult to remain neutral in observing situations with conflicts or choices.

3.7 Data analysis

I undertook the process of data analysis from the time data collection commenced. Qualitative data analysis (QDA) involves numerous small pieces of collected data that have to be gradually combined to form broader, more gen eral descriptions and conclusions (Lodico et al., 2010). The process of data analysis in qualitative research is done during data collection as well as after the data has been collected (Johnson & Christenson, 2012). I started the process of data analysis from the time that I conducted the interviews and visited the research sites for observations.

Thematic analysis approach was used, using a model by Lodico et al. (2010) which has six key steps that need to be taken when analysing data. These six steps, according to Lodico et al. (2010) are:

(1) Preparation and organisation of data;

(2) Reviewing and exploring the data;

(3) Coding data into categories;

(4) Conducting thick descriptions of people, places and activities;

(5) Building themes;

(6) Reporting and interpreting data.

In view of the above, I started the data analysis process by preparing and organising the collected data. However, the whole process of data analysis was recursive in nature as each step of the analysis was not detached from the other. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) note that the process of qualitative data analysis is iterative and recursive, going back and forth between different stages and analysis.

Preparing and organising data entailed the process of putting data that were collected through both interviews and observations in a form that can easily be analysed. I took notes from both interviews and observations which were later transcribed for meaning and depth. For field and interview notes, it is best to make field summaries that can be expanded immediately after the observations or interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In view of the above, I went through the process of expanding field notes from observations that were written in short hand to give a detailed description of the perceptions of the participants on the phenomenon under study and transcribing interview recordings.

The process of data transcription that was undertaken related to the following:

(a) Site/location from which data were collected;

(b) Persons studied;

(c) Times and periods from which data were collected;

(d) Type of data (interviews or observations).

The above processes built a clear understanding of the data.

In the second phase of data analysis, I reviewed and explored the data. This process enabled me to read through the data and look at the various types of data

collected. In addition to the above, I wrote down words and phrases that captured the important aspects of the data. In so doing, I wanted to be involved with the data so that I would be able to understand the scope of the data before dividing them into more manageable chunks organized through codes (Lodico et al., 2010).

Data coding into categories is the third step that has to be taken in analysis (Lodico et al. 2010). At this stage, I identified different segments of the data that described related aspects of the study and gave them broad names. The idea was to put related data together for easy discussion and interpretation. In that regard, codes were created to highlight parts of the data. For example, responses that were related to how learners are grouped in the regular classrooms were given a code name (G) and all data related to the code were grouped in this category.

The coding of data was followed by the construction of thick descriptions of both participants and the schools that were visited for the purposes of data collection, after which themes were identified in the study. Three themes emerged from the study. These were:

(a) Current grouping practices;

(b) Inclusiveness of the grouping practices;

(c) Strategies to enhance inclusivity in the grouping practices.

I presented the report findings through the abovementioned three themes as well as the sub-themes that emanated from the three main themes stated above.

3.8 Trustworthiness (reliability and validity)

In qualitative research, consistency and validity are also referred to as trustworthiness. This refers to the degree to which qualitative data accurately gauges what we are trying to measure (Gay et al., 2011). Lodico et al. (2010) note that evaluating narrative inquiry and phenomenological research needs to focus on four major areas and types of evidence. These four major areas are: credibility,

dependability, transferability and catalytic authenticity. Gay et al. (2011) agree that qualitative researchers can establish the trustworthiness of their research by addressing credibility, transferability, and dependability.

I took note of the four areas mentioned above to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. These areas were looked at individually as each measures a different aspect of the research. Their combination ensured that the research is trustworthy. In the following section I discuss how I ensured trustworthiness of the study through the four aspects stated above.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to whether the participants' perceptions of the setting or events match up with the researcher's portrayal of them in the research report (Lodico et al., 2010). Similarly, Gay et al. (2011) posit that credibility takes into account all the complexities in the study and addresses problems that are not easily explained. In other words, a research can be said to be credible if it portrays a true picture of the researcher's perspectives. Equally so, the account has to be clear of any complexities to be easily understood by those who read it.

To ensure credibility of the research, various measures were taken. I took into account complexities that could be present in the research. To achieve this, I engaged in member checking. This is a process in which the researcher asks participants in the study to verify the accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2012). I practiced this throughout the process of the research as well as after the research to make sure that what would be put in the final report is accurate and truly represents the participants' perspectives and what they had said during data collection process. I asked participants whether the descriptions were complete, accurate and realistic.

Member checking was done both verbally and in writing. Where interviews were done, member checking was done through availing notes to the participants to give them the opportunity to determine that what was written down was exactly what they had said. This was also done after the transcribing process. Participants

were given the opportunity to read the draft report so that they would concur or correct the information that had been written so that it reflects their perspectives. In this regard, feedback was given both orally and in written form.

I held prolonged participation at the sites to prevent inaccuracies in the gathering of the data. The participants took advantage of my prolonged presence at the site to ask for clarity on questions that they had not understood. Punch (2009) asserts that the interpretation of the responses received should be accurate as it affects the validity of interview responses, which include the possibility of interviewer bias. Communication between the participants and myself was done in English so that we could understand each other.

For observations, I spent two full working days with each participant and the class to be observed. I undertook two 60-minute interviews on a one-to-one basis with each participant that were two weeks apart.

3.8.2 Transferability

Gay et al. (2011) postulate that transferability includes descriptive, context-relevant statements that readers can relate to the settings. In this regard, I made use of statements that contextualised the research for the participants, myself as well as the readers.

Punch (2009) asserts that language represents a transparent medium to reality and that words are used to transmit information about the world, based on a correspondence between the words used, their meanings and aspects of the world they describe. I used relevant language to describe the context of the research, the site settings and the participants involved. This ensured that the information was context-bound. Punch (2009) advises that researchers have to ensure that participants have been approached professionally, and should be informed of the purpose of the research. I approached the participants in a professional manner, having sought permission from the Gauteng Department of Education, principals, gatekeepers, School Based Support Teams and finally the participants themselves. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to them. In addition to the above, in instances where participants gave information that was not related

to the study, I tried, as far as possible, to guide the data collection processes by refocussing the discussions onto the core issues that were related to the research.

3.8.3 Dependability

Another aspect of trustworthiness that was addressed in this research is dependability. Dependability refers to whether the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret the data can be tracked (Lodico et al., 2010). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) believe that dependability suggests that research findings will endure over time. In view of the above, dependability means that the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret data are traceable. During observations, I made use of observation schedule to ensure that what I needed to observe was indeed in line with what was being studied. I took notes of what I observed with regards to the inclusiveness of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms. These observations were done during prolonged periods to ensure both credibility and dependability. I also made use of an interview guide to source information from the participants.

3.8.4 Confirmability

According to Gay et al. (2011), confirmability has to do with whether the researcher is objective and reports the data in an unbiased way, without making judgments and evaluations of the data. The researcher has to remain neutral during data analysis and interpretation (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The researcher should demonstrate that results could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers who have studied a similar phenomenon.

Sources of bias are the characteristics of the respondent and the substantive content of the questions. In accordance with Savin-Baden and Major (2013), I tried to minimise bias in the following sources:

- The attitudes, opinions and expectations of the interviewer;
- A tendency for the interviewer to see the respondent in his/her own

image;

- A tendency for the interviewer to seek answers that support his/her preconceived notions;

- Misperceptions on the part of the interviewer of what the respondent is saying;

- Misunderstanding on the part of the respondent of what is being asked.

I took numerous measures to guard against biases during the research process as well as in the writing of the final report. Member checks were conducted during data collection and the writing of the final draft report in order to ensure that my personal opinions and expectations did not cloud or override the responses from the participants. It can be argued that researchers enter into research with predetermined outcomes in mind which may influence them to direct the research results towards those outcomes. This creates bias in the overall process and affects confirmability of the report.

There must be “prolonged presence at the study sites to overcome distortions produced by the presence of researchers and to provide an opportunity to test biases and perceptions” (Gay et al., 2011). Prolonged presence at the sites allowed me to gain an insightful understanding of the culture of the schools concerned. This aspect includes what the participants consider to be normal grouping practices, whether in the presence of a visitor (researcher) or not. In undertaking this, I was cautious in case participants placed their learners in settings which they assumed the researcher wants to see. Prolonged participation at the study sites established whether the grouping practices are permanent, subject determined, race, language or culturally influenced.

3.9 Triangulation

Validity means that the researcher determines the accuracy or credibility of the findings through strategies such as member checking or triangulation (Creswell,

2012). Triangulation is when responses can be checked against each other for consistency, which gives the researcher an indication whether the responses are reliable and trustworthy (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). To illustrate the importance of triangulation, Gay et al. (2011) posit that the strength of qualitative research lies in gathering data using two or more methods so that they compensate for each other's weaknesses. Triangulation processes were carried out in this study to corroborate information from different participants as well as from both observations and interviews.

As discussed above, I used two methods of data collection in this research, observations and in-depth interviews. This enabled me to compare and contrast information that was given through interviews and what I observed for myself in the regular classrooms. Triangulation was also done through interviews as I was able to ask for clarity from the participants, if required. For example, I asked the same questions in the second interview that I had asked in the first. Also, responses given by one participant in the interview were checked against the responses given by other participants responding to the same question.

Debriefing guarantees the credibility of the research. I held consistent debriefing sessions with my supervisors. These sessions ensured that I did not lose focus of the question under study. Advice was given that related to strategies and information, for example, how to triangulate during the process of the study as well as an appropriate amount of time for both interviews and observations. Debriefing sessions were also done with colleagues at work as well as fellow students who helped me to remain focused on the topic under study.

3.10 Referential adequacy

Referential adequacy involved checking that analysis and interpretations accurately reflected the documents (field notes) of data collected (Gay et al., 2011). In this regard, I tried to include every piece of relevant information that was collected. To achieve this, I wrote down the findings immediately after the interviews and observations to capture the essence of what took place accurately (Gay et al., 2011).

The notion of power is significant in an interview situation. “Those with power, resources and expertise might be anxious to maintain their reputation and so will be more guarded in what they say” (Gay et al., 2011). An interview involves two people – the interviewer and the interviewee – who may not be in the same class or have the same status. I was aware of the differences in levels of education between the interviewer and the interviewees, which was sometimes higher and, at other times, lower. To mitigate bias, a relationship with the participants was established to do away with the notion of superiority or inferiority that could have been harbored by either of the parties. Constant interactions were established between the participants and myself prior to the interview and observation dates.

In addition to the above, the professional manner in which both observations and interviews were undertaken reduced the differences of race, religion, gender, status, social class and age that, in certain contexts, can be potential sources of bias (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This professional approach allowed both parties to view each other equally as colleagues.

3.11 Ethical considerations

The need to maintain high ethical standards is the product of social research (Neale, 2013). Principles of justice and respect should be upheld and the people involved should be protected from harm. To achieve the above, issues of ethics in research must be respected. Observation-based researchers deal with real people who have legal rights, which must be given particular attention (Arthur et al., 2012). Participation in the research, both in observations and interviews, was voluntary therefore the obligation was upon me to ensure that issues of ethics were observed throughout the study. This meant that all steps that needed to be followed in order to avoid contestations that might arise because of the avoidance of ethical issues, were taken.

According to Check and Schutt (2012), the most important aspects of ethics in research can be divided into three categories, which are: (a) avoiding harming research participants; (b) obtaining informed consent; and (c) maintaining privacy

and confidentiality. Arthur et al. (2012) posit that the most fundamental principles are informed consent and the protection of confidentiality. The above principles were therefore positioned at the center of ethical research in this study.

3.11.1 Autonomy

Autonomy in research means that the researcher must respect the sovereign positions of all the participants in the research. In respect of this, participation in the research was by consent. The participants took part in the research willingly and were not obliged to do so. I gave participants a full description of the research aims and purposes and told them of their right to decide not to participate, should they so wish. Making consent as informed as possible demonstrates respect for individuals' autonomy since they are able to make a more objective personal decision about the implications of participating, and also about, in some cases, about withdrawing from the study if they come to feel that they no longer wish to participate (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

I made use of a consent form which explained to the participants what it means to be involved in the study and the purpose of the research. A statement was included in the consent form which made participants aware that involvement in the study was voluntary. They were free to withdraw from the study at any stage if they wished to. Participants must receive a clear explanation of what the research study expects of them, so that they can make an informed choice to agree to participation or to decline the request (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Similarly, Johnson and Christensen (2012) argue that, before a person can participate in a research study, the researcher must give the prospective participant a description of all of the features of the study that might reasonably influence his or her willingness to participate. This was critical in ensuring that participation was clearly voluntary and that no due influence was given to them to take part in the study.

The information that was included on the consent form pertained to the following:

- A statement that indicated that participation was voluntary and the participant can withdraw or turn down the request to participate without

any penalty;

- The purpose of the research inclusive of the procedures to be followed in carrying out the study;

- A statement of the extent to which the results would be kept confidential;

- Descriptions of any benefits the participants might expect from the research;

- Names of people the participants could contact with questions about the study or the research participants' rights – in this case, the names of contacts related to my supervisors and the University of South Africa.

The above information that was included in the consent form was written in simple, clear language that was free from ambiguity. In addition to the handing out of the consent forms to the participants, I had a verbal discussion with each one of the participants to clarify any issues that they did not understand.

3.11.1 Non-maleficence

Participants in research need to be protected from any possible harm. Non-maleficence means the researcher should not harm the participants or any other people (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Harm can be in various forms which include: (a) distress; (b) potential effect on relationships with others; and (c) disclosure of certain information to the researcher, which is given in confidence and is related to issues of individual harm, such as criminality or abuse (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

Participants may be distressed because they are diverting from their daily duties to partake in interviews with the researcher. In view of the above, I scheduled interviews to be conducted at times that were most convenient for research participants. The interviews were scheduled for the afternoons when children had left their schools. In addition, the venues were the regular schools in which the

participants were working. This was done to avoid inconveniencing participants by making them travel to other venues. I also assured the participants that what they said would not be disclosed to people other than myself. This was in light of the possibility that some information could have an effect on their relationships with their colleagues at work.

3.11.2 Confidentiality

Researchers must guard the privacy of research participants by collecting information and keeping it confidential (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). I assured participants that what they said would not be traced back to them as their names would only be known to me. All information given would be kept confidential. Confidentiality, in the context of the research study, refers to an agreement with the researchers about what can be done with the information given by a research participant (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Maintaining privacy and confidentiality during and after a study is a way to protect subjects and the researcher's commitment to that should be included in the informed consent agreement (Check & Schutt, 2012).

3.11.3 Honesty

It is important for the researcher to be as honest as possible when dealing with participants. Cases of dishonesty arise where participants are deceived about the nature of the research, not told that they were being observed for purposes of research or by falsifying the data (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). I carried out the research overtly, with participants well aware of all the necessary information about the study and with their participation having been confirmed by signing the consent forms. No part of the research process was covertly done. I tried to be as honest as possible in the recording of the data so that it was a true reflection of what the participants had said. At no stage during the research did I attempt to falsify any data that had been given by the participants. It is important, from an ethical perspective, to be aware that honesty and integrity are core values in research (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

3.11.4 Institutional Review Board

In order to ensure that all aspects of ethics in research were followed, I sent my proposal to the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee (CEDU REC) at the University of South Africa where I am studying. In reviewing the research proposals, members of the institutional review board “are required to make judgments regarding the ethical appropriateness of the proposed research, ensure that research protocols are explained to research participants and that any risks of harm are reasonable in relation to the benefits” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). In this regard, with help from my supervisors, I sent my research proposal to the UNISA CEDU REC and it received ethical clearance from the committee.

3.12 Summary

This chapter presented the research paradigm, methodology, design, sampling, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations applied in this research. The next chapter presents the research findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of data gathered and analyzed using the phenomenological study discussed in Chapter 3. The research sought to establish the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms in Johannesburg primary schools. Three themes emerged from the data which were:

(a) Current grouping practices;

(b) Inclusiveness of the grouping practices;

(c) Strategies to enhance inclusivity in the grouping practices.

Under the first theme, I present findings on the current groupings that are being practiced in the regular classrooms in the Johannesburg primary schools. I established that learners in the regular classrooms are grouped by ability, mixed ability and in pairs. However, in some classrooms, learners were taught by one-on-one contact between the teachers and learners.

Under the second theme, I present findings on the inclusiveness of the grouping practices that are being implemented in the regular classrooms. Findings indicated varying degrees of inclusiveness of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms where learner relationships point either to the inclusiveness of the grouping practices or a lack of inclusivity. In some instances, different grouping practices revealed similarities in their inclusiveness. For example, the issue of opportunities for individualized instruction appeared under one-on-one practice only, while collaborative learning cut across the three grouping practices which are ability grouping, mixed ability grouping and pairing. The third theme presents findings on strategies that can be implemented in order to enhance the inclusivity of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms.

For the sake of anonymity and confidentiality, the names used for schools and

participants were fictitious as discussed in Chapter 3. The following section presents findings on theme one.

4.2 Current grouping practices

Different grouping practices were found to be practiced in the Johannesburg regular classrooms, as presented under section 4.1 above. The procedures undertaken in grouping learners differed from one grouping practice to the other. This was informed by what the teachers intended to achieve in those groups.

4.2.1 Ability grouping

Findings reveal that ability grouping is one of the learner grouping strategies practiced in Johannesburg regular primary schools. Classrooms that practiced ability grouping were at St. Mary's Primary School in Johannesburg North, Waterfield Primary School in Johannesburg West, Pine View Primary School in Johannesburg North and Good Hope Primary School in Johannesburg East. St. Mary's Primary School enrolls learners from black township communities. There were 41 learners in the class that I visited and learners were mixed in terms of gender and age. Ages of the learners ranged from six to nine years in the grade three class that I observed. Learners whose achievement levels were higher than others were grouped in a group of their own, and learners who were struggling in reading were placed in another group.

Waterfield Primary School is situated in a black township community surrounded by farms in Johannesburg West. There were 38 learners in the grade five class that I visited who shared resources, such as textbooks, during class activities. The school has two streams per grade from grade one up to grade seven. During my observations in this class, learners were given a short test on language structures containing 20 questions. After marking the test, the teacher grouped learners according to how they had achieved in that test. Average performing learners, above average learners and below average learners were placed separate groups.

Pine View Primary School is located in a high-density suburb in Johannesburg North. There were 36 learners who sat in rows in the grade four class in the classroom that I observed at this school. The top achieving learners in English occupied the first desk in the front first row, and the least performing learners sat at the back of the third row. The teacher constantly reached out to the least achieving learners. Learners occupying the first row finished their class activities much earlier than the others and these learners were given more work to do while the rest of the learners were finishing their work.

The other school that practiced ability grouping was Good Hope Primary School in Johannesburg east. There were 43 learners in the grade two class who were divided into six groups. One group had eight learners while five other groups had seven learners each. Learners were grouped according to their reading ability. I observed that there were two groups of learners who were not as fast as other groups in reading with fluency.

In two of the classes that I observed that practiced ability grouping, I witnessed learners being changed from one group to the other based on their performances in the given assessments in English and Mathematics. Learners who had not performed well were put in a group of their own. Similarly, learners who had performed well in the assessments were grouped together and learners who obtained average marks were placed in a group of their own.

Follow up interviews with the teachers of the above four classes confirmed their use of ability grouping as evidenced by the following accounts from the participants. Ms. Dhlodlo (38 years old and 11 years' experience teaching in primary schools) has a Diploma in Education as well as an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), specialising in Inclusive Education. She practices ability grouping in Mathematics, English and Life skills at grade three level and changes her groups on a weekly basis. Ms. Dhlodlo teaches at St. Marys' Primary School in Johannesburg North. She stated that:

I group my learners according to their learning abilities. When I am saying 'according to their ability', it's how strong they are and how weak they are. I have strong learners, I have the average learners, I have weak learners. The strong learners sit on their own, the average learners sit on their own and the weak learners, they sit on their own.

She added:

I teach them first and then I assess them [in] the same concept I will have taught for example, fractions. They need to know diagrammatic representations of fractions. I give them a test on that and then from there I group them according to their performance. My groups are not stagnant for the whole term. They change every week.

This was substantiated by Mr. Sithole who teaches Mathematics at grade five level at Waterfield Primary School in Johannesburg West. Mr. Sithole (46 years of age, has a Certificate in Education as well as a Bachelor of Education degree in Special Needs Education) has 18 years' experience teaching in the regular classes at primary school level. He specified that he subjects learners to a test before grouping and then groups them according to their performances in those tests in Mathematics. The groups are based on each topic. He explained:

First of all I give them a test, we call it a gap analysis, to find individual strengths and weaknesses of the learners. Then from there, I group them according to their performance in the gap analysis test. For example, if I am teaching multiplication, you know multiplication involves numbers, questions with one digit numbers, two digit numbers, onwards. If teaching in grade five and the concept is multiplying three digit numbers like 312 x 115, which is the level of the content at grade five, you give them a test based on this and, after giving the test, you find there are learners who are struggling with the concept of multiplying two and one digit numbers.

You put them in one group.

Ms. Sekhoto (aged 45 with 16 years teaching experience at primary school level) holds a Diploma in Education, Bachelor of Science in Special Needs Education as well as an Honours degree in Inclusive Education. She teaches at Pine View Primary School in Johannesburg North. She groups her learners according to their abilities in specific areas of difficulties in English in grades four and five. Although Ms. Sekhoto claimed that she groups her learners according to their abilities, observations revealed that learners actually sat in rows in her classes. She gave an example of spelling as an area where she puts learners who are struggling in their own group. She indicated that:

> *I group my learners according to the way they perform academically. I make sure that, after every two weeks, I group my learners according to their performance. So, I mark whatever the assessment is there, then that is the assessment which I use after every two weeks to group them, for example, in spellings. We want them to practice spellings so that they start to make sentences. By writing spellings and practicing in spellings, it will be easy for them when they are writing creative writing.*

She added that:

> *I check the learner who gets 20 out of 20 then he sits on the first desk, then the second following each other like that. There is a row. They sit in three rows. The first row will be having learners sitting according to their marks from 20 going down. Then we go to the second row, they follow that channel, then we go to the third row. After that, I will be having three groups, as in three rows. The first row will be having those with higher marks going down as we arrange them until we get to the third row.*

Ms. Dhlamini (51 years old and 18 years' teaching experience in the regular classes) has a Diploma in Education as well as a Bachelor of Science degree in

Counselling. She has learners with writing difficulties grouped separately. Ms. Dhlamini teaches IsiZulu, Mathematics, Life skills and English at grade two level at Good Hope Primary School. She indicated that there are learners who perform well when doing oral work, but struggle with writing. In that light, groups for oral activities are different from groups for written activities based on how learners perform in those two activities. She stated that:

> *I group them according to their abilities. Some they are able to present themselves very well when they are doing oral work. When we are doing Maths sums orally and practically with them, they are able to give those correct answers. But when it comes to writing, you find they can't even write. If it's in English or IsiZulu, they can't even spell the simplest word of three letters, maybe like 'cat'. So I will take the learners whom I know that they are struggling the most and then I put them together in one group.*

On the other hand, Ms. Dhlamini stated that she groups learners according to their performances in different subjects. This means that the group composition of learners in one subject may not necessarily be the same as in another subject. However, Ms. Dhlamini indicated that in Life Skills she does not group learners but teaches them as a whole class. She stated that:

> *I group them in English, Maths and IsiZulu. When I am done with English, then we will be doing Maths. Again, they will be working in groups according to their performance in that subject. In Life Skills, we just teach them involving the whole class.*

In spite of the above, Ms. Dhlodlo stated that it is difficult to change the groups after every lesson due to time constraints, although that would be the ideal practice. She indicated that she changes the composition of the groups of learners in each subject:

> *I would love to group my learners per subject but it is difficult when you consider the time that we have. But my groups are not like stagnant for the whole term, they change now and again depending*

on the subjects. If I decide, as the teacher, that this week I want to group them according to their English performance, I do that.

Learner grouping by ability is practiced in subjects like Mathematics, English and IsiZulu at grades three, four and five. Other aspects considered in grouping learners by their abilities include spelling, writing and oral activities. Learners are assessed first and the marks they obtain are used to group them. Top achieving learners, average learners and the least performing learners are placed in separate groups. Groups are not permanent as they change on a fortnightly basis. However, teachers face challenges in changing the groups because of time constraints.

4.2.1.1 Challenges in ability grouping

Despite learners being grouped according to their abilities, challenges emerged in this form of grouping in the form of learner labelling. Learners in low achieving groups are regarded differently from other learners because of their difficulties in performing tasks that average and above average learners perform well. For example, at St. Mary's Primary School, I witnessed a grade four learner who refused to be in a group of the least achievers, arguing that she is "not like them" and therefore cannot sit in the same group with low achieving learners. At Good Hope Primary School, I heard a learner saying the teacher had given one group of learners work that they will not be able to do because they are "hopeless".

Three participants from the interviews indicated that incidences of learner labelling are being experienced in the classes when learners are in ability groups. Learners in the top performing groups label learners who are struggling in groups of their own. This arises because learners in high achieving groups feel they are better than learners from other groups in terms of performance. Mr. Mpofu stated:

There is labelling which comes with the learners who are doing well in one group and those who are not doing well in one group. Especially those learners who have got challenges, when they are in one group, usually other learners call them names basing on that

they are not intellectually good. When they are labelled like that, they feel inferior and their confidence is lowered.

Ms. Sekhoto stated that:

It happens that those ones who are sitting in that row of learners with higher marks, they look at those with the least marks in a certain way. For example, a certain learner gets 19/20, then the other learner gets maybe 2/20. That learner with 19/20 might think that 'I am better than this one'. So he/she might have an attitude to say 'you can't tell me anything because I am better than you'.

Labelling arises in ability grouping where learners with special educational needs are grouped on their own. High performing learners and those who are average look down on learners with special educational needs in a group of their own as they are regarded as underachievers. This militates against the principle of inclusion which believes that learners should be able to accept one another in spite of their differences.

4.2.2 Mixed ability grouping

Mixed ability grouping emerged as one of the common grouping practices in the regular classrooms. Six schools which practiced mixed ability grouping were Impumelelo Primary School, Intuthuko Primary School, Veli Primary School, Imbali Primary School, Thabani Primary School and Jabulani Primary School. Impumelelo Primary School is situated in a black township area of Johannesburg West and enrols learners who are mostly from that locality. The ages of learners in the classroom that I visited ranged from 10 to 13 years. There were 44 learners in the class and there were seven or eight learners per group.

Intuthuko Primary School is to the west of Johannesburg, on the border of North West Province. There were 43 learners between 11 and 12 years old in the grade three class that I observed. Learners were arranged into five groups of eight or nine learners each. There were both boys and girls in each group. Two desks were

brought together to form a group. Each desk had seven or eight learners who were not able to sit comfortably around the desk.

Veli Primary School is situated in a squatter camp in Johannesburg South, with large parts that do not have electricity. I observed a grade five class that had 45 learners in it who were divided into six groups of seven or eight learners each. I also noted that there was a shortage of furniture at this school as there were four learners per desk which was meant for a maximum of three learners. This made it uncomfortable for learners when they did written exercises.

The other school that practiced mixed ability grouping was Imbali Primary School in Johannesburg North. The school is in a high-density residential area and enrols learners from the local communities. There were 48 learners in the class with six groups of eight learners each. Learners' ages were mostly around nine years, with a few learners being either 8 or 10 years old.

Thabani Primary School is located in the Johannesburg Central business district and has learners who are black Africans. There were 40 learners in the class, with six or seven learners in each group. Their ages ranged from nine to 11 years. Jabulani Primary School is located in the Johannesburg South high density area. There were 47 black African learners from the local community in the grade five class. There were six groups of eight learners and one group that had seven learners.

Observations in the above schools revealed that there were learners who were more knowledgeable about the tasks they were discussing. Other learners depended on the assistance of the more able learners to move at the pace of the average and above average learners. At Intuthuko Primary School, I observed two learners in two different groups helping others who were having difficulties in map reading. They demonstrated how to locate a given feature on the map. At Veli Primary School, I observed a learner who was being assisted with pronunciation by other learners from the same group who were better at reading. At Imbali Primary School in Johannesburg North, learners in Mathematics gave each other chances to demonstrate how to get the correct answers when they worked on

addition in their groups. There were some learners who had difficulties with addition with carrying and others who were doing well, but they were together in the same group.

All six participants in the abovementioned schools confirmed that they group their learners according to mixed ability. Mr. Mofokeng (40 years old, has been a teacher for 19 years at primary school level) holds a Diploma in Education, Advanced Certificate in Education Specialising in Special Needs Education, as well as a Bachelor of Education degree in Special Needs Education. He teaches Social Science at grade six level at Intuthuko Primary School in Johannesburg West. Mr. Mofokeng indicated that he uses results of the learners' performances in the previous assessments on the same or related topics when grouping learners in Social Science. He stated that:

> *I group them, the high achievers, average and those who will be struggling to interpret the symbols on the maps; I actually group them in the same group. There would be a prior knowledge of the learners' performance because you cannot just come and assume. This grouping is informed by previous performances on the same or related topics.*

Ms. Mhlongo (40 years old with 20 years' experience teaching at primary school level) has a Diploma in Education as well as a Bachelor of Education in Special Needs Education. She teaches English at grade five level and Social Science at grade six level at Veli Primary School in Johannesburg South. She stated that:

> *I do mixed ability. I mix learners, those who are slow and fast learners. Slow learners are those who have difficulties, like in reading, those who can't read. I give them a test and then I check those who are having difficulties. Like in English, I can give them a reading test like vocabulary reading. I can give them flash cards with words and then I ask them to read. Those who fail to read, I put them on one side, those above average on one side. Then I look at those above average and I take the first two and then I take the*

bottom two from those with difficulties in reading then I put them in one group.

Mr. Mpofu (42 years, with a total of 20 years' teaching experience at primary school level) holds a Diploma in Education. In addition, Mr. Mpofu has a Bachelor of Education degree as well as an Honours degree, both of which are in the field of Inclusive Education. He teaches at Imbali Primary School in Johannesburg North. Mr. Mpofu indicated that he groups learners by mixed ability in Maths at grade four level. He explained:

When we are teaching Maths, most of the time we interact through question and answer and we get the immediate feedback and sometimes we give individual activities. After such activities, you already know that such a learner is struggling in this regard, this learner is not struggling. So, by just giving those activities or through asking questions, I formulate the groups basing on how the learners perform. For example, in addition, some learners struggle to carry and they just know basic addition where there is no carrying. I mix both those who have grasped the concept of carrying and those who are struggling with carrying.

Three participants noted that grouping of learners by mixed ability is topic specific. After each topic, they change the groups. Mr. Mpofu stated that grouping of the learners is based on each topic because learners might not have difficulties in all areas of learning. He stated:

Most of the time, it will be concept and topic specific because, at times, when we are doing a topic, learners, they show different abilities compared to different topics we have covered before.

Similarly, Mr. Mofokeng indicated that he practices mixed ability grouping in Social Science and that the grouping is concept specific:

There are certain learners who excel in certain aspects of the topic,

depending on the topic which we will be exploring, giving, for example, the aspect of map work. Map work has more to do with figures and symbols. If I realise that this learner is average when it comes to working with digits and numbers and symbols, I put him into this group. Those who will be struggling to interpret the symbols, I will also accommodate them in that same group as well.

Mixed ability grouping is practiced in grades four, five and six in subjects like English, Social Science and Mathematics. The practice entails having learners who are performing well in a particular subject area being put in the same group with learners who are struggling in that subject area. Within the subjects, learners are grouped by mixed ability according to how they perform in each topic and concept being covered. Groups are changed according to how learners perform in the different areas assessed.

4.2.2.1 Challenges in mixed ability grouping

Observations noted challenges in differentiating instruction when learners are in mixed ability groups. At Imbali Primary School in Johannesburg North, I observed that teaching was done in a generic manner in the class without differentiating instruction according to the needs of individual learners. At Impumelelo Primary School in Johannesburg West and at Thabani Primary School in Johannesburg Central, learners were given the same written activities, both in quantity and in complexity. No specific instructions were noted being given to certain learners to carry out their tasks differently. The above was confirmed by three participants who practice mixed ability grouping, who noted that differentiation of instruction is difficult to implement when learners are in mixed ability groups. Mr. Mpofu noted:

I give them the same work which they do as a group. It will be so challenging to give specific methods for different learners in a specific group.

Ms. Mzila corroborated the above when she stated that:

> *I cannot separate to say, uh, wena Siyabonga, you are doing this question, Sibonginkosi and others you are doing these questions, because I want them to feel that they are one. So I give them same questions in the whole group.*

Teachers face challenges in differentiating instruction when learners are in mixed ability groups. Work is not differentiated according to the needs of the learners because teachers want them to feel that they are equal in the groups. Specific educational needs of different learners in the groups are not given attention when learners are in mixed ability groups.

4.2.3 Pairing

Some participants paired their learners in the regular classrooms. Whilst the pairing was more like the mixed ability grouping, the difference is that this involves only two or three learners. Observations at Loreto Primary School in Johannesburg South established that learners were paired, but mixed in their abilities. The school is located in a former squatter camp that is now developing into a modern residential area. There were 45 learners in the class who sat in pairs. There were 21 pairs of learners and one desk that had three learners because of an odd number of learners in the class. The ages of the learners ranged from 11 to 13 years. Learners shared most of the resources, such as text books, in their pairs. In this practice, learners who had difficulties in specific areas of learning were paired with the average and those above average in that same area of learning. They sat on double desks facing the chalkboard.

At Ntabeni Primary School in Johannesburg West, learners worked in their pairs on Mathematical calculations that involved long division. The school is in a black township surrounded by farming areas. The class had 35 learners and their ages ranged from nine to 11 years. After the pair work in one of the lessons, one learner from selected pairs was asked to do the calculations on the chalkboard. In other cases, the teacher was seen moving around checking on how learners were

working and assisting them if necessary.

At Arikopaneng Primary School in Johannesburg East, the class had 40 learners who sat in pairs per desk, giving a total of 20 pairs of learners in the class. The ages of learners ranged from 10 to 12 years. The school is in a medium income residential area, which accommodates learners from different surrounding black communities.

Three participants, all males, confirmed that they pair their learners in the regular classrooms for the purposes of teaching and learning. Mr. Khazi (aged 52, with 23 years' experience teaching in the mainstream classes) holds a Certificate in Education, as well as a Bachelor of Education degree in Special Needs Education. He has also worked as a member of the School Based Support team for six years. Mr. Khazi teaches Maths at grade five level at Ntabeni Primary School in Johannesburg West. He explained that he pairs learners with difficulties in Maths with those who are doing well. Firstly, he gives them baseline assessments before pairing them:

> *I pair them where a learner who is struggling is paired to someone who is doing much better for the purpose of learning. I give them a test to see how they are doing and then I pair them mixing on their performance.*

This was substantiated by Mr. Sempi who teaches Maths at grade six level at Loreto Primary School in Johannesburg South. Mr. Sempi (aged 48, with 17 years' teaching experience at primary school level in the regular classes) has a Certificate in Education as well as a Bachelor of Education degree in Special Needs Education. He pairs his learners but mixes them in terms of ability. He gives them baseline assessments to determine how they should be paired. He does the pairing per topic and changes the pairs when doing a new topic based on the performances of the learners in that new topic. He indicated that:

> *I pair my learners but mixed in their abilities. When I am pairing my learners, I do this by ways of giving them some baseline*

assessment with the view of how I should determine the pairing. I give them a short test of maybe 10 questions, for example, in Mathematics. I mark that test and see which learners have performed better than the other, then I use the results to pair my learners. Those with the highest marks, I pair them with those ones with the lowest marks. For example, someone with a 10, I must pair him with one with a zero, nine paired with one in that order. When starting a new topic, I also give them another baseline assessment.

Similarly, Mr. Mpinga uses the same strategy when pairing his learners. Mr. Mpinga (47 years old, with 19 years' teaching experience in the regular primary schools) has a Certificate in Education as well as a Bachelor of Education degree in Special Needs Education. He is currently teaching Maths in grade six at Arikopaneng Primary School in Johannesburg East. He expressed the following:

I mix them in pairs where a learner who is doing much better is paired with someone who is not doing well. Pairing is like bringing two learners of different abilities together.

In light of the above, learners having difficulties in a particular content area are paired with learners who are performing well in that area. Teachers subject learners to a test and use the marks obtained to pair the learners in their abilities.

4.2.3 One-on-one

Despite the three grouping practices presented above, research findings revealed that there were two classes where learners were not grouped, but practiced a one-on-one strategy for teaching learners in the regular classrooms. At Ntini Primary School in Johannesburg East, I observed that learners sat individually at single desks and received direct instruction from the teacher. The school is in a medium income residential area and enrols learners from the surrounding communities. On average, the learners were eight years old, with 43 learners in the class. At Malibongwe Primary School in Johannesburg Central, learners sat in groups of six but no group work was observed in this class. Learners received direct instruction

from the teacher. The school is on the outskirts of the Johannesburg Central Business District in a high density residential area. There were 44 learners in the class and their ages averaged 10 years.

Two participants, both females, indicated that they teach their learners on a one-on-one basis in the regular classrooms. In their views, this is a practice that allows learners to receive direct instruction from the teacher. The participants argued that learners have to be taught on a one-on-one basis because they are at different levels.

Ms. Chiwasa (aged 46 years, with nine years working experience as a regular class teacher) has a Bachelor of Education degree as well as an Honours degree in Special Needs Education. She teaches English, Maths, and Life Skills in grade three at Ntini Primary School in Johannesburg East district. She insinuated that learners should be taught on a one-on-one basis because they are unique:

> *No, when I am teaching, I don't group them. Why should I group a child with learning difficulties? This is a child who has got a learning difficulty. Already he has indicated that he is unique or she is unique. She operates in her or his own capacity according to his capability, so I cannot. It's like I am matching the capabilities, so I teach them individually, one-on-one. They will be in groups but I have to address them one-on-one.*

Ms. Dhlamini also practices one-on-one but not in groups as indicated by Ms. Chiwasa above. She places learners with special educational needs in the front desks where she finds it easier to help them. Ms. Dhlamini (38 years old, with 10 years' experience teaching in the mainstream classes at primary school level) is a holder of a Diploma in Education as well as a Bachelor of Education degree in Special Needs Education. She teaches English grade four at Malibongwe Primary School in Johannesburg Central. She expressed the following:

> *I will be attending to them individually. I look at the learners' performances when I am giving them places where to sit in the*

class. I take those who are struggling and put them in the front row where I will be able to help them more. If I do that, I mean, I won't be disturbing those who are doing well. If it is a project, these ones who are faster they will be sort of doing everything on their own while I will be helping the weak ones.

One-on-one is mainly practiced in grades three and four in English, Mathematics and Social Science, where learners are taught on a one-on-one basis because each individual learner is unique. Two distinct strategies are applied when teaching learners one-on-one. One strategy entails learners sitting individually receiving instruction from the teacher, while the second strategy entails learners sitting in groups but not engaging in group work. They are taught on a one-on-one basis, receiving direct instruction from the teacher. Ability levels of learners are taken into consideration in one-on-one practice so that learners with special educational needs can sit where they can receive optimum support from the teacher.

The above presentation focused on the current grouping practices in the regular classrooms which emerged from the study. The following section presents the inclusiveness of the current grouping practices as noted from the research findings.

4.3 Inclusiveness of the grouping practices

Study findings established that the current grouping practices in the regular classrooms have different degrees of inclusiveness through the considerations that teachers make when grouping learners in their classrooms. These relate to gender, age and backgrounds. The inclusiveness of the grouping practices were also revealed by the way learners related to one another within the group settings through collaborative learning; learner to learner assistance; social acceptance; use of teaching/learning media; optimised opportunities for teacher assistance; opportunities or differentiated instruction; and individualised instruction. The following section presents findings on the inclusiveness of the different grouping practices that were established in the classrooms.

4.3.1 Mixed ability grouping

Findings indicated that mixed ability grouping takes into account issues of gender parity, age of learners and learners' backgrounds. Mixed ability grouping offers learners opportunities for collaborative learning, learner-to- learner assistance and social acceptance.

4.3.1.1 Gender Parity

The gender of learners emerged as a key component of inclusion when grouping learners in the regular classrooms. Observations at Thabani Primary School in Johannesburg Central revealed that, in all the groups, learners were mixed in terms of gender. The same mix in terms of gender was also observed at Veli Primary School in Johannesburg South district and at Imbali Primary School in Johannesburg North. Both boys and girls were seen working together collaboratively on different tasks in the same groups in the three classrooms indicated above. At Imbali Primary School, there were equal numbers of boys and girls in each group, except in one group where there were five boys and three girls. This was because there were more boys than girls in that class. At Intuthuko Primary School in Johannesburg West, groups of learners were also mixed in terms of gender, with both boys and girls in each group. The classes where learners were mixed in terms of gender are the same classrooms that practiced mixed ability grouping. Ideally, gender of learners was infused in the mixed ability groups.

Congruent with the above, three participants from the interviews indicated that they infuse gender of learners with their levels of abilities when grouping them in mixed ability groups. Mr. Mpofu noted that he checks the performance levels of boys and girls separately and then fits them into mixed ability groups to balance gender representativeness:

> *You check the performance within the range of girls, then performance within the range of boys and you infuse them together.*

So it's performance which has gender infused in it. We don't only consider performance, but marks oriented with gender. A boy who is struggling should also be in a group where there are boys and girls who are doing well. The same with girls who are having challenges in map work. They should have that inclusiveness that everyone is accommodated. So basically, when it comes to the aspect of gender, we realise that learners who are females should be comfortable to sit next to learners who are males.

Ms. Mzila (47 years old, with 20 years' teaching experience) holds a Certificate in Education at primary school level and a Diploma in Special Needs Education. She teaches Maths at grade five level at Thabani Primary School in Johannesburg Central. She indicated that boys having difficulties in Maths are mixed with girls and other boys who are performing well, and that the same applies to girls who are having difficulties in Maths who are mixed with girls and boys who are doing well. This is to allow them to be used to learners of the opposite sex. She pronounced that:

It mustn't be a group of boys only. I try to combine girls and boys but mixing them in their performances. For example, boys who are not doing well in 3-d shapes can be in a group of girls who are doing well in 3-d shapes. The same with girls, they have to be used to each other irrespective of their gender.

Mixed ability grouping incorporates the issue of gender as learners of the opposite sex are placed in groups to balance them on gender lines. This is done to enable learners of the opposite sex to get used to each other despite their differences in abilities in the regular classrooms.

4.3.1.1 Age of learners

Besides the aspect of gender parity, some mixed ability groupings accommodated learners of different ages. This was established through observations at Veli Primary School and at Jabulani Primary School. Three participants confirmed the

consideration of age when they indicated that they group their learners according to mixed ability, but they also consider the ages of their learners. Mixed ability groups ensure fair distribution of learners according to age. Mr. Mofokeng stated that there are some learners who were retained in the same grade because they did not pass that grade the previous year so they could not progress to the next grade. Such learners would be older than others in their current grade but they have to be accommodated as well. He stated that:

> *If you check in grade six, you will be having learners who would have been retained in the same grade who are now older. They need to be accommodated so that they can feel they are part of the class. They have to realise that they are part of the learning environment. In order to balance, you make sure that those learners are spread out in different groups. They should not be in one group because they will feel like marginalised.*

The above sentiments were corroborated by Ms. Khumalo who confirmed that:

> *I also look at the age of the learner because, at times, you see that there are learners that are old enough for that grade that were supposed to do a higher grade. So I can't group them together. It's wise to mix them with those young ones. If you put learners that were retained in one group, sometimes it can pull them down because the class can label them, can give them names that this is a group of old people in the class. So it's wiser to mix them so that they don't feel bad.*

The ages of learners are considered in grouping learners in the regular classrooms in order to accommodate all learners in the groups in spite of their age differences. This is done so that older learners with special educational needs do not feel marginalised and to prevent them from being labelled.

4.3.1.2 Learners of different backgrounds

Mixed ability grouping also considers differences in learner backgrounds to ensure

that all learners feel welcome in the classrooms. Observations indicated that all classrooms had learners of different backgrounds as evidenced by the languages learners spoke in their various groups, besides the language of teaching and learning. Learners spoke in Sotho, IsiZulu, Xhosa, Sepedi, Venda, Tsonga and Tswana, among others, that indicated their diversity. Learners were often seen communicating to one another in the groups in their mother languages despite the language of teaching and learning being predominantly English.

In a Life Orientation class at Intuthuko Primary School in Johannesburg West, the educator allowed learners to participate in group work using their mother languages. Some of the learners were reluctant to speak in English but were more comfortable when they used their mother language. At Veli Primary School, one group of learners was not eager to share the learning experience with a learner who spoke Chichewa. A similar experience was noted at Imbali Primary School where a learner who spoke Venda was in a group of learners who were predominantly Sotho. Across all the grouping practices observed, there were learners of different backgrounds who spoke different languages other than the language of instruction. Teachers encouraged learners to use their mother languages to communicate in cases where they could not effectively communicate in English.

Three participants who practiced mixed ability grouping noted that they ensured that learners from different backgrounds learn together in the same mixed ability groups.

Mr. Mpofu who practices mixed ability grouping indicated that he groups learners with different backgrounds together. Within that same group, he allows learners who speak the same language to assist each other in the language that they understand. He explained:

> *When we use mixed ability, we don't want learners to be isolated or labelled because of who they are. So we make sure different learners are grouped together in one group. Most of the learners are coming from the townships, and they speak different languages. We allow them to use vernacular, those who can speak the same*

language in the groups, I give them the opportunity to interact in the groups using the languages they understand. Learners should be able to help one another within the groups regardless of who or what they are.

Ms. Mzila stated that she takes learner diversity into account when she is grouping learners according to their mixed abilities. She stated:

What I always try to avoid is to expose learners who are minority in the class, like learners from other countries. So I put learners who are different in one group. They (learners) have to be able to cooperate and learn together, as they are all my learners, and I want them to feel that they are all the same.

Mr. Mofokeng said that learners from other countries should also feel welcome in the classrooms:

Maybe one can be having learners from different countries, I cater for that. I believe that, when one is having learners from different countries, those learners should be catered for, that they should also feel welcome. I group them together with others in the mixed ability group.

The above findings indicate that mixed ability grouping considers learner diversity to enable diverse learners to interact with one another and learn from each other despite their differences. Learners who speak the same language within the same mixed ability group help each other in the language they both understand. Furthermore, groups accommodate diverse learners so that all can feel welcome in the classrooms and, more particularly, in the groups where they will be learning.

4.3.1.3 Opportunities for collaborative learning

Findings indicate that learners learn from one another when they are in mixed ability groups. In all the six classes that practiced mixed ability grouping, learners worked collaboratively within their groups. This was seen in subjects like

Mathematics, Life Orientation, Social Science, Natural Science and English, where learners of different abilities, genders and backgrounds worked collaboratively together in their groups. Teachers emphasised that learners must choose their group scribes who took notes during group activities. At Mpumelelo Primary School in Johannesburg West, Veli Primary School in Johannesburg South and Thabani Primary School in Johannesburg Central, I saw learners encouraging each other to express their views on the questions asked. Learners were allowed to speak in their home language without being interrupted. Brighter learners were encouraged by their teachers to assist struggling learners. In one group at Imbali Primary School in Johannesburg South, learners gave each other opportunities to give their answers in a rotational manner, with no omissions of any learner. Group members elaborated on behalf of learners who were not fluent in English when they did shapes in a Mathematics lesson. Each learner in the group was given opportunities to participate in the group discussions.

All six participants who practiced mixed ability grouping indicated that the learners worked collaboratively in mixed ability groups. Ms. Mhlongo expressed that:

> *We will be encouraging group work, not individual work. Like when it is time for reading, we can give them something to read as a group. There is time to read aloud together as a group. Firstly they will read together, then they will read individually. I see them improving in reading. They become confident because they read in the groups.*

Mr. Mofokeng stated that learners with communication challenges can learn from their peers without disabilities if they are allowed to learn collaboratively. This includes basic language skills, how to express themselves, articulate themselves, argue and read. They can also improve their writing skills as well as analytical skills and comprehension. He stated that:

> *Learners having challenges in language, learn from others how to speak, articulate, how to read certain words, how to argue certain issues. By so doing, they end up actually trying to demonstrate what*

they would have learnt from their peers. Academically, the learners learn to improve their writing skills, their analytical skills, comprehension generally improves. Also, they improve in articulating certain points and their general performance improves.

He added that mixed ability groups encourage collective thinking and this enables those with disabilities to realise that they can also contribute to the group positively. He explained:

If you look into the bigger society, the reason why a lot of things are achieved is because people bring their ideas together and they identify with their ideas as a collective. So, by mixed ability grouping, you are bringing collective thinking. Those learners who are struggling, they will feel that their contribution is having a positive impact on the outcome of the lesson as well.

Mr. Mpofu indicated that if learners with special educational needs are in mixed ability groups, they can ask others who are more knowledgeable about the concept being taught within the group. In addition, learners learn how to help each other:

When they are doing group work, sometimes there are challenges to the learners who are struggling. They can ask others and then, in that process of explaining, they are learning from each other. If you stream them according to their abilities, those who are not able are in one group, they won't be learning because there is no one who is rubbing off to them. The learners will be struggling on their own and they are frustrated and no one is giving any input and they feel like they are neglected, and they will be in a group where they can just switch off. So definitely, mixed ability cultivates that culture of helping each other, the Ubuntu in the African context.

Ms. Mzila stressed the importance of learners with disabilities interacting with learners without disabilities in the group rather than solely relying on the teacher. She stated that*:*

It's important to include struggling learners in mixed ability groups because there is what we call 'learner-to-learner interaction'. Instead of me being the teacher talking to them and they are responding, they also need that time where they learn from one another. There are some learners who don't even like participating when it's the whole class, but when it is group work, they will be forced to participate.

The above findings indicate that mixed ability grouping offers diverse learners the opportunity to interact that enables them to improve on their communication skills and their general academic performance despite their differences.

4.3.1.4 Learner-to-learner assistance

Learners with disabilities in mixed ability groups are assisted by those without disabilities. Observations witnessed learners with difficulties in reading, factors and multiplication with carrying being assisted by other learners in the mixed ability groups. At Imbali Primary School in Johannesburg North, I witnessed three learners being assisted in multiplication with carrying. The teacher gave tasks on multiplication on the board and asked learners to work in their groups. Although they were working as groups, I noticed two learners who got illustrations on how to carry in multiplication from peers sitting closest to them. Apparently, one of the learners who was being assisted was getting the correct answers after multiplying two digits, but was struggling with the concept of carrying.

At Impumelelo Primary School in Johannesburg West, the teacher gave out an exercise from the textbook where he wanted learners to work on highest common factors and lowest common multiples. Learners engaged one another in the groups except in two incidences where I noted group members assisting learners who were confusing highest common factors and lowest common multiples. At Jabulani Primary School, a learner was assisted by his peers in the group to pronounce given words correctly in a reading lesson. The learner was struggling to read all the words but other learners were trying to help.

Five participants who practiced mixed ability grouping indicated that learners without difficulties in certain areas of learning assist other learners who are having difficulties in that same content area.

Ms. Ngwenya (46 years old, with 21 years' experience teaching in the regular classes at primary school level) holds a Certificate in Education as well as a Diploma in Education specialising in Special Needs Education. She teaches English grade five at Jabulani Primary School in Johannesburg South and she practises mixed ability grouping. She stated that learners with disabilities sometimes get assistance from other group members if they face difficulties:

> *If they are mixed, you find that those that understood will be helping those that are struggling and participation can improve.*

In Social Science, Ms. Mhlongo stated that those who are struggle with map reading can improve as they get help from those who are good in that area. She indicated that:

> *They will improve because if one learner is not good in map reading, another learner who is good in map skills will be demonstrating to them.*

Findings indicate that learners with disabilities get assistance from their more able peers in the areas where they face difficulties in learning if they are in mixed ability groups.

4.3.1.5 Social acceptance

Findings also established that levels of learner acceptance are higher when learners operate in mixed ability groups. Observations in five classes that practised mixed ability grouping established that learners with disabilities can develop friendships with other learners that they are grouped with. At Impumelelo Primary School in Johannesburg West, as well as at Veli Primary School in Johannesburg South, I saw learners sharing their mathematical instruments, textbooks, rulers,

erasers and other teaching/learning materials. At Veli Primary School, learners assisted each other with measurements to construct rectangles, pentagons and hexagons accurately. Those who finished their work first assisted other learners.

Two participants noted that mixed ability grouping encourages social acceptance as well as development and strengthening of friendships amongst learners. Mr. Mofokeng confirmed:

> *There is the element of solidarity and the element of social acceptance. Learners identify with their ideas as a collective, so you are bringing collective thinking. As such, those learners who will be having disabilities they will feel like wow, that 'wowness' when they realise that their ideas, their contribution is having a positive impact on the lesson.*

He added that:

> *It's a wonderful experience when it comes to the social aspect because, generally, remember these people (learners with special educational needs) are part of a society. They belong to a certain family. So if you engage them, they realise that their inputs, irrespective of the challenges that they might be going through, they are valued. They get appreciated. Basically, once a learner is appreciated, accommodated and embraced, they realise that they are valued and that alone will motivate the learner to learn more and they want to please.*

One participant who practiced pairing indicated that learners with disabilities are accepted by those who are gifted. Mr. Mpinga noted that:

> *They will look themselves as equal. You can see by sharing, they want to share and even if one learner takes out a book, the other one will not take the book, they will want to go and read together. That's one simple thing that can show that learners with disabilities*

are accepted. They feel threatened at first but, with time, depending on your explanation why you are putting them together, and eventually you will see those learners with challenges if they have got any challenge of any sort, they ask the person they are sitting with.

Learners tend to accept one another regardless of their differences if they are grouped according to mixed ability. This is because of the optimum opportunities for engagement they have in those groups.

Findings indicated that when learners are in mixed ability groups, they make friends, accepting each other regardless of their differences. At Impumelelo Primary School in Johannesburg West, I witnessed learners from one group playing together during break time. This was also observed at Imbali Primary School in Johannesburg North and at Veli Primary School in Johannesburg South. Learners were seen playing together during lunch according to how they sit in class. However, in most cases, it was not the whole group but two or three learners from the same group playing together.

Three participants who practiced mixed ability grouping noted that learners make friends with one another because of the opportunities for interaction they have in those groups. Ms. Mzila expressed that learners in mixed ability groups can become friends because they have time in the groups to get to know each other:

When learners are in mixed ability groups, they have time to know each other. You might find that one learner is not having a friend, but because of this grouping, the person will get used to other learners and therefore they will end up being friends, and when they are going home or during break time, they play together. But it has started during group work.

Corroborating the above, Mr. Mpofu stated that:

Usually, these groups, they consolidate the friendship among

learners. They learn to know each other and they find making friends easy because they are accessible to each other and they end up picking on who they want to be friend to within the group. We have seen a situation whereby, because of the grouping, those friendships are made and then it can be a lifetime friendship. Sometimes we see it prolonging to life time and in the community.

In the same vein, Ms. Khumalo stated that:

If you want to group learners that these ones are the capable, these ones are underperformers, it means it will be difficult for them in making friends because they will now be thinking that since they are underperformers, they cannot achieve anything. Once you group them with the intelligent ones, they can become friends.

The above findings indicate that mixed ability grouping enables diverse learners to make friends with each other, as well as to keep friendships with their group mates who do not have disabilities. At times, such friendships transcend the confines of the classrooms.

4.3.2 Ability grouping

Findings established that ability grouping facilitates collaborative learning, the use of appropriate teaching/learning media, optimum opportunities for teacher assistance and opportunities for differentiated instruction. The following section presents findings on ability grouping in relation to inclusion.

4.3.2.1 Collaborative learning

Findings indicated that learners can work collaboratively in English and Mathematics when they are in ability groups. At Waterfield Primary School, I witnessed a group of four learners who were said to be underachievers working together on a multiplication exercise given to them on work cards. They were given

more time to discuss and the teacher assisted them without giving them the answers. Similarly, at St. Mary's Primary School, learners in the class did group reading. The group that was said to have learners with reading problems were reading to each other even though the teacher spent more time assisting those learners than with other groups.

Three participants who practiced ability grouping noted that learners with difficulties in learning who are grouped on their own can also assist one another. Ms. Dhlodlo stated that:

> *A learner who doesn't know a word, they try and put it together until they get it. Using sounds, I will give you a word, 'dog', it's difficult for learners doing grade three. One might not know the sound of the first letter but knows other sounds. So if one comes with the sound of the first letter 'd' and they put them together with '-og', they can try and come up with the word 'dog'. Even if they are not using phonics, there are some who can see a word, they have seen it somewhere and they can say Oh no friends, this word is 'dog', without using phonics.*

Mr. Sithole noted that:

> *If you give them group work, you see them participating in the groups and they will be debating which means there will be what we call 'cross pollination of ideas'. They debate and debate until they come up with the best solution.*

Ms. Dhlamini indicated that if learners who are facing challenges are in group settings other than ability grouping, they feel helpless but, if they are with others of the same level, they feel more at ease. She elucidated:

> *What I have discovered is that, if you are not grouping them according to their abilities, sometimes those who know too much*

they tend to make others feel small, like they know nothing. But if they are in the same group with the same level, at least it makes them to feel comfortable with what they are doing.

Ability grouping enables learners who are operating at approximately the same level to learn from one another in subjects like Mathematics and English at grade three level. Learners assist each other in their learning as they feel comfortable being in the same group of learners who are at their academic level.

4.3.2.2 The use of teaching/learning media

In addition to the above, findings established that, although ability grouping precludes learners with difficulties from participating with other learners who are academically stronger, they get more support from the use of relevant teaching/learning media in their own groups. Findings established that teaching/learning media are easier to use when learners are grouped according to their abilities. Observations in grades two, three and five revealed that learners with challenges in Mathematics and English learn through the use of concrete media like charts and counters. At Waterfield Primary School in Johannesburg West, I witnessed two groups of learners who used multiplication charts to find the answers to their group activities. At Good Hope Primary School in Johannesburg East and at St. Mary's Primary School in Johannesburg North, learners used letters on cards to form words as well as word cards for reading. In both cases, this was done by learners who were said to have reading difficulties.

In light of the above, Ms. Sekhoto indicated that learners with challenges in language structures, such as adjective use, teach learning material when they are in ability groups. She indicated that:

We will be showing them the pictures; we will be showing them the tangible objects so that they will understand. I see them learning better because, after using pictures, after using real objects, then we go back to writing now in an abstract way. Now they remember

what they have been doing.

Mr. Sithole stated that, in Mathematics, one can use learning materials that suit the levels of learners with disabilities if they are in a group of their own. He noted that:

> *I use counters for challenged learners so that they can touch and see. Maybe their problem is they haven't mastered the concrete concepts at the concrete stage, so I use the learning materials, which suits them. Those with disabilities, when you give them tough concepts, and also using the advanced learning materials, they don't participate very well. But if you give them the learning aids, which suits their level, they participate very well.*

Ms. Dhlodlo said that she is able to use concrete objects when learners are in ability groups in Mathematics as learners with disabilities prefer learning by seeing the objects:

> *Now that you have identified your learners who need support, usually I use concrete objects with the learners because they prefer seeing objects. You can use the abacus, you can use fraction chart. Abacus for counting, addition, subtraction, where they count the numbers, or take away or putting together. We can use fraction charts so that when you say one half, they can see what you are talking about. Since they will be working as a group, you can have one fraction chart per group so that, as they are talking about the fraction, they can ask each other, 'when we say one fraction what do we mean? It's a whole that is cut into two'. Ok. This is the same as this. If we put this together it becomes a whole. So, since this shape is divided into two, so this is one half and this is one half. They move on to the next fraction. They work together as a group using the concrete objects. As a teacher, you are just there to facilitate. You walk around and seeing the struggling and then you ask them a leading question, you don't have to tell them the answer.*

Ms. Dhlamini said, in reading, you can use CDs for phonic sounds for those learners who have difficulty reading. She stated that:

> *Whilst the others who are able are busy writing sentences, forming their own sentences, I will be sitting with those who are struggling with a radio, maybe on my table, they come around and then they listen to a story from different CDs. Maybe that CD is about a certain phonic that we are doing, like we were doing 'boat', so they will be listening to that, but they are listening to a story whereby some of the words will be mentioned.*

The above findings indicate that ability grouping enables learners with disabilities to learn through the use of different teaching/learning media. The focus will be on making sure that they are not left behind in the learning activities that take place in the classrooms. Their environment is equipped with resources so that they can learn as much as other learners in the regular classrooms. Teaching/learning media enable them to perform better academically. They learn through manipulating the objects in their own groups without disturbing the average and above average learners.

4.3.2.3 Optimised opportunities for teacher assistance

Ability grouping also enables learners with disabilities to receive optimum support from the teacher. At Good Hope Primary School in Johannesburg East, I witnessed a teacher spending more time with a group of learners that the teacher said had difficulties in reading in a grade two class. At St. Mary's Primary School in a grade three class in Johannesburg North, the teacher helped learners to read a list of words on a chart in an English lesson. At Waterfield Primary School in Johannesburg West, the teacher spent more time with a group of learners with challenges in fractions in Mathematics. She gave them more examples on the task. Concurrently, the teacher allowed other learners to progress at their own pace.

In agreement with the observations noted above, all four participants who practice ability grouping noted that they are able to give more assistance to learners with disabilities if they are in groups of their own. Ms. Dhlamini noted that she is able to concentrate on those with disabilities in their own groups in Mathematics. She expressed the following:

> *You can concentrate a lot on the low achievers because these ones will be able to assist themselves. I attend to them as a group, when I find out that they are struggling, say with addition, I help them alone and I try to explain again. As an educator, you get sort of enough time of interacting with them because the high achievers will be pushing on their own but you just get there and check on what they are doing. At times, there are those who move to high achieving groups. You find that, maybe, they needed a little bit of assistance.*

Mr. Sithole noted that the teacher can use methods that suit the levels of operation of learners facing difficulties in Mathematics in their own groups. He stated that:

> *Normally, the teacher will sit on the group of those ones who are facing difficulties. He will be listening to their discussion, and here and there he will be directing them … The teacher will use the method which suits the learners. It's not like, say in group work where sometimes learners are teaching each other like in pair work, maybe someone is intelligent but he is teaching another learner who is lacking. But the method he or she is teaching doesn't suit her. So, if you are the teacher, you are using the right method for the group.*

Ms. Sikhoto noted that she is able to give more assistance to learners with reading problems:

> *Let's say we had a reading exercise then you realize the learners didn't do well on fluency, maybe learners didn't do well on pronunciation of words. I will focus now on those learners to say these ones have a problem of pronunciation or a problem on*

fluency. I will be focusing on those learners to help them having extra work with them, giving them extra reading.

She added that:

We have got concepts whereby, for example, they did an assessment in creative writing, then you find that these learners have got a problem in sentence construction. He has a problem of using tenses, like it's something descriptive and he is using the past tense, which is wrong. Maybe they are writing a report on creative writing and the learner is using future tense as well, so I will group them now. I would know these learners they need help on their challenges on tenses. So I will focus on that.

Essentially, teachers are able to give more support that is appropriate to learners with disabilities when they are in their own groups in Mathematics and reading at grade two and three levels. Those without disabilities are allowed to progress at their own pace without being held back by learners who are struggling in any particular area of learning.

4.3.2.3 Opportunities for differentiated instruction

Findings indicated that learners are grouped according to ability in order to differentiate instruction. In one class, at St Mary's Primary School in Johannesburg North, in a Social science lesson in grade five, five groups were asked to draw and label the provinces on the South African map. At the same time, two learners in the sixth group that had four learners with problems in map reading were asked to shade the different provinces with different colours on maps they were given by the teacher.

Similarly, in another grade five class in Life Orientation at Pine view Primary School in Johannesburg West, learners in the top five groups were asked to state five children's rights as enshrined in the South African constitution. The teacher had brought copies of the pages from the constitution that deal with children's

rights. The teacher asked the learners to read through the copies and identify those rights. At the same time, the last group that had learners whom the teacher confirmed had difficulties in comprehension were asked to choose children's rights from a list of six statements. From that list, three were children's rights and three were not. All the six statements were written in simplified language compared to the copies given to other learners.

In the interviews, three participants stated that ability grouping enables them to differentiate work according to the abilities of learners in their different groups. Mr. Sithole noted that he gives less challenging work to learners who are facing difficulties in grasping concepts. He indicated that:

> *You give those who are able more challenging work, and those who are not able to grasp concepts fast, you give them less challenging work but the concept is the same … Usually, when I want to reinforce and measure if they got to the concept that I have taught, what I do is I give them the same tasks but the way of questioning the things that I give them (learners with special educational needs) are much easier. Those who are above average, they can work on their own.*

This was supported by Ms. Dhlamini who stated that she differentiates tasks in reading:

> *I give them different activities in their groups, for instance, we were doing a sound 'e' as in sheep, and sweet. The other groups can circle the words with that sound. The other groups can build the words out of those two 'e's'. These ones who are unable to read, I just give them a big apple with many 'e's' inside and Os and Us. I tell them to just pick out this letter E. After that, I give another chart with the words now of sheep, sweet and sleep and others. They have to circle those words and write them down.*

Ms. Sikhoto said that she changes the way of questioning in cases where learners fail to comprehend the question:

Let's say we have prepared a lesson in a general way. After marking, you will find that this one is struggling. I will go back and make sure I give the instruction in a differentiated way to cater for those who are struggling. If for example, I have a learner who, after marking, I have seen that the learner is struggling to comprehend the question, I will go back to those learners in their group and change the questioning.

Although learners in ability groups are able to receive differentiated instruction in their own groups, they receive work that is compromised in terms of quality. This runs the risk of alienating learners in ability groups from receiving quality and equity in education which are the key tenets of inclusion. Ability grouping allows teachers to differentiate tasks according to the learners' levels of ability. This can be done before teaching a concept or afterwards when the teacher would have noted areas where learners have difficulties.

4.3.3 Pairing

Findings noted the presence of gender parity in pairs, collaborative learning amongst diverse learners and opportunities for learner-to-learner support, as well as diverse learners readily accepting one another. The following section provides findings on the inclusiveness of pairing as a grouping strategy.

4.3.3.1 Gender parity

Observations at Loreto Primary School in Johannesburg South and at rikopaneng Primary School in Johannesburg East established that learners were mixed in pairs in terms of gender. Boys and girls were paired together but mixing those with difficulties in Maths and those who had no difficulties in the subject.

The diagram below illustrates how learners were paired at Arikopaneng and at Loreto Primary Schools.

Figure 4.1: Illustration of how learners were paired according to gender

Corroborating the above, two participants indicated that they consider the issue of gender of learners when doing the pairing. Participants stated that they do this because they do not want their learners to feel that others are being favoured on gender lines. They argued that all learners must feel equal regardless of their gender differences. Mr. Mpinga indicated that he considers gender because he wants boys and girls to get used to each other. He stated:

> *Normally, I pair a boy and a girl so that they work together, unlike pairing a girl and a girl. You can take a boy or a girl who is struggling and pair with someone of the opposite sex who is doing well. I think it's good if you pair a boy and a girl, why? These boys must get used to girls. They must take girls as their friends, their sisters, unlike when you pair boys alone. You know, even at work, after school, there they see men and women are mixed together. So it's like I am preparing them for their future environment by mixing them.*

Mr. Sempi indicated that he considers the gender of his learners in order to have a balance in the pairs in terms of gender. He also takes an underachieving boy and pairs with a girl who is doing well and a girl who is underachieving who is paired with a boy without difficulties in learning. He stated that:

> *One thing you mustn't do is to try to be gender biased. I have seen in*

these primary classes, it seems like maybe sometimes girls perform better than boys. So, if you try to maybe pair girls alone, I am saying girls because that's my own assessment. Girls seem to perform better than boys in primary schools. So when you pair a girl and a boy, you are trying to balance, yes, maybe even from the baseline assessment you can also find that most of your higher achievers are girls.

Gender parity is taken into consideration when deciding the pairing. Learners of the opposite sex are paired together but within the framework of one having difficulties in learning in a particular aspect of the curriculum and the other doing well. The main reason is to allow both boys and girls to get used to each other.

4.3.3.2 Collaborative learning

Similar to mixed ability grouping, findings also revealed that learners engage with one another when they are in pairs. This was evident in two classes in Johannesburg West and Johannesburg South. At Ntabeni Primary School, learners were seen asking each other questions on what they were supposed to do in spite of their differences in ability. Three learners from different pairs were seen erasing what they had written and writing again with the assistance of their other partners in a Maths lesson. At the same time, the teacher was moving around checking on the progress that learners in each pair were making.

Two participants corroborated the above when they noted that pairing in Mathematics gives learners the opportunity to guide each other and those who are having difficulties get involved in the tasks. They can understand more from their peers without learning difficulties than the teacher. Mr. Sempi explained:

When children are in pairs, those with challenges get involved in the learning process. Since children are more used to each other, they learn better off amongst themselves. You may find that a gifted learner is able to teach a struggling learner better than the teacher because they are on

the same level as students, they understand each other better. This one who is struggling is getting help from the fast learner, getting help in a number of ways, for example, copying the handwriting, the ideas and so forth.

In agreement with the above, Mr. Mpinga stated that learners with special educational needs can benefit from the practice they get when they are in pairs:

They can practice what you will have given to them and can see that the one who is struggling can actually be supported by the one who is doing much better and the lower achiever can actually improve. There can be a situation where there is what we call the 'apprenticeship model' where the other one learns from the other. It means, for the above average student, it's like a trainer. The apprenticeship model here works very well where the other child who is not doing well is benefiting from the one who is now conversant with what is happening.

The above findings indicate that learners can engage one another through collaborative learning in ability groups, mixed ability groups and in pairs that have learners who are mixed in ability. They can also learn skills such as expressing themselves properly and improving on their reading skills. Learners with special educational needs are not excluded from activities that other learners are doing when they are in mixed ability groups and pairs.

4.3.4 One-on-one grouping

Findings indicated that teachers are able to give optimum assistance as well as individualised instruction to learners when they are taught one-on-one.

4.3.4.1 Optimum teacher assistance

Observations undertaken revealed that two teachers who were teaching their learners on a one-on-one basis were attending to learners individually, helping them, and giving them more individual instructions. This was observed at Ntini Primary School in Johannesburg East as well as at Malibongwe Primary School in

Johannesburg Central. From the interviews undertaken, one participant who practiced one-on-one grouping indicated that she is able to give more assistance to learners with learning difficulties on a one-on-one basis. Ms. Chiwasa stated that:

> *I do a break away period to assist a child who is struggling. I will give him something to answer so that I can see how much he has grasped. Then, after that, if I have seen that this child can do his work alone, I will have to break away from him to enable him to function independently. I give them a lot of individual support where they have challenges.*

Central to the use of ability grouping and one-on-one is the need for teachers to give more direct support to learners who need extra assistance. This is premised by the need to improve the academic performances of learners with special educational needs in the regular classrooms.

4.3.4.1 Individualised instruction

Observations also established that, in the two classes that practiced one-on- one groupings, tasks were done individually with no group work observed in either class. In addition, learners received instruction directly from the teacher who, in most cases, gave such instruction according to the levels of abilities of learners. This was observed at Ntini Primary School in Johannesburg East and Malibongwe Primary School in Johannesburg Central. At Malibongwe Primary School, the teacher gave examples of proper nouns to one learner in an English lesson. At both schools, teachers were seen moving from one learner to another, marking the activities whilst learners were still writing. At Ntini Primary School, the teacher illustrated how to add numbers with carrying to two learners individually. From the interviews, both participants who practiced one-on-one indicated that the practice enables the teacher to provide individualised instruction to learners.

Ms. Dhlamini stated that she intervenes and illustrates to individual learners how they should carry out the task as she helps them individually. She indicated that:

> *I give those with learning challenges work that they can manage. I can pick some learners who have got challenges. Then, from there, I have to intervene by making sure that they work on tasks that are at their level. I teach them first, I show them, 'you are not supposed to do like this, you are supposed to do that', then I take it from there. I help them individually.*

Ms. Chiwasa also stated that one-on-one enables learners to receive individualised instruction and they can ask questions when they do not understand:

> *You will be dealing with them according to what they can do. So it will be a teacher and a learner. If I am doing group teaching, sometimes many children will be left behind because they cannot catch up on what I am teaching. So, one-on-one allows a child to experience that learning environment, which is individualised, that he can ask and I can even see that the child is lacking this and that. So, in that way, individualised learning instruction is very important because you focus on what the child is supposed to know, and you even dwell on the problem.*

The above indicates that one-on-one instruction permits teachers to assist learners on an individual basis so that all learners can improve academically. Furthermore, findings indicate that learners with difficulties in learning are given tasks that are at their levels of ability.

4.4 Drawbacks for effective inclusion of learners in the grouping practices

Although learners were being grouped in the regular classrooms in one way or another, findings revealed that class sizes are too big across all the regular classes visited. At Arikopaneng in Johannesburg East, there were 44 learners in one class

that practiced pairing. At Intuthuko Primary School in Johannesburg West, there were 43 learners in the class. The highest number of learners in a single class was noted at Imbali Primary School in Johannesburg South which had 48 learners. There were 41 learners and 43 learners at St Mary's and Good Hope Primary Schools respectively.

In light of the above, three participants noted the sizes of classes as a drawback for effective inclusion of learners in the grouping practices in the regular classes. One participant who practiced pairing indicated that this impacts negatively on the teacher's ability to assist learners with disabilities within the groups. Mr. Mpinga stated that:

> *The class sizes are extraordinarily big. I have plus or minus 45 learners. This makes it difficult to assist learners with difficulties. They are not getting enough attention because of the size of the class. If there were smaller classes, we could attend to an individual child and then we can be able to assist them within a period of, say, 45 minutes.*

Mr. Mpofu who practiced mixed ability grouping indicated that he has 48 learners in one class and that he is teaching three classes. He said:

> *Imagine a class of 48 learners and you want to attend to each one of them. It's a big challenge. Sometimes we won't be able to fully support learners who have got challenges.*

One participant who practices mixed ability grouping indicated that the group sizes in her class are too big for the optimum benefit of learners. Ms. Mzila stated:

> *Maybe it's a class of 40 learners, then I decide to group my learners into five groups. Each group will be having eight learners. So those eight learners will be working together. I just feel it's too much. I have just mentioned 40 because those are the learners that I am having. I am having eight learners per group because they are 40.*

Teachers have difficulties in effectively assisting learners in the groups. Large class sizes are directly linked to group sizes which ultimately become too big as well. This negatively affects the inclusion of all learners in their groups as they cannot be assisted in their areas of need.

The following section presents strategies that emanated from the research which can be implemented to enhance the inclusivity of grouping practices in the regular classrooms.

4.4 Strategies to enhance inclusiveness of the grouping practices

Research findings indicated that there are important issues that need to be attended to in order to enhance the inclusivity of particular grouping practices in the regular classrooms. These issues relate to the provision of varied but appropriate teaching/learning materials that cater for the needs of different categories of learners within one group, a reduction of group sizes which must start with the reduction of class sizes and the professional development of regular class teachers in the field of inclusive education.

4.4.1 Teaching/learning media

Observations in all the classes that practiced mixed ability grouping established that learners in these groups were not subjected to the use of varied teaching/learning media that addressed the needs of different learners. However, observations carried out in classes that practiced ability grouping revealed that learners were provided with different teaching/learning media for them to learn through manipulation.

In light of the above, three participants highlighted the need for the provision of teaching/learning materials in the groups. Mr. Sithole who practices ability grouping suggested that learners with difficulties in Mathematics require concrete teaching/learning aids like abacuses so that they can learn through manipulation. He explained:

Teaching and learning aids must be there in the groups so that all learners can benefit. For example, in multiplication for learners who are facing difficulties, in most cases, you must go back to the concrete stage. Like I said earlier on, if you are saying 3x3 or 1x1, you must give learners counters or even oranges, whatever learning aids, so that others can show them how to work out. They must touch and count. They need to be supported through concrete aids while still in the same group.

Ms. Dhlamini who teaches grade two expressed the need for the use of concrete media in the groups so that learners who struggle can learn through manipulation within the groups. She stated that teachers have to bring in concrete objects when teaching counting. She noted:

In Maths, you have to have concrete objects for learners who are struggling but within the same group with those who are performing well. They can use stones or counters when counting. They will get to know that 'so this means five sweets'. By so doing, it helps them because they are doing it concretely; practically, they will be having those things in the groups that they are in.

Ms. Chiwasa who practices one-on-one, spoke about the need for teachers to be resourceful even though schools should provide the necessary teaching/learning aids. She indicated:

Teachers have to be resourceful enough in order to provide teaching/learning resources that can be used by the whole range of learners in the groups. However, to some extent, they need to be given such resources. Some learners need to learn by seeing.

Concrete teaching/learning media are essential in supporting learners with difficulties in learning as they can learn through touching and seeing, but still in the same groups as those who are not struggling. Findings indicate that learners in groups need to be supported through the use of teaching/learning media that

address their unique learning needs. The underlying factor is that, for inclusion of learners with special educational needs to be enhanced in the groups, there must be appropriate teaching/learning resources which they can use within their specific groups.

4.4.2 Group sizes

Observations undertaken revealed that when groups are too large, they become noisy, disruptive and learners engage in discussions that are not related to what they are learning. Learners competed to be heard during group discussions thereby raising the noise levels in the class. At St Mary's Primary School in Johannesburg North there were five groups of eight learners each and learners made a lot of noise during group discussions. At Veli Primary School in Johannesburg South, groups had seven or eight learners each. Some learners were not able to participate in the groups during discussions due to the lack of time allocated for group discussions. At Intuthuko Primary School in Johannesburg West, there were nine learners in each group. During group work at Good Hope Primary School in Johannesburg East, two learners in one group did not participate in the discussion during a Mathematics lesson. Instead, they spoke about something that was not related to the group task.

Three participants felt that group sizes should be kept low if groups are to be more inclusive of all learners in those groups. Mr. Mpofu stated that:

> *Students should be in group sizes where we think we can effectively help them. I have a class of 48 learners, so they usually sit more or less eight or seven per group and I have five to six groups. The smaller the groups, the more they benefit from being in the groups. Five learners per group would be the ideal size because they have a chance to have an input. If they are so many, some learners hide and they don't participate.*

Ms. Mzila also commented that the group sizes should be kept low:

Mainly, what I have realised is the number of learners, like I said, I have 40 learners in a class. I feel they are just too much. A group must have at least four to six learners. I feel classes mustn't be too big so that when I try to group them, a group must have four learners or six. I will be able to check the progress of learners who have challenges.

Mr. Mpinga who practices pairing spoke about the need to reduce class sizes so that he has fewer pairs of learners that he will be able to assist within a lesson. He noted:

They have to reduce class sizes, teacher-pupil ratio to a maximum of 25 or maybe 30 learners. This allows teachers to move around checking all the learners and helping those who are struggling. Imagine in a class of 45, if you put children in pairs, it means you are having pairs of about 22, which means it's very difficult to reach out and to make sure that they are working together.

Observations also revealed that class sizes were too large in both the two classes that practiced one-on-one. In one class at Ntini Primary School in Johannesburg East, there were 43 learners while at Malibongwe Primary in Johannesburg Central, the class had 44 learners. In both classes, teachers did not get enough time to be with each learner in the 30 minute period they had for a lesson. Teachers could not attend to all learners in the class when they were moving around offering individual assistance. In both classes, I noted that teachers took three minutes at most with a few individual learners.

One participant noted that there is a need to reduce class sizes in the mainstream classes. Ms. Dhlamini stated:

Imagine a class of 48 learners, and you want to attend to each and every learner. It's a challenge. I am teaching three classes and, on average, there are 48 learners in each class. Class sizes have to be a bit smaller, say 30 learners in each class. This makes it easy to help all learners, especially those who are challenged.

Ms. Dhlodlo concurred:

> *I feel classes should not be too big. It is difficult to teach all learners when they are too many. Teaching could be better for the teachers if learners are fewer as they will be able to help children facing learning challenges in their classes.*

Large class sizes lead to large group sizes in the classrooms. This has a negative effect on the participation of all learners in the classrooms as some may choose not to participate. To circumvent these negative effects, both group and class sizes have to be smaller for teachers to be able to assist all learners. In addition, smaller group sizes optimise participation by all learners within the groups as compared to large groups that are noisy and disruptive of learning in those classes. In respect of the above, there is congruence between mixed ability grouping and ability grouping on the need to have smaller groups, preferably four to six learners in each group.

4.4.3 Professional development for teachers

Participants spoke about the need to equip in-service teachers for the inclusion of diverse learners in the mainstream classes. Mr. Mpofu indicated that most teachers do not know much about inclusive grouping practices in the regular classes therefore they need to be workshopped. He stated that:

> *Most of the teachers, they just group learners for the sake of grouping. Some of the teachers, they just know the names of the groups but not what it entails, they don't have any idea about these groups. Most of the teachers, when they are doing their training, the issue of inclusivity in groups is not coming up … When we are using group work, it is important to know how to mix up those learners, who to put where and how to do it in the sense that, if we just say they are there but we don't see the communication patterns, it's a problem. The teacher should see the communication patterns to say*

these learners are most likely to talk to those learners because they have this link of communication, and then you tend to use those traits to mix those groups so that, when they are in those groups, there is communication and participation from all learners.

This was corroborated by Ms. Dhlamini who stated that it is necessary to work-shop teachers to mitigate the challenges of a lack of knowledge on how to group learners in the regular classes:

To start with, we are not well trained for learners at risk or learners with learning barriers for inclusion. With that, I think the employer can try, by all means, to provide training or workshops. We once had a workshop for three days, but going there you will see that this was supposed to be for three years, not three days. We had a lot of questions that we could not ask; we had no time. So I think a lot of time needs to be spent on in- servicing teachers on how to group learners in the classes so that justice is done to every learner.

One participant felt that school administrators have to be trained in inclusive education for inclusive grouping practices to be successful in the regular classrooms. This will make it easy for them to understand the concerns of the teachers about inclusivity. Ms. Chiwasa commented:

Administrators should be well versed in Inclusive Education strategies. Right now, if we can look around, most of the principals, they don't know about it and it's only the teachers who know about it. If you go to the principal and say 'we have to group like this', you will seem like you are challenging them. So administrators have to be trained about inclusive education so that they can empower teachers as well.

The findings above indicate that inclusive grouping practices in the regular classes can be enhanced if teachers and principals can be trained on how to set up inclusive grouping practices. It is also imperative for school administrators to be

knowledgeable about inclusive practices at classroom level so that they can empower teachers on how to include diverse learners in the teaching/learning in the groups, as well as to avoid contradictions between teachers and administrators on how to group learners in the regular classrooms.

4.6 Summary

This chapter presented the research findings and analysis through the three themes where were: (a) Current grouping practices; (b) Inclusiveness of the grouping practices; and (c) Strategies to enhance inclusivity in the grouping practices. The next chapter discusses the research findings using the lens of inclusive pedagogy by Florian and Black Hawkins (2011).

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings presented in Chapter 4. The findings are discussed through the lens of Inclusive Pedagogy by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011). Data are discussed in line with the three themes that emerged from the data which were: (a) Current grouping practices; (b) inclusiveness of the grouping practices; and (c) Strategies to enhance inclusiveness of grouping practices. Participants' qualifications and experiences in teaching in the regular classes are also discussed.

5.2 Teachers' experience and qualifications

Findings indicated that all participants were qualified educators who met the criteria discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.5. Their qualifications ranged from Advanced Certificates in Inclusive Education, Bachelor of Education degrees in Inclusive Education, and Honours degrees in Inclusive Education. The assumption was that they were prepared to group learners in inclusive ways in their regular classrooms. However, findings indicated that, even though participants had qualifications and experiences in inclusive pedagogy, some still group their learners separately for the purposes of teaching and learning. This was established in ability grouping in section 4.2.1. This suggests there could be other contributory factors to the implementation of inclusive grouping practices besides the qualifications and experiences of teachers.

Mukeredzi (2013) argues that teachers' professional development is key to inclusive classroom practices as this can influence pedagogic approaches. A study by Mackey (2014) on the teachers' preparedness to teach inclusive classrooms in the USA established that teachers who had only one undergraduate special education course felt their undergraduate programs had not sufficiently prepared them to meet the needs of diverse learners. Fundamental knowledge and skills on instructional accommodations should be provided within the inclusive settings (Nguyet & Ha, 2010). The belief here is that teachers should possess the skills

that enable them to implement inclusive grouping practices in their regular classrooms.

Teachers' qualifications assist in promoting inclusion through the implementation of grouping practices that address diverse needs of all learners in the regular classrooms (Frederickson & Cline, 2011). However, findings indicated that the experiences and qualifications of teachers in inclusive education alone are not adequate. School management teams also need to be knowledgeable about inclusivity in order to avoid clashes in their practices. Findings revealed that teachers who practice one-on-one grouping decry the lack of knowledge on inclusive education practices that principals and other administrators, such as HODs, in the mainstream schools have. This poses a challenge to teachers in the regular classes as they tend to go against the implementation of inclusive grouping practices as their superiors require them to pursue a different approach that is not inclusive, as indicated by the findings under section 4.5.3. Conflicts arise when school management teams believe in the need to enhance the level of education of all learners at the expense of social inclusion. This may explain the clinical approach to teaching that teachers who practice ability grouping and one-on-one pursue, that of intending to "treat" the learner that emanates from the medical model of disability, not as a social construct, but as a deficiency within an individual (Florian, 2015).

The inclusion movement should be viewed as a motivation for change, not only in educational policies but also in the classroom teacher's roles and expectations (Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014). In that regard, teachers' qualifications in inclusive education are critical in implementing and managing inclusive grouping practices in the regular classes and therefore should be broadened to include other stakeholders in the schools such as school principals and their management teams. In the past, efforts have consisted of specialised programs, institutions and specialist educators (UNESCO, 2005). The consequence of such differentiation has been further exclusion, as evidenced by grouping learners by ability, which is rejected by inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The following section discusses the current grouping practices that emerged from the research findings.

5.3 Current grouping practices

Findings presented under 4.2 indicate that the current grouping practices that emerged from the research were ability grouping, mixed ability and pairing. One-on-one grouping emerged as an alternative arrangement to grouping learners in the regular classes. In the following section, I discuss each of the grouping practices that emerged.

5.3.1 Ability grouping

Research findings established that learners are grouped according to their abilities in regular classrooms in subjects like Mathematics, English and Social Science to enable teachers to give more support to learners with special educational needs in groups of their own. Findings further indicate that ability levels of learners are the primary factor in grouping learners by ability. Similar findings on grouping learners by ability were established in Sweden by Ramberg (2014). Heward (2014) avers that ability grouping is an effective instructional approach to teaching reading, Maths and Social Studies to learners in the regular classrooms. Learners can work in the same curriculum area as classmates, but at different levels within their different groups (Lewis & Doorlag, 2011). For example, while peers work on algebraic problems, learners with disabilities can work on addition and subtraction skills, as was reflected in the research findings.

However, the practice of grouping learners by ability is not in line with inclusive pedagogy which views separation of learners on the basis of their abilities as a perpetuation of exclusion of other learners based on what they can or cannot do (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The act of separating learners by ability creates different learning environments in the classroom. Further to the above, issues of justice in education are violated if learners are treated differently in the classrooms, as learners who are average and above average receive more quality work compared to the content given to learners with special educational needs (Mahlo, 2013). In the advancement of inclusive pedagogy, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argue that inclusion requires that learners with diverse abilities should be taught together in the same groups, yet findings indicate that learners are

separated according to their abilities.

The findings also indicated that the consequences of grouping by ability are that learners with disabilities may derive negative views about themselves from the way they are grouped. Those in lower ability groups may see differences as the norm, yet inclusion is about learners' entitlement to education without distinction and that education is provided without discrimination (Bubpha, 2014). In light of inclusive pedagogy, grouping by ability can lower a teacher's expectations about what is possible for a learner to achieve (Florian, 2015). Inclusive education mandates that all learners should be accommodated on an equal basis, that discriminatory attitudes be erased and that there should be welcoming learning environments that respect both the differences and the dignity of all learners (DoE, 2001). The argument is that learners with special educational needs should not be separated in order to be assisted, but should be incorporated in inclusive grouping practices so that they can learn together with others (Spratt & Florian, 2013).

Findings also established that learners with special educational needs receive more assistance than other learners who are doing well in any aspect of learning. However, the problem with such an approach is that it is deeply ingrained in the traditional model of disability (medical model), which views disability as a personal constraint that limits the capacity of the learners with special educational needs to participate in normal settings (Florian & Black- Hawkins, 2011). What is needed is an expanded vision that surpasses present conventional delivery systems while building the best in current practices (Florian, 2015). Learners have to learn and receive extra assistance whilst with their so-called "normal" peers so that they can have a happy social life with others (Bubpha, 2014).

Inclusive education is based on the ideals of social justice (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). These can be seen as complete and equal participation of all learners in a society that is mutually designed to meet all learners' needs and in which individuals are both self-determining and independent to interact democratically with others (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). However, findings indicated that the grouping of learners by ability limits the options for "democratised interaction" of learners of different abilities in the regular classrooms. In addition, findings on

ability grouping established that learners with disabilities receive separate instructions and different activities from other learners on the principle of offering extra assistance to them. In the inclusive pedagogy, this is referred to as the “bell curve model of distribution which assumes that most phenomena occur around a middle point, while a few occur at either high or low extreme ends” of a normal distribution and may require something additional or different (Florian, 2015).
Provision of different activities to learners based on their abilities acts against one of the principles of inclusive education, that of equality (Marin, 2014). In the light of inclusive pedagogy, the naturalisation of the bell curve of grouping by ability, “as a structural feature of schooling, is inherently unjust because it perpetuates the inevitability of failure” (Florian, 2015). The problem is that the identification of additional support needs is often accompanied by the lowering of expectations about what can be achieved (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Consequently, learners with special educational needs are precluded from receiving quality education in the regular classes because they are in lower achieving groups where the curriculum is weaker (Florian, 2015).

5.3.2 Mixed ability

Findings under section 4.2.2 indicate that some classes practice mixed ability grouping where diverse learners learn together in one group. Learners are subjected to baseline assessments and results from those assessments are used to group them. Learners with disabilities are grouped together with the average and those above average in every topic in the different subjects. Such arrangements are consistent with DoE (2001) which stipulates that learners with special educational needs should be included in the educational arrangements made for the majority of learners in the classrooms.

The procedural mechanisms in grouping learners according to their mixed ability indicate that learners are enabled to learn together irrespective of their differences in ability. Inclusion is intended for all learners without distinction between “special” and “normal learners” and in respect to the human rights and diversity rather than their differences (Bubpha, 2014). Mixed ability groups in the regular classes respond positively to the need to incorporate diversity in learning through

overlooking differences in learners. Inclusive pedagogy primarily involves increasing participation and decreasing exclusion of other learners from the regular curricula (Florian, 2015). Learners have to be educated together as a basis for building a just and non-discriminatory society (Florian, 2015). The emphasis is on the creation of an inclusive society, where there is democracy and all individuals participate to the fullest extent and are able to make a worthwhile contribution. Arguably, the way learners are grouped in the regular classes for the purposes of learning and teaching can either promote or impinge on the justice for learners who have special educational needs.

However, the use of mixed ability grouping has negative detriments to inclusion emanating from the generic approach to teaching and learning that are contiguous with the practice. Teachers find it difficult to differentiate instruction despite glaring disparities in learner abilities within mixed ability groups because they want all learners to proceed at the same pace. Petrenas et al. (2013) posit that once learners are grouped by mixed ability, teachers cease to give attention to some learners in the groups because they cannot attend to everyone, which impacts negatively on the academic inclusion of learners who need more support from the teacher. In cases where teachers try to give differentiated instruction to some individual learners in the groups, this poses the challenge of channelling learners into categories based on the amount of support an individual learner requires (Duncan, 2012).

Marumo and Mhlolo (2017) aver that the progress of gifted learners is held back by underperforming learners if they are all in the same ability groups because teachers find it difficult to differentiate instruction. This positions mixed ability grouping as good for academic inclusion, but lacking in its ability to unlock opportunities for more exploratory learning by gifted learners.

In addition to the above, key to inclusive practices is the use of appropriate teaching/learning material that addresses the needs of all learners (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Given the diversity of learners in mixed ability groups, teachers face challenges in providing the teaching/learning materials for the various categories of learners in the groups. This impinges on one of the principles

of inclusion which requires the provision of teaching/learning materials that are appropriate to the needs of each individual learner (Tanenbaum, 2011).

5.3.3 Pairing

Enabling learners to sit in pairs emerged as one of the grouping practices that are being implemented in the regular classes. This is a strategy in which two learners work on learning tasks, practice and review an academic skill together that the teacher has planned (Lerner & Johns, 2012). Pairing entails that teachers follow a particular method of rank-ordering in a class, starting from the strongest to the weakest in the targeted skills (Smith & Tyler, 2010). Similarly, findings established that, in some cases, learners are arranged in such a way that the best performing learner per topic is paired with the least performing learner in that topic. This is consistent with Frederickson and Cline (2011) who believe in ranking learners by reading levels from 1 to 20, then matching the 1st reader with the 11th reader, the 2nd with the 12th, 3rd with the 13th in that order. The purpose of such a procedure would be to ensure that pairs are balanced in terms of learner performance.

However, in light of inclusive pedagogy, the problem with such a practice is that learners are being identified by their abilities or disabilities (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This is tantamount to labelling which sustains negative attitudes towards those who are identified as weak. On the other hand, if such a procedure were to be followed in all the subjects, a learner cannot be in the same position across all the lessons for the duration of the whole school day. Learners would need to change their partners several times a day, depending on the subjects. The changing of the pairs regularly would be informed by the need to enable learners who have disabilities to be supported by other learners without disabilities in each particular subject. This provides opportunities for extensive engagements for both learners with and without disabilities (Frederickson & Cline, 2011). In that view, pairing allows learners to converse with one another and brainstorm together in order to find solutions to problems as well as to complete their assignments in harmony.

Inclusion is about erasing discriminatory attitudes and exclusion (DoE, 2001).

Findings indicated that the nature by which learners are paired in the regular classes does not discriminate learners either by ability, age or gender. Rather, effort is made to mix learners so that they can learn together in those pairs. Participation of all learners needs to be maximised in the culture and curriculum of educational institutions in order to minimise barriers to learning (UNESCO, 2005). It can be argued that the way learners are paired in the regular classrooms reduces the exclusion of other learners from full participation which is a key tenet of inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Black- Hawkins, 2011).

5.3.4 One-on-one grouping

A divergent view to grouping of learners on a one-on-one basis in the regular classrooms emerged from the research findings. Learners do not get the opportunity to learn from one another in groups, but they receive direct instruction from the teacher. The argument that emerged from one-on-one practice was that all learners should be able to operate at their own levels of ability without being held back or hurried by those who are different from them.

Other studies that established the same results were carried out by Person (2012) in Sweden and Baines et al. (2015) in the United Kingdom. However, the difficulty with this strategy is that, like ability grouping, it views learners' (in) abilities to learn as qualities in the learners themselves and not environmental factors. This subscribes to the medical model which views disability as a "personal tragedy" (UNESCO, 2001). The view is that difficulties in learning lie in individual learners, hence the need to teach them on a one-on-one basis, to "treat" their disabilities. This militates against the principle of inclusion which seeks to modify and arrange environmental factors to enable learners to learn together effectively (UNESCO, 1994).

Inclusion is built around the social model in which all learners have to learn together regardless of their differences (Plows & Whitburn, 2017). Inclusive pedagogy argues that learners should be able to interact with one another without being isolated from others and be prepared to take their place in society and in the world of work (Marin, 2014). Arguably, the focus in one-on- one is to improve

learners' academic attainments, negating issues of social inclusion, dignity, justice and equality of all learners (Bubpha, 2014). This transcends into establishing humane and caring societies where children will live in harmony with others (DoE, 2001; UNESCO, 1994).

The discussion above looked at current grouping practices in the regular classrooms that were established in the study. The following section discusses how the current grouping practices are in alignment with principles of inclusivity, viewed from the light of inclusive pedagogy.

5.4 Inclusiveness of the grouping practices

This current study established that various practices are embedded in the grouping practices, which include considerations of gender of learners, their ages, as well as their backgrounds when grouping learners. Other practices that emerged from the study are about how learners relate to each other in the various grouping practices, which may or may not point to the inclusiveness of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms.

5.4.1 Gender Parity

Research findings indicated that gender of learners is considered when grouping learners by mixed ability and in pairs. Teachers take measures to ensure that groups have both boys and girls in them. Arguably, considering the gender of learners when grouping them in the regular classrooms allows boys and girls to learn alongside each other and preserves their dignity in the classrooms (UNESCO, 2005). Recchia and Lee (2013) avow that all learners should be accepted and respected as important and integral members of the classroom community despite their gender differences. The manifestation that mixed ability grouping and pairing accede to the need for gender infusion in groups positively identifies with the principle of inclusivity – that of social justice for every learner (Tanenbaum, 2011). The ideals of social justice can be viewed as the complete and equal participation of all learners in an environment that is mutually designed

to meet all learners' needs (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013).

Inclusive management should take into account education that allows all learners to learn together, to be recognised and to be provided with equal educational opportunities (Bubpha, 2014). In that light, "special efforts should be made to encourage the participation of girls … with disabilities in educational programs" (UNESCO, 1994). The absence of learners of a particular gender from a group set-up is tantamount to discrimination and exclusion, which is against the dictates of inclusive pedagogy that stipulates that regular education has to be the most effective means for combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming environments and building an inclusive society (Mahlo, 2013). In light of the above, it can be argued that mixed ability grouping and pairing are in line with inclusive pedagogy as they enable learners to learn together, despite their gender differences.

5.4.2 Age of learners

The findings in section 4.2.2 established that the ages of learners form part of the physical appearance of mixed ability groups to facilitate the inclusion of all learners in the regular classrooms in spite of their age differences. Findings indicated that older learners are present in the regular classes as a result of being retained in the same grade because of poor attainment results the previous year(s). Arguably, such learners are at risk of social rejection from their more abled peers without disabilities because they are older than most of the learners in the regular classrooms. Inclusive education dictates that every learner must have a place and must be welcome in the regular classes, irrespective of their ages (Smith et al., 2011). The essence of inclusive grouping includes learners accepting and supporting each other in the same groups (Kruger & Nel, 2011; Smith et al., 2011). The point is that, whether learners are having disabilities or not, they have to be accepted by other learners in order to benefit from inclusivity. In that light, considering the ages of learners when grouping according to their mixed abilities attests to the dictates of inclusive pedagogy, that of incorporating all learners in one learning environment despite their differences (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

5.4.3 Learners of different backgrounds

This current study established that regular classrooms have learners of different backgrounds as evidenced by their first languages that were observed. However, there were no particular patterns observed which explained how learners of different origins are grouped in the classrooms. What emerged as part of the teacher craft were the accommodations which teachers made, which include allowing learners from different countries to sit where they feel comfortable. A study by Sugimoto (2017) revealed that learners of foreign origin attending school in the USA are reluctant to interact with learners of the dominant group. In that regard, allowing learners from different backgrounds to sit where they are comfortable positions them to gradually fit into the existing systems in the classrooms. In inclusive pedagogy, participation and acceptance of learners should be both by teachers and by other learners (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Allowing learners with different backgrounds, such as those from different countries, to sit where they want to enables them to feel welcome in the group set-ups within the regular classroom environment.

The other accommodation established in the research findings relates to allowing learners in the groups to speak in the vernacular when assisting each other. This is consistent with a study by Moswela (2010) in Botswana which established that current trends compel teachers to engage in teaching and instructional practices that include groups of learners from diverse backgrounds. Person (2012) reports that, in Sweden, learners speaking the same language and from the same background form a heterogeneous category so that they can help one another. In that view, allowing learners to speak in the vernacular in the group set-ups enable them to feel welcome in the classrooms.

It is not only the learners' abilities that should be the basis for the grouping in inclusion, but also factors such as social class, socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender and special educational needs (Ramberg, 2014). This is in line with UNESCO (2001) which postulates that teachers must take account of learners' backgrounds in order to be more inclusive, as inclusivity is concerned with all

learners, including those, such as ethnic and linguistic minorities, who have traditionally been excluded from educational opportunities.

5.4.3.1 Opportunities for collaborative learning

Mixed ability grouping, ability grouping, and pairing offer opportunities for collaborative learning in the regular classrooms as established under section 4.3.1.4, 4.3.2.1 and 4.3.3.2 respectively. In mixed ability grouping and pairing, learners of different abilities are grouped together to facilitate collaborative learning amongst different learners. Findings from a study by Pohtola (2015) purport that most teachers who use mixed ability groups emphasised that everyone has something to give as every learner has their own strengths. The above is consistent with Reid (2012) who states that learners with special educational needs must be in a group where at least one or more learners in the group are able to impose structure on the group. Inclusive pedagogy stresses the importance of applying teaching strategies that enable all learners to learn together (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Findings by Al-Shammakhi and Al-Humaidi (2015) established that learners in Oman are grouped according to mixed ability where they willingly help and learn from one another. Learners without special educational needs are able to work together with those with special educational needs in the same groups in terms of learner attainment and other facets of learner development. The current study findings indicated that grouping by mixed ability and pairs permits learners to interact optimally among themselves and, in the process, to learn from one another, despite their differences. Each learner is seen as a contributing member of the classroom community through collaborative learning (Recchia & Lee, 2013).

Conversely, the current study findings also established that collaborative learning in ability groups takes the form of learners who operate at approximately the same level being allowed to work together in their own groups. However, in light of inclusive pedagogy, such collaborative learning compromises the quality of work in groups of lower achieving learners (Florian, 2015). Learners in higher performing groups learn more than learners in other groups (Dunne, 2010).

Notwithstanding the above, the provision of quality education for all learners is one of the key objectives of inclusion (Marin, 2014). Learning environments should be able to promote the full academic development of all learners in the classes not just a selected few (Mahlo, 2013).

Compromising the quality of work in the lower achieving groups can serve as an indicator that such learners are being left behind while the average and above average learners benefit from learning collaboratively on tasks that are appropriate to their grade levels. Provision of quality education to all learners can be achieved through collaboration in the groups. In light of ability grouping, the reflection is that there is “exclusion” of the “included” as learners with special educational needs are allowed to attend the same regular classes with others without special educational needs, but are grouped separately, according to their abilities, in the same regular classes. This is tantamount to the institutionalisation of discriminatory tendencies which lead to disparities in the delivery of education (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). The view is that collaborative learning is beneficial for all learners, but if learners with special educational needs are expected to collaborate only amongst themselves, then the practice becomes discriminative in light of the inclusive pedagogy which rejects the idea that there should be something for some, at the exclusion of others (Spratt & Florian, 2013).

5.4.3.2 Interaction amongst learners

Besides collaborative learning, findings indicated that mixed ability groups and pairing optimise social interaction amongst learners with and without special educational needs in the regular classrooms. This serves as the foundation on which lifelong patterns of social behaviour are constructed (Recchia & Lee, 2013). Ultimately, such lifelong patterns prepare learners for societal acceptance because they learn to conform to the norms of the society through interaction with one another. Enabling learners to interact socially amongst themselves gives them the opportunity to understand other learners, respect them, as well to cultivate tolerance amongst different learners. Eredics (2015) purports that learners in mixed ability groups can develop new social skills through interaction with one another and that this increases learners’ confidence in the classrooms. In light of

inclusive pedagogy, learners with special educational needs should be able to join other learners without special educational needs in their groups (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Furthermore, findings of this study indicated that mixed ability grouping and pairing provide lower functioning learners with models from whom to learn social skills through optimum opportunities for interaction. Learners with articulation problems can benefit from hearing the more appropriate speech of their peers in their groups (Lewis & Doorlag, 2011). Stereotypes can be removed if diverse learners are allowed to interact amongst themselves in the same group (Harnish, 2015). Separating learners on the basis of ability inhibits their chances of being able to express themselves appropriately as evidenced by the research findings. Recchia and Lee (2013) postulate that it is in the regular classrooms that learners develop an understanding about themselves and others. All learners have to learn how to talk, play or share amongst themselves in the same class that transcends to the larger societies in which they live. This builds the notion of humaneness, the Ubuntu concept, which subscribes that “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” which means that a person can only be a person through others (Van Vuuren et al., 2016).

Many learners with special educational needs face challenges in holding a conversation, expressing their feelings, participating in group activities and responding to failure or criticism in constructive ways (Heward, 2014). These challenges can be erased if diverse learners have optimum opportunities to interact amongst themselves. Inclusive pedagogy is of the view that such learners should be able to learn with others in the classrooms (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). All learners need to develop social skills that enable them to work well with others. This can be achieved through introducing such learners to peers from whom they can learn to socialise in acceptable ways through optimum opportunities for interaction (Deiner, 2013). Smith et al. (2011) posit that placing a learner in an inclusive classroom does not guarantee social acceptance or inclusion. For a learner with disabilities to “fit” in the larger groups, he/she has to participate in ongoing social play and be able to continue to interact (Deiner, 2013). Peer buddies are much more successful at teaching social skills through the course of a regular conversation or interaction (Heward, 2014).

From pairing learners, friendship skills can be developed. This includes being able to say “thank you”, giving compliments, as well as giving help as evidenced by the research findings. When learners are paired or are in mixed ability groups, they are more readily approachable and they lend support in a more natural and informal way (Pienaar & Raymond, 2013). Heward (2014) views this as the “buddy system” in which partners serve as positive role models in social interactions, and provide the support their partners need to be included within general education. The obstacle regarding positive interaction amongst learners manifests when learners are grouped according to ability. Those with disabilities interact socially amongst themselves in their own groups as evidenced by the research findings. This is socially unjustifiable in light of inclusive pedagogy as this perpetuates incidences of marginalisation of some learners, such as those with special educational needs (Florian, 2015). In that light, ability grouping preserves the segregation of learners with special educational needs from opportunities to interact with other learners in the regular classroom. Learners have to belong within an educational community that endorses and values their individuality (Powell, 2016).

5.4.3.3 Learner-to-learner assistance

In line with collaborative learning, the current study findings indicated that learner support is more evident in mixed ability grouping, ability grouping and pairing, though in varying degrees. Findings revealed that pairing and mixed ability grouping are conducted in such a way that those with special educational needs sit next to learners without disabilities. Under such arrangements, learners are able to support each other in the groups. Inclusive pedagogy is of the view that learners with disabilities should be given continuous support (DoE, 2014) from other peers, in addition to what they get from their teachers. However, this support for one another should be provided in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goals of inclusive pedagogy (Florian, 2015).

In pairing learners, there is a tutor and a tutee where the tutor serves as a model

of appropriate academic and non-academic behaviours (Lerner & Johns, 2012). Learners with special educational needs are able to get more support from other learners without special educational needs. On the other hand, although learners in ability groups are able to support one another in their own groups, as evidenced by the research findings, the support in low achieving groups is of lesser quality considering that they are all struggling to cope and that they have been grouped based on their performance levels in particular areas of learning. Arguably, this implies that curriculum and classroom grouping practices do not need to be rigid but they have to be flexible in order to accommodate all learners.

5.4.3.4 Social acceptance

Inclusive pedagogy values the acceptance of one another within the classroom environment (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In light of the above, findings under section 4.3.1.6 indicate that learners in mixed ability groups readily accept one another in spite of their differences in ability. DoE (2001) asserts that classrooms should provide a humane and caring society, not for the few, but for all learners as embodied in the values of human dignity and the achievement of equality. Recchia and Lee (2013) posit that social rejection of learners appears to occur at a higher percentage for learners with special educational needs and that this is a barrier for them to successful inclusion. In the same vein, learners with special educational needs have significant social and emotional problems and so they run a greater risk of rejection than their peers without barriers to learning (Hallahan et al., 2011).

A learner who is continually rejected may experience self-concept problems or general unhappiness and is likely to drop out of school (Bender, 2008). This denotes that learners with special educational needs are at risk of social rejection or social isolation, hence the need to create environments that encourage social acceptance. Consequently, grouping learners according to mixed ability is in line with inclusive pedagogy as this promotes social acceptance of learners by the way they are, and not by what they can or cannot do (Florian & Black- Hawkins, 2011). The web of learner relationships in mixed ability groups takes the diversity of learners into account and works towards the acceptance of one another. This changes negative attitudes and promotes the acceptance of those with disabilities,

as documented in DoE (2001).

5.4.3.5 The use of teaching/learning media

Research findings established that learners are able to use concrete teaching/learning media when they are in ability groups. Teaching/learning media can increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities of learners with special educational needs (Vaughn et al., 2011). Findings under section 4.3.2.2 indicate that, by grouping learners by ability, the focus will be on addressing the needs of different learners through the use of appropriate teaching/learning materials. Furthermore, research findings indicated that teachers use charts, compact discs, abacuses and other concrete objects, according to the areas of need for those with special educational needs. The use of any teaching/learning media in the regular classroom should be based on learner needs (Vaughn et al., 2011). For example, visually representing the elements of a narrative story with graphic organisers can help learners with learning difficulties to improve their comprehension (Heward, 2014). Teachers can provide a wide range of teaching/learning media, such as spell checkers and grammar checkers that can encourage success in writing, as well as talking word processors which are valuable in assisting learners who have difficulties in reading (Smith et al., 2011). Findings noted incidences where learners learnt about phonics through the use of compact discs. Pienaar and Raymond (2013) give examples of teaching/learning media, such as talking word processors, scanners to convert print directly to speech, e-readers and web text readers that can make the learning process more effective and efficient. The above views emphasise the importance of using teaching/learning media in the classrooms.

The provision of teaching/learning media reflects well on the principle of inclusion which calls for the need to avail such media to learners with disabilities in order to maximise learning. Support has to be provided in the form of assistive devices or learning support materials to benefit learners with special educational needs in the regular classrooms (DoE, 2014). The worrying trend that has emerged from the use of ability grouping is providing teaching/learning media to learners with special educational needs in groups of their own. Learners do not have to be separated

because they are thought to need something different (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In the inclusive pedagogy, rich environments should be created within the learning centres for learners of different abilities to learn through manipulation (DoE, 2014). Such arrangements maximise the participation of all learners within the same groups (Bubpha, 2014). The provision of teaching/learning media should be extended from what is ordinarily available to all learners in the class, rather than making “different” or “additional” provision for some individuals who might be experiencing difficulties in their learning (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

5.4.3.6 Optimum opportunities for teacher assistance

This current study also established that ability grouping and one-on-one offer optimum opportunities for assisting learners who are in need of extra suppor Similar findings by Takala, Pirttimaa and Tormane (2009) established that teachers in Finland use one-on-one grouping, which is deemed effective in giving focused attention to learners. However, Heward (2014) argues that educators must realise that putting learners into like ability or performance groups is insufficient. Mercer, Mercer and Pullen (2011) argue that grouping learners according to ability enables the teacher to tailor instruction for learners in the groups because the lowest performers need more intense instruction such as elaboration, examples, feedback and praise. Similarly, Frederickson and Cline (2011) believe that the teacher should intervene in the groups by providing additional instruction. The argument is that, when learners with disabilities are in groups based on ability or are on one-on-one, teachers are able to give more illustrations and examples to enhance learning. Findings of this study indicated that teachers are able to attend to individual needs of learners when they are in one-on-one. Findings by Baines et al. (2015) established that learners in United Kingdom classrooms do their work individually. However, teaching them on a one-on-one basis denies learners opportunities for socialising with other learners in the classrooms which is a key factor of inclusion (Harnish, 2015).

Findings also indicated that, once teachers have identified learners who are struggling with a concept such as reading, they spend more time helping these learners. This includes teachers being able to carefully plan for specific groups as

well as increasing the intensity of interventions for learners with special educational needs if they are in groups of their own (Vaughn et al. 2011). However, this strategy seems to be deeply entrenched in the medical model, which views the learner as an individual who needs to be “fixed” (UNESCO, 2005). This runs contrary to inclusive pedagogy which is of the view that the act of separating learners on any basis is not inclusion (Spratt & Florian, 2013).

The problem is not with the optimum assistance that teachers give to learners with disabilities rather the problem is on assisting them separately. Such a practice invites a host of other challenges such as learner labelling and learners with disabilities losing self-esteem because they can see that they are treated differently from the other learners. All learners should be able to receive equitable outcomes in the classrooms (Marin, 2014). Teachers should be able to respect and respond to learner differences “in ways that include learners, rather than exclude them, from what is ordinarily available in the daily life of the classroom” (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

5.4.3.7 Opportunities for differentiated instruction

Research findings revealed that learners are able to receive differentiated instruction if they are grouped by ability. Learners receive educational instruction that is at their level of understanding in each group. Frederickson and Cline (2011) assert that teachers must account for individual differences in instructional activities. However, differentiating instructions in separate groups (ability groups) is disputed by Spratt and Florian (2013) who argue that all learners can make progress within the same group if conditions are right. The argument is that differentiated instruction can still be provided whilst learners are in groups that accommodate diverse learners and not necessarily separating them. Furthermore, Lerner and Johns (2012) affirm that differentiated instruction embodies the qualities of clinical teaching in the regular classrooms. This tends to view the learners as the ones with problems instead of environmental conditions as causes of disabilities. Learning in inclusive groups entails learners sharing and actively listening to different viewpoints, feeling safe and confident to “express different viewpoints and to know that their perspectives will be valued and respected”

(Garibay, 2015). In light of inclusivity, learners have to be given differentiated instruction without necessarily separating them from others (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

The argument is not about doing away with differentiated instruction, but that learners' needs have to be addressed within the establishment of an all- inclusive grouping practice. This is a challenge which sets a high standard for inclusive practice (Florian, 2015). There has to be a shift away from the traditional or individualised approach to learner diversity that starts by making provision for most learners and then offering something additional or different for some learners identified as having particular needs within the same group set-up (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Differentiation becomes a valuable strategy for supporting the learning of everyone when it is used in an "elastic and creative" way rather than simplistic "linear means" of sorting learners into ability groups (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

5.4.3.8 Individualised instruction

Findings from this study have also indicated that learners with special educational needs receive individualised instruction from their teachers if they are on one-on-one. This practice provides the most effective and efficient means to provide the curriculum and instruction to learners with disabilities (Heward, 2014; Vaughn et al., 2011). Correspondingly, findings indicated that, in one-on-one practice, teachers are able to reach individual learners and provide instruction according to their unique needs, as documented in the DoE (2001). Teachers are able to provide more instruction, praise and feedback to individual learners with learning disabilities in the classrooms (Mercer et al., 2011). This is because learners with disabilities need explicit instruction in their learning (Heward, 2014; Allen & Cowdery, 2009). Teachers can make the changes at any point during lessons to enhance the learning of their learners with disabilities (Lewis & Doorlag, 2011). Furthermore, individualised instruction allows for scaffolding which provides the link between what learners can do independently, and what they can accomplish with adult help (Deiner, 2013).

However, the major challenge in one-on-one is that the practice precludes learners from other important inclusionary practices that enable them to benefit from inclusion in the regular classes, such as the need to socialise with others as well as to participate fully in group interactions. Learners with special educational needs may be excluded within the regular classes without opportunities to interact with other learners (Florian, 2015). As a result of such a practice, learners with special educational needs are marginalised within the classroom set-up (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This calls for teachers to shift towards pedagogical approaches that are inclusive (Plows & Whitburn, 2017), in order to give learners opportunities for interaction with one another in the regular classes leading to social acceptance and respect for each other. As the “additional needs” approach to inclusion focuses only on the learner who has been acknowledged as being in need of additional support, the inclusive pedagogical approach concentrates on everybody in the classroom (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This implies that, although individualised instruction is necessary, it is not inclusive when it is given to some learners who are isolated from others.

In this section, I have discussed how the current grouping practices are in line with inclusivity. In the following section, I present a discussion on strategies that can be implemented with the view of enhancing the inclusiveness of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms.

5.5 Strategies to enhance inclusiveness of the grouping practices

This current study established a number of strategies that need to be engaged in order to enhance the inclusivity of current grouping practices in the regular classrooms. These strategies relate to the reduction of class size and group sizes, teacher training and the use of teaching/learning media during teaching and learning in all the grouping practices.

5.5.1 Class sizes

The environments in which learners with special educational needs receive instructional services affect how they learn (Heward, 2014). At the same time,

inclusive education practices should ensure the learner's success, both socially and academically (Mercer et al., 2011). Findings indicated that learner populations in regular classes are generally too high, with as many as 48 learners per class. A similar study which revealed large class sizes was conducted in Botswana by Otukile-Mongwaketse (2018). Pienaar and Raymond (2013) established that space in South African classrooms is generally limited. There are high learner populations in the regular classes which inhibit the full interactive participation amongst all learners in the groups. Findings indicate that class sizes are pivotal in the establishment of grouping practices that are inclusive and groups that maximise the participation of all learners in the classrooms (DoE, 2001; UNESCO, 1994; Marin, 2014).

Maximising learner participation in the curriculum of the school can be achieved through optimising opportunities for learner engagement in the regular classes, which may be hampered by the large class sizes in the regular classrooms. Although findings indicated that learners participate in group activities, such as reading, solving mathematical problems, spelling activities and other facets of learning, participation can be more powerful and effective if there are fewer learners in the class so that each learner can get a chance to participate. Inclusion is all about enabling all learners to participate in the curricula of the school (UNESCO, 2005). A smaller class size can allow teachers to cope with the added responsibility of teaching widely diverse learners in the regular classes (Lerner & Johns, 2012). Findings indicated that regular classes should have between 25 and 30 learners, at most.

5.5.2 Group sizes

Large class sizes negatively impact on the group sizes. Findings of this current study established that large class sizes inadvertently led to large group sizes of up to eight learners, which restricted the participation of all learners in group activities. This is in conflict with inclusive pedagogy which calls for an increase in participation of all learners in the curricula of regular classrooms (Florian, 2015). Learners with special educational needs require group sizes that enable participation of all learners and foster positive relationships amongst different

learners (Kirk et al., 2012). Research findings indicated that group sizes need to be kept reasonably low to enable the inclusion of all learners in the learning activities. Positive attributes of small groups include enabling different learners to work together on given learning tasks (Kruger & Nel, 2011). Further, Vaughn et al. (2011) assert that learners taught in small groups of two to six learners are able to make remarkable gains in reading. This implies that the levels of intensity of both academic learning and social interactions are higher when learners are in small groups of between two and six learners. Ultimately, this positively cultivates learners accepting one another, respecting diversity, culminating in the building of societies that are defined by the respect for one another. In line with the above, research findings indicated that groups in the regular classrooms should have between two and six learners in order to enhance inclusiveness of the groups.

5.5.3 Provision of teaching/learning media

The provision of teaching/learning media to groups of learners is a necessary approach to teaching and learning as a means for facilitating group inclusivity. Teaching/learning media can either foster inclusion or destabilise the inclusiveness of grouping practices. Findings of this current study established that teachers find it much easier to use appropriate teaching/learning media when learners are in ability groups. Learners in mixed ability groups and pairs that were mixed in abilities were not exposed to different teaching/learning media for the purposes of teaching and learning. However, literature advises the use of different types of media in the groups. For example, Smith et al. (2011) argue that technology-related assistance, including assistive technology devices and services, must be considered during lessons. Heward (2014) purports that visually representing the elements of a narrative story with graphic organisers can help learners with special educational needs improve on their comprehension.

However, research findings indicated that the provision of appropriate teaching/learning media is more conceivable in ability groups, at the expense of pairing and mixed ability groups. The provision of teaching/learning media is necessary but does not have to be done systemically in exclusionary practices like ability grouping as evidenced by the findings. Inclusive pedagogy rejects the notion

of providing teaching/learning media in settings that perpetuate exclusion (Florian, 2015).

The argument is that, in light of inclusive pedagogy, teaching/learning media need to be provided in ways that maximise academic and social development of all learners, not only some. This calls for teaching/learning media to be provided to learners while they are sitting together in one group despite their differences. Providing resources to learners with disabilities in their own groups exacerbates exclusion (Florian, 2015). In that light, inclusive pedagogy prescribes that we have to work on improving on the current practices so that they become more inclusive by addressing issues of justice, quality and equality in education (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In light of the above, this research noted the need for teachers to be resourceful in providing varied teaching/learning media that foster inclusion. Furthermore, participants noted the need for schools to provide teachers with adequate teaching/learning resources that address the needs of different categories of learners. This will enable learners to learn together without having to separate some so that they can be assisted on their own.

5.5.4 Teacher training

Findings established that teacher training is a critical component of inclusive pedagogy in capacitating teachers and school principals to promote inclusive grouping practices in the regular classrooms. Similar findings were established by Ford (2013) and Mackey (2014) in the USA; Buli-Holmberg and Jeyaprathaban (2016) in Norway; and Rix, Hall, Nind, Sheehy and Wearmouth (2009) in the United Kingdom. The findings of this current study indicate that, although some teachers are knowledgeable about inclusive practices, they face resistance from their principals who are more interested in learners' academic attainments than issues of inclusivity. However, inclusive pedagogy rejects this deterministic belief about ability that "the presence of some will hold back the progress of others" (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This sets regular classroom teachers in conflict with the school management teams, including their principals. In that regard, findings of this study indicated that there is a need to improve teachers' and school management teams' skills in order to effectively interface with diverse classrooms

in inclusive ways (Bubpha, 2014). At times, policies make it difficult for teachers to take alternative decisions and actions that promote inclusion (Florian & Hawkins, 2011). There is a need to realign classroom practices to policy expectations in the schools and at classroom levels.

Current studies indicate that contemporary teacher education in South Africa trains teachers how to accommodate learners with special educational needs in diverse classrooms (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Potentially, teachers will be able to group learners in inclusive practices and enable the achievement of good academic results by all learners, including those who have been identified as having additional support needs (Florian, 2015). Despite teachers being trained in inclusive practices, the majority of teachers in South Africa today were trained before the conception of inclusive education in 2001 (Marin, 2014). Findings of this current study indicated that some teachers decry the lack of information on how to implement grouping practices that are inclusive. This poses a challenge for those teachers to implement inclusive grouping practices in the regular classes because they were not properly trained in that regard (Daiton, Mckenzie & Kahonde, 2012).

Those who are responsible for teaching diverse learners in the regular classrooms "should have the knowledge, skills and the right attitude to be able to teach and guide these learners to reach their highest potential" through grouping practices that are inclusive (Bubpha, 2014). This will help in developing rich communities characterised by learning opportunities that are made available for everyone in the classrooms (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

In light of the above, the current study findings established that some participants felt that there is need for teachers to be trained on how to use inclusive grouping practices in the regular classrooms. Teachers have to learn about and practice inclusive practices during pre-service and in-service training (Marin, 2014). In line with the above, pedagogic skills, such as instructional accommodation and activity differentiation, should be provided to teacher candidates (Bubpha, 2014). This enables them to use inclusive grouping practices as instructional strategies and make appropriate accommodation for all learners (Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014).

5.6 Summary

This chapter discussed the research findings that emerged in this study which included how learners are grouped in the regular classrooms, how the grouping practices are in alignment with principles of inclusion, as well as strategies to enhance the inclusivity of the grouping practices. The next chapter presents the summary, conclusion, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This study sought to establish the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms in the Johannesburg metropolitan region, with the view to developing a model for grouping learners with inclusivity. The background of the problem that I presented in Chapter 1 is recapitulated and a summary of the findings of the study for each research sub-question presented in Chapter 1 is presented in this chapter. Conclusion of the study is also presented in this chapter, as well as the proposed model of an inclusive grouping practice, recommendations for further studies and strengths and limitations of the study. The following section presents the review of the research problem.

6.2 Review of the research problem

The background to the study demonstrated that, internationally, various grouping practices are implemented in the regular classrooms. Some grouping practices accommodate diverse learners, while others separate learners for the purposes of teaching and learning. One of the grouping practices that have been established in the background to the study, which welcomes diverse learners, is mixed ability grouping that leads to the improvement of social relations, social skills and social relations among different learners (Kruger & Nel, 2011). This has been established by research studies in Saudi Arabia and Iraq (Al-Shammakhi & Al-Humaidi, 2015) and Spain (Petrenas et al., 2013). Learners with special educational needs are provided with role models who can assist them in their learning (Vaughn et al., 2011). Other countries that practice mixed ability grouping include the USA, Finland and Canada (Ramberg, 2014); Oman and Iraq (Al-Shammakhi & Al-Humaidi, 2015); and the UK (Pay, 2016).

When grouping learners according to mixed abilities, gender parity is considered an essential element of grouping for classroom pedagogy (Barlow, 2017). This is done to ensure that no learner is excluded from particular groups. Furthermore,

learners from diverse backgrounds learn together in the same groups in Finland, without due regard to what makes them different (Honkasalo, 2016). Ethnically diverse learners, including learners from other countries, learn together in mixed ability groups in New Zealand (Baker & Clark, 2017). Learners are assigned to different groups in Swedish classrooms, rather than learners themselves deciding where they want to sit (Pohtola, 2015).

However, challenges were noted in the use of mixed ability grouping with regards to giving more assistance to learners with special educational needs, provision of teaching/learning media and differentiating instruction. Petrenas et al. (2013) note that teachers cease to give attention to some learners in the groups because they cannot attend to everyone, which impacts negatively on the academic inclusion of learners who need more support from the teacher. Furthermore, teachers are tempted to channel learners based on the amount of support an individual learner requires (Duncan, 2012). It was also revealed that mixed ability grouping does not benefit learners who are gifted because they may be held back by underperforming learners, while learners with special needs will be hurried in the groups (Marumo & Mhlolo, 2017). Furthermore, teachers face challenges in providing teaching/learning materials for the various categories of learners in the groups. This impinges on one of the principles of inclusion which requires the provision of teaching/learning materials that are appropriate for the needs of each individual learner (Tanenbaum, 2011).

The background also established that learners are also grouped by ability and streaming in the regular classrooms – practices that do not subscribe to inclusion. Ability grouping is anchored in the idea of separating learners according to their levels of abilities, so that they can be assisted according to their areas of need in their own groups (Dupriez, 2010). This is despite a study by Rytivaara (2011) in Finland which established that ability grouping promotes negative labelling and its rejection by inclusive pedagogy which views it as a perpetuation of exclusion of other learners in the regular classrooms (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

The background to the study also established that schools in other countries practice pairing in the classrooms, where two learners of different abilities work together. Pairing enables learners to assist each other in the classrooms (Lerner & Johns, 2012). In countries like Sweden, learners who speak the same language are paired together (Jalali-Moghadam & Hedman, 2016). However, a major drawback of pairing is that socialisation of learners is limited to two learners in each pair, instead of extending to other learners within the classrooms.

A shortage of resources, such as textbooks, furniture and classrooms has an effect on how learners are grouped (Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015). Regionally, studies revealed that classrooms in the regular schools are generally over crowded (Ncube, 2014). Amidst all the above classroom practices, principles of inclusivity are that all children and youth can learn and they need support (DoE, 2001; UNESCO, 1994; UNESCO, 2005; UNESCO, 2001).

Through their teaching, teachers must explore multiple identities through building confidence and affirming the identity of learners (Tanenbaum, 2011), promoting social justice and ensuring fairness in the education of all learners (Spratt & Florian, 2013; Tanenbaum, 2011; Borg et al., 2011). Furthermore, principles of inclusivity assert that education systems must guarantee issues of human diversity and prevent prejudice (Spratt & Florian, 2013; Tanenbaum, 2011). Learners' differences must be respected whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability or HIV status (DoE, 2001).

Amidst all the above, there is a scarcity of literature on the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms in South Africa, reflecting on the principles of inclusivity (Bubpha, 2014; Loveless, 2013; Florian, 2015). It is against this backdrop that the study sought to establish the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classes in the Johannesburg Metropolitan region, with the view of developing a model of inclusive grouping practices. The following section presents a summary of findings of this study.

6.3 Summary of the findings

Findings of this study established that learners are grouped differently in the regular classrooms. Findings were presented in three themes that emerged from the study, which are:

(a) Current grouping practices;

(b) Inclusiveness of the grouping practices;

(c) Strategies to enhance inclusivity in the grouping practices.

The themes that emerged from the study were in line with the three sub- research questions which are presented and discussed below.

6.3.1 Research sub-question 1: How are learners in the regular classes grouped?

Sub-research question 1 looked at how learners are grouped in the regular classrooms. Three distinct learner-grouping practices emerged in this current study, ability grouping, mixed ability grouping and pairing. However, other teachers do not group their learners, but teach them on a one-on-one basis. In ability grouping, learners are grouped according to their performances in tasks and subjects that are assessed. Those who perform well are grouped together and learners who are struggling are grouped on their own.

Mixed ability grouping entails having learners of different abilities grouped together in the same groups. They are subjected to baseline assessments, and results that learners attain in those assessments are used to group them. In other instances, learners' performances in previous topics are used to populate the mixed ability groups. This enables diverse learners to learn together despite the differences they have.

Research findings also established that pairing is another grouping practice that is

used in the regular classrooms. Findings established that learners of different abilities are grouped together. Learners who perform well in a particular skill area are paired together with learners who struggle. Pairing emerged as similar to mixed ability grouping, with the difference being that it entails two learners only as compared to mixed ability grouping which has more learners in each group.

Findings also indicated that some teachers do not group their learners but teach them on a one-on-one basis. This is based on the understanding that all learners are unique and each operates at his/her own level.

6.3.2 Research sub-question 2: How are the current grouping practices in alignment with the principles of inclusivity?

Research sub-question 2 looked at how the grouping practices are in alignment with principles of inclusion. This was carried out through the lens of inclusive pedagogy by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011). The grouping practices showed varying degrees of inclusiveness. There are also grouping practices that showed common features of inclusiveness in some cases, while other practices demonstrated a lack of inclusiveness, but are still practiced to achieve set goals.

Research findings indicated that some grouping practices are inclusive because of what teachers do when they group their learners in the regular classrooms. One of the actions that teachers take when grouping learners according to mixed abilities and pairing is to consider the gender of learners. Findings indicate that teachers infuse the gender, age and backgrounds of learners when grouping learners by mixed ability. The ages of learners are considered in respect of learners who are older than their grade levels, because of repeating the same grade. By that, teachers try to facilitate acceptance of all learners in the groups despite their age differences.

Furthermore, findings indicated that learners from different backgrounds are allowed to sit where they feel comfortable within the classroom grouping practices. Learners of different abilities are grouped together in mixed ability groups and pairs. Learners in the groups are also allowed to speak in their mother languages

within their groups in the regular classes. Findings indicated that age, gender, and learners' backgrounds are infused into mixed ability groups and pairs in order to make learners who are different feel welcome. This is consistent with principle of inclusivity that focuses on the provision of equity in education for all learners without considering learners' differences (Bubpha, 2014). The above actions taken by classroom teachers build inclusive grouping practices in the regular classrooms as established in the research findings. However, also findings indicated that teachers have difficulties differentiating tasks according to learner needs when learners are in mixed ability groups. This militates against inclusion which advocates for the provision of learner needs and support according to what individual learners require.

Findings established that mixed ability, ability groups and pairing enable learners to learn collaboratively. However, collaborative learning in ability groups is not extensive in lower achieving groups of learners, thereby compromising the quality of learners' engagements. The quality of collaboration in lower ability groups is also compromised as standards in those groups are lowered when teachers give learners in those groups work that they can manage. This is against the principle of inclusive education which stipulates that all learners must receive the same quality education, in spite of the differences that they may have (DoE, 2001).

Findings of this current study also established that social interaction amongst different learners is fostered when learners are in mixed ability groups and pairs. Learners of different abilities, backgrounds, ages and genders are enabled to learn together in the same settings. This promotes acceptance of learners in the groups and builds respect for one another as learners begin to understand each other due to their working together in groups. Learners with special educational needs can also learn important social skills from their more abled peers. Separating learners on the basis of ability inhibits them from being able to express themselves appropriately and therefore perpetuates exclusion as learners of different abilities have limited opportunities for interaction. All learners need to be supported in the groups (UNESCO, 1994).

Findings also established that mixed ability groups, ability groups and pairs enable learners to support each other in those groups. Learners with special educational needs are able to get support from their more abled peers who act as their role models. Findings indicated that, although learners in ability groups are able to support one another in their own groups, the support they give each other is of low quality. As such, learners in low achieving groups are left behind in terms of academic progress due to the pace at which lessons progress.

Social acceptance amongst different learners is higher in mixed ability groups and pairs because different categories of learners are found in those groups. This promotes the building of a humane and caring society for all learners (DoE, 2001), as it excludes the problem of social rejection amongst learners. Conversely, findings indicated that ability grouping and one-on-one grouping enable learners to get more assistance from teachers. Learners without disabilities are able to proceed with their learning in their own groups. However, assisting learners separately is exclusionary and is based on the special education model which views disabilities as inherent flaws in the learners who need to be "fixed" (UNESCO, 2005). This promotes learner labelling which impacts negatively on learners' self-esteem.

Findings also established that learners get differentiated instruction when they are grouped by ability and one-on-one grouping. This enables teachers to reach the academic needs of all learners, as they are able to use multiple ways to teach learners. However, inclusive pedagogy is of the view that providing differentiated instruction in separate environments leads to the exclusion of learners with special educational needs in classroom activities. Learners should receive differentiated instruction without necessarily being removed from the rest. Findings also established that positive self-esteem of learners is improved when learners are in mixed ability groups and pairs because learners of different abilities work together.

Findings indicated that learners who are being taught on one-on-one basis are able to receive individualised instruction from their teachers. Although teachers are able to reach out to individual learners and provide instruction according to their unique needs, the practice precludes learners from socialisation with others,

leading them to being marginalised.

6.3.3 Research sub-question 3: How can the current grouping practices be strengthened to enhance inclusivity in the regular classrooms?

The third research sub-question looked at how current grouping practices can be strengthened to enhance inclusivity in the regular classrooms. Findings established that the learner population in the regular classes is too high to allow active learner participation in all the groups. Recommendations were that smaller class sizes can help teachers cope with the added responsibility of teaching widely diverse learners. It was suggested that classes should have between 25 and 30 learners. Large class sizes influenced the sizes of the groups in the regular classes. This restricted the optimum participation of learners in the groups. Recommendations from the research were that groups should have between two and six learners in the regular classes.

Research findings also established that teachers find it easier to use appropriate teaching/learning media when learners are in ability groups, and not in mixed ability groups and pairs. The recommendations were that teaching/learning media should be provided to all learners according to their needs and levels of operation. The teaching/learning media should be provided in a group that maximises academic and social development, without separating learners from the groups. In addition, provision of teaching/learning media should be extended to modern technological devices that learners should use within inclusive group settings, rather than only using traditional types of media. In addition, it was suggested that the Department of Basic Education should provide schools with resources for virtual learning.

Furthermore, findings noted the aspect of teacher training as imperative in order for teachers to be able to manage diverse learners in an inclusive group. In light of the above, recommendations were that teachers have to learn about and practice inclusive education during pre-service training and post-training workshops on classroom inclusive practices. In addition, teachers need to craft ways of teaching that respond to individual differences in the regular classrooms.

6.4 Conclusion

The current study sought to establish the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classes in Johannesburg Metropolitan primary schools. The background to the study established that, internationally, learners are grouped in different ways with varied degrees of inclusivity, while other grouping practices perpetuate the exclusion of learners with special educational needs from other group settings. However, there is limited literature on the inclusiveness of grouping practices in South Africa. In addition, the background to the study indicated that there are other challenges, such as teachers' unpreparedness to teach diverse learners, large class sizes, overcrowded classrooms, a lack of resources and administrators' lack of understanding and desire to implement inclusive grouping practices, which militate against inclusion. A qualitative method was used through the phenomenological approach. Fifteen participants took part in the study through interviews as well as their 15 classrooms for observations.

Findings established that learners in the regular classrooms are grouped according to ability, mixed ability and pairs. However, some learners are taught on a one-on-one basis in the regular classrooms. The grouping practices revealed different levels of inclusiveness, with some grouping practices being able to offer opportunities for collaborative learning, provision of learner-to-learner support, differentiated instruction and opportunities for optimum teacher support. Other grouping practices did not show inclusivity as their practices revealed more of the "special needs" discourse rather than inclusivity. For example, findings indicated that one-on-one grouping offers teachers opportunities for the development of individual educational plans, which is a strong tenet of the special educational needs discourse.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that teachers' training in teaching diverse learners is imperative in grouping learners with inclusivity in the regular classrooms. Class sizes have to be kept low to enable all learners to fully participate in the regular classrooms. Furthermore, teaching/learning aids have to be provided in all the group set-ups so that all learners can learn through manipulation of those teaching/learning aids.

6.5 Contribution of the Study

Given the limited information on the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms, this study will add value to the available body of knowledge on inclusion with regards to the grouping of learners in the regular classes in the South African schools. Findings of this study and teacher craft in grouping learners will enable other researchers to investigate how classroom grouping practices can be more inclusive, given the learner diversity that now exists in the South African regular classrooms. Furthermore, the current study presents conditions that make it possible for grouping practices to be inclusive, such as having fewer learners in a class, small group sizes of two to six learners per group, provision of teaching/learning media to all learners as well as improving on the teachers' professional qualifications so that they are able to group learners in inclusive ways as well as being able to teach diverse learners in the regular classes, enabling full participation of all learners in the groups.

6.6 Recommendations on current grouping practices

Research findings have indicated that there are three grouping practices that are being practiced in Johannesburg regular primary schools. However, teachers can also consider implementing other grouping practices such as whole class teaching and small group cooperative learning. These two grouping practices can enhance inclusivity in the regular classes as they allow learners to optimally interact amongst themselves thereby increasing the opportunities of learning from one another. Grouping practices should focus on addressing the principles of inclusivity which are: being able to "teach all students, exploring multiple identities, preventing prejudice, promoting social justice, choosing appropriate materials, teaching and learning about cultures and religions and adapting and integrating lessons appropriately" (Tanenbaum, 2011).

Teachers also need to consider using different grouping practices interchangeably, depending on the aspects of learning that need to be covered. Rigid adherence to one particular grouping practice can lead to the exclusion of

learners in other aspects of learning. In that light, the content being taught should influence the choice of grouping options as some instructional materials are better suited to a particular grouping option. In view of the above, grouping practices can be more inclusive if they are subject specific.

On the other hand, grouping practices in the regular classrooms should not only focus on improving the levels of academic achievement of learners in the regular classes. Solely focusing on improving the academic achievements of some learners can lead to the social exclusion of other learners on the basis of their levels of achievements in the regular classrooms. In that light, issues of social justice and equity in education are compromised if learners are grouped according to their abilities. Grouping practices should be able to address issues of academic attainment and social inclusion in the same group setting. Furthermore, teachers must shun grouping practices that promote the labelling of other learners. Negative labels demean learners who can develop low self-esteem leading to withdrawal in both academic and social activities in the classrooms.

Successful inclusion involves restructuring classrooms to meet all learners' individual needs (Frederickson & Cline, 2011). Even though teachers treat their learners as equal for the purposes of social acceptance and inclusivity when they are in mixed ability groups and pairs, more effort has to be put on differentiating tasks in those groups. There is need to balance between social inclusion and improving the levels of academic performance of all learners. This can be addressed by embracing differentiated instruction which should be provided within the grouping practices in the regular classes, and not by separating learners on any basis.

Differentiated instruction must also focus on offering learners with special educational needs in the regular classrooms work that they will be able to complete within the allocated time. Where learners without special educational needs are given ten items to work on, those with special educational needs should work on four or five items that address the same areas of the curriculum content. Learners with special educational needs should also be given more time to complete their tasks, while they learn with others in the same groups.

Findings indicated that regular classrooms are overcrowded. In that regard, class sizes have to be kept low to help classes to have groups that are inclusive and manageable. If the number of learners per class could be between 25 and 30 learners, such classes can have groups of between four and six members. This could be an ideal group that increases participation by all learners, which is a good tenet of group inclusiveness in the regular classrooms.

Findings also indicated that grouping learners by ability is one of the pedagogic strategies that are being used in the regular classrooms, although it is disputed by inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). It is recommended that the use of ability grouping should be disregarded as the use of such a practice limits the learners with special educational needs' exposure to role models. Learners with special educational needs are disadvantaged by not being able to learn cooperatively from their more abled peers in other groups. This precludes learners with special educational needs from the opportunities to interact with other learners without disabilities. Learners must be allowed to mingle in all activities of learning, and other activities requiring socialisation, such as Life Orientation.

The following section presents the proposed model for an inclusive grouping practice in the regular classrooms.

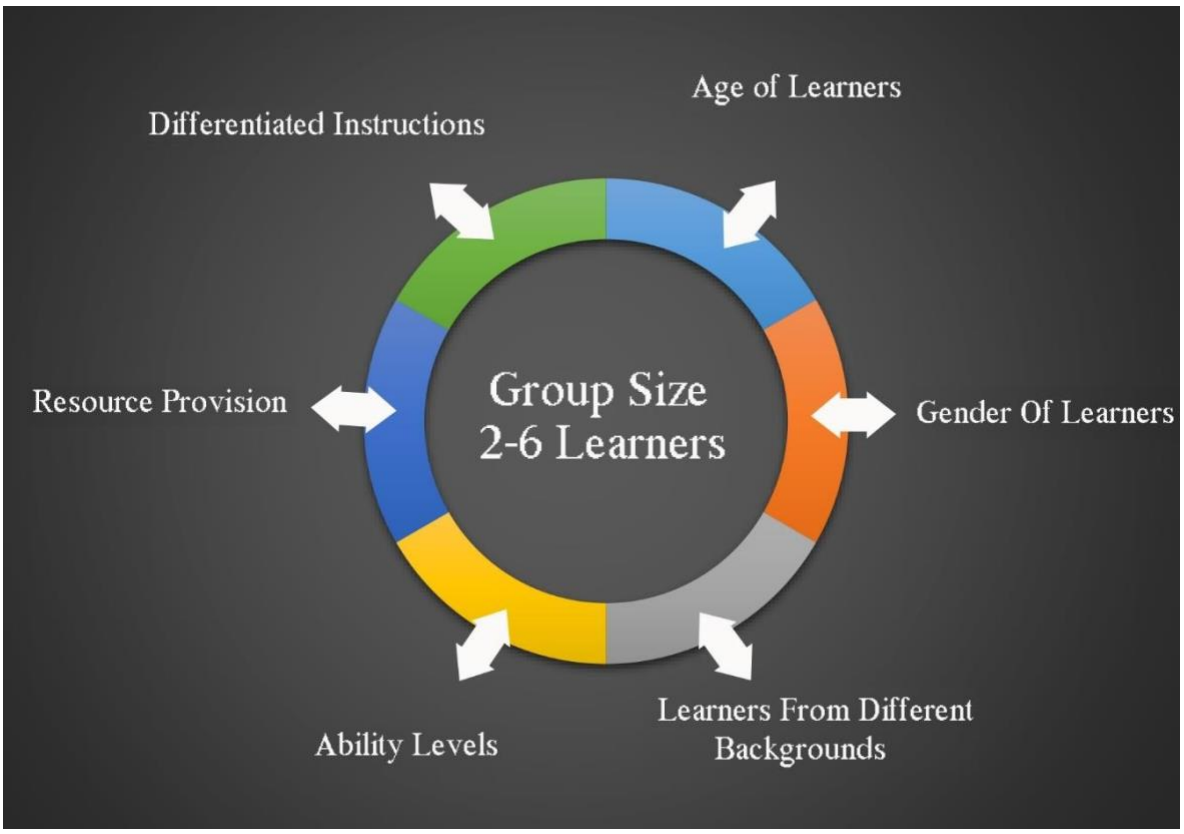

Figure 6.1: The proposed model for an inclusive grouping practice in the regular classroom

The diagram above represents a proposed model of an inclusive grouping practice in the regular classrooms. The model indicates that there are seven key issues that must be considered when grouping learners for inclusion in the regular classrooms. These seven key issues relate to:

- small group sizes;
- age of learners;
- gender of learners;
- learners from different backgrounds;
- ability levels of learners;

- resource provision;

- differentiated instruction

It is imperative to note though that learners may possess more than one characteristic from the list given above. For example, one learner may be struggling in terms of academic achievement, have a higher age than the average learners in the class and come from a different background to most of the learners in the class. However, different learner characteristics should be considered and all diverse learners should be found within one grouping practice for it to be inclusive.

It is envisaged that the model being proposed will be able to promote inclusivity in the groups in the regular classrooms. These inclusive practices relate to what teachers do when grouping learners, as well as how learners relate to each other when they are in the groups. This includes collaborative learning, interaction amongst diverse learners, learner-to-learner support, social acceptance amongst learners who are diverse, teacher assistance to all learners within the same group setting, differentiated instruction to all learners, and the building of self-esteem of all learners. The focus is on having inclusive grouping practices that are capable of addressing the unique needs of each learner in the regular classroom. In the following section, I discuss each of the components of the proposed model of an inclusive grouping practice.

6.6.1 Age of learners

The first component from the proposed model above deals with the different ages of learners who should be accommodated in each group. From the research findings, section 4.3.1.2 of Chapter 4 indicates that teachers include older learners in the groups so that they feel welcome. Such learners are mostly those who have been retained in the same grade due to factors like having failed to meet the minimum requirements for promotion to the next grade. The argument is not about grouping according to learners' ages, but to have learners of different age ranges

well spread out across the groups in the class, instead of having a separate group of older learners. Having older learners grouped alone can lead to labelling as well as exclusion of those older learners.

6.6.2 Gender

For the purposes of inclusivity, the gender of learners is considered in grouping learners in the regular classrooms. Findings indicated that teachers practicing mixed ability grouping and pairing consider the gender of learners when grouping their learners. However, one-on-one and ability grouping do not consider issues of gender. This model proposes that a group must have learners of different genders in order to facilitate inclusion of all. Inclusive pedagogy requires that all learners should be accepted and respected as equal members of the group, and that they can contribute meaningfully to the group (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). In that light, inclusive settings must emphasise building an environment in which everyone belongs and is supported by his or her peers, irrespective of gender differences (UNESCO, 1994). Considering the issue of gender answers the question of social justice in the classroom, which relates to equal participation of all learners in an all- inclusive environment (Mahlo, 2013).

6.6.3 Learners from different backgrounds.

Findings indicated that regular classrooms in South Africa consist of learners from different ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This aspect of diversity needs to be embraced when grouping learners. The discussion in Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.3 indicates that learners from other countries are allowed to sit where they are comfortable in the regular classrooms. Although this is plausible, there could be a danger that learners from minority backgrounds can exclude themselves from other groups. It is more beneficial if teachers use their knowledge of their learners to determine where learners who are diverse could sit without compromising their chances of active participation, as well as being socially accepted by other learners. Research findings further indicated that learners are allowed to speak in their mother languages in their groups. This can be problematic when learners are widely diverse in linguistic and cultural dimensions. As such, learners in the groups

should rather use the language of teaching and learning in the classrooms so that all learners in the groups feel welcome.

6.6.4 Ability level of learners

Findings indicated that the ability levels of learners in the regular classes are critical in grouping learners. This is considered when learners are in ability groups, mixed ability groups and pairs. Chapter 4, section 4.3.2, indicates that learners who perform well are grouped together and those who are struggling are grouped together. Findings in section 4.3.3 indicate that learners are paired in such a way that those who are doing well are paired with struggling learners. The point is that learners of different abilities must be spread out across all the grouping practices to avoid having learners of similar abilities in their own groups as this can trigger issues of the labelling of learners who are in low achieving groups.

6.6.5 Provision of teaching/learning media

To avoid the exclusion of some learners on the basis of provision or non- provision of teaching/learning media, teachers must provide the resources to all learners within an inclusive set-up. Section 4.3.2.2 of Chapter 4 indicates that the provision of teaching/learning media in the regular classes is critical in teaching and learning. Two issues arise from the findings. The first is that teaching/learning media are provided to learners when they are in ability groups at the expense of pairing and mixed ability grouping. The second issue is that teachers rely mostly on traditional teaching/learning media such as charts and radios. With regards to the former, teaching/learning media must be scaffolded so that they address the different levels of ability in the groups and be provided to all learners in the group. The latter requires that modern technological devices must also be used to enhance teaching and learning. However, such modern technological devices must be used by all learners within a group so that all learners can benefit from them.

6.6.6 Differentiated instruction

Findings indicated that differentiated instruction is critical in the grouping of

learners in the regular classrooms. Differentiated instruction delivers effective learning experiences for different learners based on their unique characteristics (Friend & Bursuck, 2011). Research findings indicated that differentiated instruction is provided when learners are in ability groups at the expense of pairing and mixed ability groups. The lack of differentiated instruction in mixed ability and pairs compromises issues of social justice because all learners need support. Being in a group or a pair does not mean that those learners are operating at the same level. The model being proposed here acknowledges the importance of differentiating instruction, but that learners must not be separated in order to receive differentiated instruction. In this light, learners who need differentiated instruction must be able to receive such instruction in the same groups, rather than in separated settings. The above discussion looked at the different components of the proposed model of an inclusive grouping practice and elucidated on the importance of each component in the group. The following section presents the recommendations for further research.

6.7 Recommendations for further research

Research findings indicate that the grouping practices that are implemented in the regular classes have varied degrees of inclusiveness. Gaps were identified that need to be addressed to enhance the inclusivity of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms. The following recommendations have been identified for further research:

- An investigation into the strategies to improve the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms.

- The role of regular class teachers in ensuring optimum inclusivity grouping practices in the regular classrooms.

- The effects of implementing rigid grouping practices in the regular classes

  in South African regular primary schools.

- Critical factors for consideration in the grouping of learners in South African primary schools.

- An analysis of the effects of gender balancing in grouping learners in the regular classrooms.

- The challenges of whole class teaching in an inclusive class setting.

The section above presented recommendations on areas that need further investigation to enhance the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms. The following section presents the strengths and limitations of the current study

6.8 Strengths and limitations of the study

This study was carried out in 15 classrooms from the five districts of the Johannesburg Metropolitan Region in the Gauteng Province. Results only reflect the feelings and experiences of the teachers of those 15 classrooms, and do not allow for the generalisation of the findings on inclusiveness of the grouping practices to other districts within the regions of the Gauteng Province or the whole of South Africa. South Africa has a total of nine provinces. This implies that other regions might have different experiences and views on the grouping of learners in light of the policy on inclusion.

Furthermore, the study was carried out in black township schools in Johannesburg region. Other schools not in this category were left out of the study. As such, findings may not be representative of the other categories of schools that are not regular schools. The voices of practitioners in those schools were not heard, and teacher craft in those classrooms was not observed. To that end, the findings cannot be generalised to other settings.

The researcher is currently teaching in Johannesburg South District, one of the districts where the current study was carried out. It can be argued that any other person who is completely detached from the districts studied could have produced

different results.

In this current study, interviews and observations were the tools that were used to collect data and other methods of data collection, such as document analysis method, were excluded. This had the potential of limiting the study because the researcher only depended on two methods of data collection for the purposes of triangulation.

6.9 Concluding remarks

This current study established that there are three grouping practices that are being implemented in the regular classrooms in Johannesburg schools. These grouping practices are mixed ability groups, ability groups and pairs. Some teachers also use a one-on-one basis. The research also established that teachers consider the age, background, gender and ability levels of learners when grouping learners in the regular classrooms. These aspects are infused in the grouping practices to ensure the representativeness of all learners. Some grouping practices reflected varying degrees of inclusivity, while others reflected a lack of inclusivity. The inclusive practices noted were collaborative learning, interaction amongst diverse learners, learner-to-learner support, social acceptance amongst learners who are diverse, teacher assistance to all learners within the same group setting, differentiated instruction to all learners, and the building of self-esteem of all learners. Suggestions on how to improve on the inclusiveness of the grouping practices were also made. These suggestions related to the reduction in class sizes, having fewer learners in each group, the provision of teaching/learning aids in the groups, improving teachers' qualifications to practice inclusive grouping and to equip them with the skills to teach diverse learners in the regular classrooms.

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Appendix A: Letter to Gauteng Department of Education requesting permission to conduct research

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For adminuse

GDE RESEARCH REQUEST FORM

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN INSTITUTIONS AND/OR OFFICES OF THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1. **PARTICULARS OF THE RESEARCHER**

1.1	**Details of the Researcher**
Surname and Initials:	Hove
First Name/s:	Nilford
Title (Prof / Dr / Mr / Mrs / Ms):	Mr.
Student Number (if relevant):	47000872
ID Number:	BN783828

1.2	**Private Contact Details**
Home Address	***Postal Address (if different)***
11190	11190
Extension 7B	Extension 7B

Orange Farm	Orange Farm
Postal Code: 1841	***Postal Code:*** 1841
Tel:	
Cell: 078 431 9189	
Fax:	
E-mail: nilfordhove@yahoo.com	

2. PURPOSE & DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

2.1	**Purpose of the Research (Place cross where appropriate)**
Undergraduate Study - Self	
Postgraduate Study - Self	X
Private Company/Agency – Commissioned by Provincial Government or Department	
Private Research by Independent Researcher	
Non-Governmental Organisation	
National Department of Education	
Commissions and Committees	
Independent Research Agencies	
Statutory Research Agencies	
Higher Education Institutions	

2.2	**Full title of Thesis / Dissertation / Research Project**
Appropriate grouping practices for facilitating optimal learning amongst learners with learning disabilities at selected primary schools in Johannesburg.	

2.3	**Value of the Research to Education (Attach Research Proposal)**
See annexture B—Research Proposal	

2.4	**Proposed date of completion of study / project and submission of research findings to GDE**
Completion date:	**30 September 2015**
Submission to GDE date:	**10 December 2015**

2.5	**Student and Postgraduate Enrolment Particulars (if applicable)**
Name of institution where enrolled:	UNISA
Degree / Qualification:	DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
Faculty and Discipline / Area of Study:	EDUCATION

Name of Supervisor / Promoter:	Professor N. T Phasha and Doctor V.A Nkonyane

2.6	**Employer (where applicable) N/A**	
Name of Organisation:		Department of Basic Education
Position in Organisation:		Educator
Head of Organisation:		Ms. Angie Tshoeu
Street Address:		
		Orange Farm
Postal Code:		
Telephone Number (Code + Ext):		
Fax Number:		
E-mail:		angietshoeu@yahoo.com

2.7	**PERSAL Number (where applicable)**

2	7	0	6	6	5	2	6

3. PROPOSED RESEARCH METHOD/S

(Please indicate by placing a cross in the appropriate block whether the following modes would be adopted)

3.1 Questionnaire/s (If Yes, supply copies of each to be used)

YES		**NO**	

3.2 Interview/s (If Yes, provide copies of each schedule)

YES	**X**	**NO**	

3.3 Use of official documents

YE S		**N O**	**X**
If Yes, please specify the document/s:			

3.4 Workshop/s / Group Discussions (If Yes, Supply details)

YES		NO	X

3.5 Standardised Tests (e.g. Psychometric Tests)

YES		NO	X
If Yes, please specify the test/s to be used and provide a copy/ies			

4. INSTITUTIONS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH

4.1 Type of Institutions (Please indicate by placing a cross alongside all types of institutions to be researched)

INSTITUTIONS	Mark with X here
Primary Schools	X
Secondary Schools	
ABET Centres	
ECD Sites	

LSEN Schools	
Further Education & Training Institutions	
Other	

4.2 Number of institution/s involved in the study (Kindly place a sum and the total in the spaces provided)

Type of Institution	**Total**
Primary Schools	**15**
Secondary Schools	
ABET Centres	
ECD Sites	
LSEN Schools	
Further Education & Training Institutions	
Other	
GRAND TOTAL	

4.3 Name/s of institutions to be researched (Please complete on a separate sheet if space is found to be insufficient)

Name/s of Institution/s

25 JOHANNESBURG PRIMARY SCHOOLS

4.4 **District/s where the study is to be conducted**. ***(Please indicate by placing a cross alongside the relevant district/s)***

District	
Ekhuruleni North	
Ekhuruleni South	
Gauteng East	
Gauteng North	
Gauteng West	
Johannesburg Central	X
Johannesburg East	X
Johannesburg North	X
Johannesburg South	X
Johannesburg West	X
Sedibeng East	
Sedibeng West	
Tshwane North	

Tshwane South	

Tshwane West	

If Head Office/s (Please indicate Directorate/s)
N/A

4.5 Number of learners to be involved per school (Please indicate the number by gender)

N/A

Grade	***1***		***2***		***3***		***4***		***5***		***6***	
Gender	**B**	**G**	**B**	**G**	**B**	**G**	**B**	**G**	**B**	**G**	**B**	**G**
Number												

Grade	***7***		***8***		***9***		***10***		***11***		***12***	
Gender	**B**	**G**	**B**	**G**	**B**	**G**	**B**	**G**	**B**	**G**	**B**	**G**
Number												

4.6 Number of educators/officials involved in the study (Please indicate the number in the relevant column)

Type of staff	*Educators*	*HODs*	*Deputy Principals*	*Principal*	*Lecturers*	*Office Based Officials*
Number	**25**					

4.7 Are the participants to be involved in groups or individually?

Participation	
Groups	
Individually	X

4.8 Average period of time each participant will be involved in the test or other research activities (Please indicate time in minutes)

Participant/s	Activity	Time
	INTERVIEWS	2 hours
	OBSERVATIONS	2 days

4.9 Time of day that you propose to conduct your research.

Before school hours	During Break	After School Hours X

4.10 School term/s during which the research would be undertaken

First Term	Second Term	Third Term
	X	

CONDITIONS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN GDE

Permission may be granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted:

1. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*

2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*

3. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*

4. *A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*

5. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*

6. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*

7. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*

8. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*

9. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*

10. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*

11. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*

12. *On completion of the study the researcher must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*

13. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*

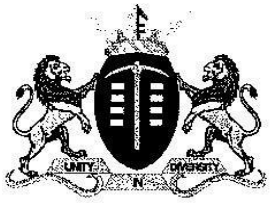
14. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied*

with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER	
1. I declare that all statements made by myself in this application are true and accurate.	
2. I accept the conditions associated with the granting of approval to conduct research and undertake to abide by them.	
Signature:	
Date:	**10 April 2015**

NB. If a group of Students / Researchers will be conducting the same research in the same / different GDE Institutions, Annexure A (attached) must be completed and signed by each researcher

Appendix B: Approval letter from Gauteng Department of



GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For administrative use:
Reference no: D2016 / 043

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**24 April 2015**
Validity of Research Approval:	**24 April 2015 to 2 October 2015**
Name of Researcher:	**Hove N.**
Address of Researcher:	**11190 Extension 78; Orange farm; 1841**
Telephone / Fax Number/s:	**078 431 9189**
Email address:	**nilfordhove@yahoo.com**
Research Topic:	**Appropriate grouping practices for facilitating optimal learning amongst learners with learning disabilities at selected Primary schools in Johannesburg**
Number and type of schools:	**TWENTY-FIVE Primary Schools**
District/s/HO	**Johannesburg Central; Johannesburg East; Johannesburg North; Johannesburg South and Johannesburg West.**

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

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

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

CONDITIONS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN GDE

2015/04/24

Making education a societal priority

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

Education

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

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

Kind regards

.....

Dr David Makhado

Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 2015/04/24

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

Appendix C: CEDU Clearance letter

UNISA university of south africa

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

13 May 2015

Ref#:**2015/05/13/47000872/22/MC**
Student #:Mr N Hove
Student Number#:47000872

Dear Mr N Hove,

Decision: Approved

Researcher
Mr N Hove
Tel: +27 78 4319 189
nilfordhove@yahoo.com

Supervisor
Prof N.T Phasha
Department of Inclusive Education
College of Education
Tel: +27 12 429 8748
phashnt@unisa.ac.za

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
2015 -05- 22
Office of the Executive Dean

Proposal: Appropriate grouping practices for facilitating optimal learning amongst learners with learning disabilities at selected primary schools in Johannesburg

Qualification: D Ed in Inclusive Education

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for 2 years.

For full approval: *The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the CEDU ERC on 13 May 2015.*

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

1) *The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.*
2) *Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the College of Education Ethics Review Committee.*

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.

3) *The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.*

Note:

The reference number **2015/05/13/47000872/22/MC** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication [e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters] with the intended research participants, as well as with the College of Education RERC.*

Kind regards,

Dr M Claassens
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC

Prof VI McKay
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN

Appendix D: Letter to districts requesting permission to conduct research

Request of permission to conduct research in Johannesburg Primary Schools

08-08-2014

Title: The inclusiveness of grouping practices in regular primary schools in Johannesburg metropolitan region.

Dear _____

I, Nilford Hove, am doing research with Professor Phasha,and Dr. Majoko in the Department of Inclusive education towards a Doctor of Education degree at the University of South Africa. I am requesting for permission to carry out a study in your selected primary schools entitled: The inclusiveness of grouping practices in regular primary schools in Johannesburg metropolitan region.

The aim of the study is to establish the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular schools. The study will entail interviews of selected teachers who are currently teaching in the regular classes as well as observations on the grouping practices in those classes.

The results of the study will add value to classroom grouping practices in general.

Yours sincerely

_____

Nilford Hove

Researcher

Appendix E: Letter to school principals requesting permission to conduct research

Request of permission to conduct research in your school

08-08-2014

Title: The inclusiveness of grouping practices in regular primary schools in Johannesburg metropolitan region.

Dear _____

I, Nilford Hove, am doing research with Professor Phasha,and Dr. Majoko in the Department of Inclusive education towards a Doctor of Education degree at the University of South Africa. I am requesting for permission to carry out a study in your schoolentitled: The inclusiveness of grouping practices in regular primary schools in Johannesburg metropolitan region.

The aim of the study is to establish the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular schools. The study will entail interviews of selected teachers who are currently teaching in the regular classes as well as observations on the grouping practices in those classes.

The results of the study will add value to classroom grouping practices in general.
Yours sincerely

_____

Nilford Hove

Researcher

Annexure F: Letter to the prospective participants

Information letter

Dear prospective participant

My name is Nilford Hove and I am doing research with Professor Phasha and Dr. Majoko in the department of Inclusive Education towards a Doctor of education degree at the University of South Africa. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled: The inclusiveness of grouping practices in regular primary schools in Johannesburg metropolitan region.

The purpose of this study is to establish the inclusiveness of grouping practices in the regular classrooms. This study is being carried out as a fulfilment of the requirements of the University towards the attainment of the aforesaid degree.

To gain insightful information about the inclusiveness of the grouping practices in the regular classrooms, I seek to interview you because of your experience teaching in the regular classrooms. I got information about you from the chairperson of SBST/ principal who hinted that you could be the most information rich person to help in this study. You are being asked herein to answer interview questions related to the topic under study. You are also being asked to allow me to gain access to your class to observe how you group your learners in your class as well as the actual teaching in their different groups.

Interviews will last for approximately 60 minutes. Observations will be carried out over a period of two days. Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

This research will benefit the education system at large as the results may be used to improve the current grouping practices in the schools to become more inclusive. There are no monetary benefits or tokens of appreciation to be given out in exchange for participation. The research might inconvenience you particularly when it comes to giving your time for the interview as well as class observations. This will take you some of your time. The information that you will give will be kept

confidential as your name will not be attached to the interview sheet. Furthermore, the researcher will not divulge any information that you will give to any other third part. Your answers will be given a fictitious code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your responses may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that this research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the research ethics committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Hard copies of your responses will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further research ethics review and approval if applicable. After five years, hard copies will be destroyed by burning them while the electronic information will be deleted.

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Nilford Hove on 083 463 8512 or at nilfordhove@yahoo.com.

Thank you or taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely

Nilford Hove

Annexure G: Consent to participate in this study

I,_____(participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure and anticipated inconveniences of participation.

I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the interview.

I have been assured that I will receive a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

_____	_____
Name & Surname of participant	Researcher name
_____	_____
Signature	Signature
_____	_____
Date	Date

Annexure H: Observation schedule

Name of sit School_____ Date_____ Time _____

1. How are learners grouped?	
2. Are learners in each group mixed in terms of the following: ability, gender, race, age and other factors	
3. How big are the group sizes?	
4. How do learners interact in a group?	
5. What behaviors are taking place in the groups?	
6. Are teachers able to reach out to all learners in each particular group?	
7. Are learners with special educational needs given the chance to participate in those groups?	
8. How do teacher facilitate optimal interaction amongst learners in those groups? (identify behaviors and explain how)	
9. Comment on the strategies used by the teacher to facilitate optimal learning amongst learners experiencing barriers to learning	
10. Identify behaviors which suggest learners' willingness to work with	

each other within their particular groups?	
11. How is inclusivity facilitated in various groups	

Annexture G:

Interview Guide

Name_____ Institution_____

Date_____ Time_____

1. How do you group learners in your regular classes?

2. How do you ensure the inclusion of all learners in the groups?

3. How do your learners relate to each other when they are in the groups?

4. How are your grouping practices in line with inclusion?

5. What do you think needs to be done to improve on the inclusiveness of the current grouping practices in the classrooms?

Comments

Annexure I: Editor's letter

Barbara Shaw

Editing/proofreading services

18 Balvicar Road, Blairgowrie, 2194

Tel: 011 888 4788 Cell: 072 1233 881

Email: bmshaw@telkomsa.net

Full member of The Professional Editors' Guild

To whom it may concern

This letter serves to inform you that I have done language editing, reference checking and formatting on the thesis: **THE INCLUSIVENESS OF GROUPING PRACTICES IN REGULAR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN SCHOOLS**

By

NILFORD HOVE

Barbara Shaw

23rd June, 2019

Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 13-Aug-2019 20:57 SAST
ID: 1159886013
Word Count: 61405
Submitted: 1

THE INCLUSIVENESS OF GROUPING PRACTICES IN REGULAR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN SCHOOLS By Nilford Hove

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